



Switchback

Figurative vs. Literal

Issue 10, vol 5

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This Is a Woman

Gretchen Clark

This is a woman who thinks a suburban spell has come over her.

This is a woman who, as a child, was frightened by the movies *The Planet of the Apes* and *The Stepford Wives*.

This is a woman who is on the treadmill five times a week wearing running shorts and a t-shirt, hair a sweaty mess, with her iPod on too loud, pumping out a playlist something like this: “Timebomb,” “Paralyzer,” “Save Me,” “Where is my Mind?,” “We’re Going Down,” “Rebellion,” “No More Words,” “Blue Sky,” “Anything, Anything.”

This is a woman who doesn’t remember hearing her father say I love you until she was twenty-nine.

This is a woman who used to go out for what she called “cigs & drinks nights” with her three closest girlfriends. It was a short walk from one of the girl’s tiny-but-hip San Francisco apartment to the bar around the corner. The bar where drinks are the size of punch bowls decorated with paper umbrellas and pineapples and cherries. Drinks in electric alcoholic colors like turquoise, lime, safety cone and lightening bolt.

This is a woman who would sometimes smoke an entire pack of Camels during one of these outings. To feel wired. Jittery. Her heart a wild bird, flapping hard to get out. Her heart a motorboat racing inside the blue ocean of her blood.

This is a woman who is still close in heart, but not miles, to these three girlfriends, now scattered like marbles across the U.S. There is now no bar around the corner to collect them in. Cardigan sweaters, businesslike hair styles, organic produce, a Ph.D. program, responsibility, a master’s thesis, wedding rings, a terminally ill parent, small children, fertility treatments and big mortgages—all these things have rooted, contained and caged them.

This is a woman who hasn’t felt truly unabashedly honest-to-god black garter belt red-satin sexy since she became a mother.

This is a woman who remembers the prizes: the beaded coin purse, the candy necklace, the plastic ring, the pencil topper that was shaped like a cluster of grapes and smelled purple. She was sent to a speech therapist twice a week in the fourth grade. Was given dittos of poems to memorize and recite to the lady sitting across from her in the small room with the row of windows all around. She didn’t go for very long. The lady heard nothing wrong in her speech. This girl just didn’t like to open her mouth.

This is a woman who remembers old ladies at church patting her head, saying “such a quiet good girl.”

This is a woman who believes Anne Sexton was telling the truth.

This is a woman who, three years ago, leaned into the mirror, tilted her head back to put mascara on her lashes, saw a lump, size of an almond, sticking out from the left side of her throat, felt it, finished applying her make-up, and didn't mention it for two months.

This is a woman who, one New Year's Eve visited a psychic who immediately sensed lots of fear in her.

This is a woman that was raised on homemade fudge, PBS and worry.

This is a woman who had an enlarging left thyroid mass. Fine needle aspiration showed atypical epithelial component. A hemithyroidectomy followed by possible total thyroidectomy in the case of cancer was recommended. The risks of injection, inferior scarring, hypoparathyroidism, recurrent laryngeal nerve injury were discussed with her in detail. She understood the risks and wished to proceed.

This is a woman who researches everything. She looks up the percentage risk rate of damage to the vocal cords for this type of surgery. Three percent does not seem low enough to her.

This is a woman who, as a child, refused to recite her ABC's for her older sister. Red record button pushed down. Sister making all the noise, imitating Grover, singing "Row Row Row Your Boat" into the speaker. "Say something," you can hear the sister say on the decades old recording. The little girl whispers back "I don't want to talk." Click. Tape ends.

This is a woman who doesn't sleep. She stays up at night looking at thyroid cancer websites and sending emails to her friend, Jill. She writes "make it go away." She erases it. She wishes it was that easy. That fast.

This is a woman who is obsessive about her body. She is afraid she will get fat after this is all over. This would be worse than death to her.

This is a woman who married a man who says I love you to her almost every day.

This is a woman who puts mascara and lipstick on the day of her surgery even though the hospital's direction sheet explicitly says no make-up.

This is a woman who is so nervous everyone can see it and feel it. She hates this, hates that the fear is leaking out, glowing in her eyes, dripping in her palms. The anesthesiologist, a small blonde with funky glasses, asks her if she'd like something to help her relax. The small blonde doctor pushes something opaque and white into her IV. She feels something altogether foreign to her—calm.

This is a woman who thought she could control one thing in life.

This is a woman who wants to believe the words a priest once said to Anne Sexton: "God is in your typewriter."

This is a woman who doesn't tell those three girlfriends what's been going on all summer until after the surgery, after she is home, after her skin starts to sew a thin red seam.

This is a woman who thinks back. All those sore throats she had as a kid. Her tonsils always swollen, red, infected. Their removal at age nine. The cool strawberry ice cream bandage. It wasn't the end but the first warning.

This is a woman who encounters a theory on an alternative medicine website about “biography becoming biology.” About the physical dysfunctions that fail when one does not surrender personal will to divine will. Thyroid problems. The list of ailments ends with thyroid problems.

This is a woman who had a picture of her aura taken years ago. The spiritual colors—blue, indigo and violet—are no where to be found.

This is a woman who is driven to search for the answers. Blue. It always seems to be colored blue, a pale sky hue, on a chakra chart, the throat chakra. She reads this from her Astrological Bible: *Failure to achieve full experience of the self at this stage can result in heart attacks in men and blocked throat chakra in women, who feel they are unheard and cannot speak.*

This is a woman whose childhood nightmares involved talking apes and robotic women.

This is a woman that closes her eyes and sees the words—love stop yes no now wait pain more dream—stuck, those little dead bodies of sound, rotting in her throat.

This is a woman who has felt captured by invisible things.

This is a woman who had a scalpel slicing millimeters from her vocal chords.

This is a woman who starts punching out an S.O.S. on her computer keyboard. No matter what she configures with the black alphabet it all says listen:

This is a woman who has something to say.

Excerpt from *Crocodile: Memoirs From a Mexican Drug-Running Port* David Vann

Four men who were collecting Corona bottles on their tabletop were openly staring at me. Not saying anything, just staring and staring, as if I might suddenly pupate or transform in some other abrupt and fascinating way. Whenever it happened, they didn't want to miss it. I looked everywhere except at them, mostly at my hands on the table.

On the menu, when it finally arrived, I was not able to find any of the dishes you would expect at a Mexican restaurant in the U.S. What they did have were breaded shrimp, which were expensive, the Pollo Diablo, which I wasn't trying again, several items I couldn't translate even remotely, and tortas, or sandwiches. I decided a chicken sandwich couldn't be that bad, and I ordered two, along with an orange soda. Sin mayonesa on the sandwiches. It took some back and forth with the waitress to hit on the Spanish word for mayonnaise, but we finally narrowed it down and she promised it wouldn't be on my sandwiches.

Three more guys came in and sat on the other side, near the plaza under construction, and they also seemed to come over just to stare at me. They didn't order beer, even, and the waitress ignored them. So I stared out between these two groups of men to the work that was being done on the plaza. The crew looked like it was going to work all night. They had an enormous portable light set with a generator, and they had a jackhammer now for undoing their work. Only hand tools, though, for putting down new construction. The sound from all of it, the jackhammer and the twenty or so guys whacking the hell out of dirt, cement, and brick, was what you'd imagine, but it was no competition for the cantina music blaring out of every palapa, including the one I was in.

The sandwiches finally arrived, wrapped in aluminum foil. I had meant to eat in, but they had assumed I would want my food to go, which was fine with me. I paid my buck fifty for two sandwiches and an orange soda, and I vamanosed.

On the beach, as I was launching my dinghy, I was hailed in a loud, drunken voice by a young guy who spoke passable English.

"I am Santiago," he said. "I can help you. I help Mike and other guys on your boat. I do many things for them. Do you want to help you?"

I was curious. I wanted to know what Mike and the others had done before they abandoned my boat here with a destroyed engine. And a translator wouldn't be a bad idea, either. On the other hand, he was drunk and full of exaggeration, his hand over his heart to show the depth of the help he was offering, etc., and his friends, all sloshing aimlessly through the shallow water with beers in their hands, were not inspiring great trust. "Can we talk in the morning?" I asked. "Can we meet at the plaza at 8 or 9?"

"I be there, my friend," he said, and tapped me on the chest, lurched to the side then steadied himself. "Santiago will take care of you, my friend."

Not the most reassuring words, really, and the whole thing seemed like a scene from a bad movie, but if he showed up sober in the morning, maybe he could be helpful. I rowed out to the boat, unwrapped my sandwiches, scraped off the mayonnaise, threw out the lettuce and tomato since they couldn't be trusted, and after dinner was over, went to bed.

In the morning, I rowed ashore in the dinghy, returned to the palapa, where the same men were still drinking, and ordered huevos rancheros. It wasn't on the menu, but they seemed to know what it was. I was taking a risk eating eggs in this place, but the risk seemed small compared to everything else.

The construction crew was still going, though I assumed the guys were in shifts. Lots of women were rubbing bricks with bricks, also, at 5:30 am, and sweeping sand over the new sidewalk, then sweeping it off. Another way of aging the plaza, I supposed. It seemed the work could go on forever.

The huevos rancheros were two eggs, over easy, with the signature red drool shared by the chicken knuckles. I asked for corn tortillas, received flour tortillas, and went to work. Not bad. I made a mental note I now had two dishes I could order.

Santiago arrived just as I was finishing up. This was an encouraging sign, since it was early. Then I realized someone must have seen me and awakened him under orders, which was a little scary. He had a full shock of hair, a bit longer than the local style. He had no moustache, unlike almost everyone else, and an earnest face. After our hellos, I tried to find out a little about him. He made it clear he was Guatemalan, not Mexican. "People here mostly Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua. No many Mexican."

"People crossed the border and came here for better jobs?" I asked.

"Si. Better jobs here," he said.

I had meant it as a joke. "How much does a waitress make here at this palapa?"

Santiago considered for a moment. "Maybe 200 pesos a month."

That meant \$25 a month. I was stunned. I had expected it to be low, but not that low. I realized that the \$1 or so I was paying for breakfast, which had seemed low, was probably an inflated price. "Do you have a job?" I asked him.

"No," he said. "Not every day. But I work as a translator. I help people on yachts for their papers."

"What did Mike and Elizabeth and my other crew do during their time here?"

Santiago laughed. "They drink a lot of cerveza. Mike and his friend both fuck local girls. None of them do any work. They talk about you, they say how you don't give any money, how your boat is no good, how you can go fuck yourself."

"Well that's nice," I said. "I guess I should have expected that."

"You seem alright to me," Santiago said.

"Thanks."

Santiago's breakfast finally arrived. I had told him to order whatever he wanted, and he had ordered the same.

"In California, Mexican food is different," I said. "You'd have salsa, sour cream, and guacamole, and

beans and rice. And the tortillas would be corn tortillas.”

“California is a rich country,” he said.

“That’s true.”

I told him I was waiting for the mechanic and I tried to describe what needed to be done for the engine.

“I can help,” he said. “You have to be careful here. This is not California. You can’t do much, even you know someone cheats you. I know who takes your outboard engine from your boat, but that doesn’t mean you can get it back.”

“You know who took my outboard?”

“Si. But is not important. The men who take it are familia with El Capitan. And they have guns.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “I’m getting my motor back. Where do these people live?”

“I’m not taking you there, man. Go to the Capitan, tell him you know who has it, but don’t say nothing about me, and see what he says. You’ll see. There’s no way for you to get your engine.”

“I’ll talk to him. And I won’t say anything about you. So how can I find you if the mechanic ever comes?”

“I live behind the fishing boats, just ask for Santiago. But I check you later. The mecanico won’t be here this morning. Maybe lunch time.”

We said goodbye, and I marched off to the port captain’s office. I wanted my outboard back.

The port captain’s office wasn’t open yet. I had forgotten that they opened at nine. I didn’t have anything else to do, though, so I just sat on their steps and waited for a couple hours, going crazy in the sun.

When the Capitan finally arrived, an hour after everyone else had arrived, he wouldn’t see me right away. I had waited almost four hours by the time I was shown in. I really did feel crazy from the waiting. I skipped quickly through the formalities, saying “Buenos dias, como esta, etc.” then saying “I have been told that the men who stole my outboard engine are here in this town.”

The Capitan just smiled and looked at me, as if he were waiting to hear more.

“I think I can tell you which house, if you could send some of your men with me to get it.”

The Capitan smiled again, sat back in his chair and looked around his office. Then he sat forward and folded his hands on his desk. “Do you have your papers with you?” he asked.

“My papers?” I asked. “I came in to talk about the outboard engine.”

“Do you have your papers with you?”

“You have copies of all of them. When I first arrived here, you’re the one who gave me the papers, after you made copies. And you kept the original of the clearance.”

“I need to see that you have your papers.”

So Santiago was right. But I didn’t feel like giving up. “Okay,” I said. “I’ll row back out to my boat. Is there anything else you would like from the boat other than the papers?”

“Only your papers.”

I rowed back out to the boat in the hot sun, grabbed all the papers, including the boat's documentation and my passport, then rowed back in and walked to his office.

I had to wait almost half an hour to be shown in, even though he didn't have any other visitors. It was just me waiting in the lobby while he sat alone in the next room at his desk doing nothing. I could see him through the open door.

When I was let in, I walked straight to his desk and handed over the papers. He waved his arm to show me a seat, then he picked slowly through the papers, glancing over all of them but of course not really needing to read them.

"Your papers," he said. "You may take them now."

I got up and collected them, then sat back down. My chair was about twenty feet from his desk, so most of the time I was far away.

"May I have your help in recovering my stolen engine?" I asked.

He leaned back in his chair and folded his hands behind his head. Then he swiveled around so that I stared at his folded hands and the back of his head while he stared at the portrait of the President hung on the wall behind his desk. This went on for maybe five minutes, which seemed unbearably long.

"May I have your help in recovering my stolen outboard engine?" I repeated.

He turned around slowly, brought his hands back to his desk and folded them carefully.

"Have you seen the weather report?" he asked. "I can show you the weather report."

"Okay," I said.

He stood up and walked over to another desk with a printer and fax. He motioned for me to come, and I walked across the room to join him. He handed me the most recent text report, in Spanish, and I read it as best as I could. "Olas are waves?" I asked.

"Si."

I finished reading what I could. "The weather looks okay," I said.

"Yes, the weather is okay," he said. "So thank you for coming in to my office. I will see you again soon, my friend."

"Will you help me find my engine?" I asked.

He was pissed off now. No more smiling. He sat down and I returned to my chair across the room. His folded hands on the desk were chopping up and down, a slow hatchet, controlled. "Let me tell you the two ways you can report a crime here in Mexico," he said.

"Great," I said.

"The first way is to make an official report. If you make an official report, you will need to make it in this office, and in the harbor office across the bay, and in Puerto Madero with the police and with the Navy, and with two more kinds of police in Tapachula, the police for this region and the federal police. Then each kind of police will come to inspect you and your boat. The navy, and my men, and every kind of police. Then, after all of those reports are made, someone will make a recommendation about what can be done. Maybe something,

maybe nothing. Depending.”

“Your English has really improved,” I said. “What’s the other way to report a crime?” I certainly didn’t want to be inspected by every police and military force. I assumed he was exaggerating about all the offices; I imagined I could probably get away with just the Navy, the Capitan’s office, the port authority, and the local police, but that was still a lot of inspection. I did believe they would come out to inspect.

“The other way is unofficial. You can let me know, as you have done now, and if I find your engine, I will let you know.”

“That sounds good,” I said. “Can I help you find it, by letting you know where it is?”

“No,” he said. “You just leave it up to me.”

“Okay,” I said. “I guess I have to go with that option. If you find it, I’ll pay you \$200 U.S. That’s half of what the engine cost me. I bought it used.” This was a lie, of course.

“That is not necessary,” he said. “We are a government office. We are here to help.”

poetry

Five Scenes from Six and Renaldo

Linda Phillimore

waiting all morning it seems then we hear
him before we see him that old austin-
healey backfiring as it flies around doc
simon's corner almost on two wheels before
rolling to a stop and there's renaldo
unfolding himself from behind the wheel
tequila bottle in one hand daffodils in the
other crowing julia querida

jonah and me giggling on the back stoop
peering through the screen door too late
mama calls us in and he's swooping down
on us before we know it whooping giving
jonah a mock one-two but it's me renaldo's
grabbing up under the arms twirling me like
a dervish i shut my eyes and breathe in bay
rum and something like danger

renaldo rumbas mama across the room right
out the french doors mama's protests don't
do one bit of good and daddy keeping time
with two flamingo stir sticks just to be
part of it all a smile stretched tight across his
face like a band-aid besame mucho renaldo
croons as around the patio they go till
mama's high heeled mule catches the
lagstone and there they are tumbling
laughing into the hammock and daddy
laughing too

suppertime and renaldo's helping himself to
seconds and filling empty wine glasses all
the while talking about mazatlan and plans
for a marina another deal that went sour
some s.o.b. who bailed on him only renaldo
talking daddy nodding every now and then
mama trying to catch his eye and it seems
the talk's run out until daddy says it's a
damn shame about juanita

renaldo says he really should be driving
down to escondido tonight mama just
smiles and doesn't say the spare room's
been made up for days and daddy doesn't
say we make our own beds and lie in them
and the same light that spins such
afternoons luminous can wane faster than
two taillights disappearing around a corner

After Sappho
Christina Hutchins

Prehension is how an occasion in its immediacy of being
absorbs another occasion which has passed.
—Alfred North Whitehead

Sweetest hours of a sweet life
quite literally we became one another

not the old couple finishing each other's sentence
but beginning here adrape

prehending in such proximity!
My skin the immediate past of your skin

there are so many places I can never go: your
pain dreams or from them into your days

Incalculable the loss the one poem ever
requiring the past be passed

How long ago did this heat I field
depart your animal furnace?

Remainders

Christina Hutchins

We lay abed fitted & refitted
& the remainder of the day could not stop washing
its hands its face its long & glossy back

in the passing strands of us Savored
silk we were mercurial
the sunlit mane of a river in flood

For years you leaned forward with the dusk
& then again away O house of solitude
damp night air

flax wrapped loose round my dark comb

The Music Inside

Christina Hutchins

This is the truck inside the truck, the plane
inside the airplane I drew early most afternoons,
a psychological puzzle handed over to my mother.
This is the poem inside the poem.

As early morning I stood high on a kitchen chair,
firm hands unbraided, brushed, & damp braided
my hair. The barrette clasped tight, my mother rough-
pulled her comb through my brush. I trotted

a cloud of childhair out to the yard,
laid it on the tips of the grass. First rays arrested
among the flutes & stems, scent of a dark-water birth,
this is the dew inside the dew.

Late in the day polished boards streamed light
under a locked closet door. Three quarters of an inch
& seeping through every luminescent leaf, lemonade
stand, white wicker & Kimberly-pink child nipple,

this is the child inside the child, cross-legged
below the brush of coat hems. Beside the bright stripe
on the dark of the neighbor's floor, silence was thickening
to song. Released at suppertime, I jogged home

past crowds of juniper thorn & poison peas,
chest-high clappers of the bell that was my outstretched
arm, my round & rosined palm. "Ring," I said.
I sang, "wrangle, wrung."

Amid the bell-towers a high wind rose & rang
the thousands, tongues all garrulous green. Fists
of first drops, fragrant the breath of tarp
& tarmac, a hidden creek rattled.

A joyful dog barked the letters of foul words.
A piebald horse took a weed-lined walk.
A mower & a mower's own path following it,
all of us grew damp & damper:

The cantering horse. The joyful dog.
Bright the shorn. Stubble. The creek!

This is the drummed bottom of a blue plastic pool,
empty, upended.

Hairs, collected & abandoned, line the inner nests
of unknown birds. I left the cage door open while I slept.
Dank as an albatross & happy at the flute hotel,
I fastened the past with a loose clasp.

The Ear as Rifle

Tania Van Winkle

When he sleeps
I go hunting

for the duration of a cigarette
beneath the bare bulb

porch light, never stepping from
inside its limited reach.

In the darkness
out beyond where the front walk

ends, they are there;
ginger steps. Each footfall

the sounds that leaves make
as they freeze. Steps one

by one a chest tightening
bone crackle of leaves

decomposing. A cautious
time-lapsed

sound of hooves.
I know they are out there

just past the ridge of trees
waiting,

listening for me to make a move.
They never come

into my crescent of light. Pine
needle and leaf all

will cease before
we ever meet.

Arriving in New York for My Grandfather's Funeral

Alison Doernberg

We have unlatched
a house where no one lives.
The walls, like spines
of library volumes, softened by time.
Back home, no salt lines ribbon across the toes
of my boots and I cannot untangle
where loss resides –
in the ache of the empty kitchen chair,
the calendar page unturned,
the tired linoleum.
My parents asleep in the snakeskin
of his bed, cocooned in vacancy,
the next in line.
The rafters sigh, but cannot mend. And soon
the blanket edges will hold the scent
of someone else's skin.

Honeysuckle

Alison Doernberg

By early June, they've cloaked the fence in green,
extending toward the house. We plunge our arms

into the dense entanglement of vines
and pluck them, one by one, the slender bells

of palest gold and white beneath the gray
swell of the sky, thick with unfallen rain.

We twist the ends, a gentle pull – my sister first,
then I – slide out the wispy stem and catch

the single fragrant drop. It melts against
my tongue, a softened burst of summer sun.

Inside, my father scrubs the plates and sighs,
They'll swallow up the house. He tries each year

to cut them back: a pleading push against
a yawning leafy tide, the fist-like roots

uncurling underground and spreading wide.
They climb the brick, grab at the mortar cracks

and angle toward the sky. I wonder why
we don't just drown; our house, a vessel lost

in stormy seas. At night, I lie in bed,
a breath away from sleep, and feel the silence

creep up every wall, the empty spaces
shifting into voids to fill. I settle

into strange relief. We're giving up the fight –
instead we live within and find it sweet.

The Crossing

Caroline Knapp

The quayed riverbed open like palms.
The not body not broken: is ended.

Shell of cicada dust-white in the calcite gulley.
A strange ship sailed in.

Sepia tree in the petal: a suffused tale we scarcely saw.
The men keep turning into deer.

Dropped datura body at our feet.
Name: antistrophe. Hemistich. Corner of my eye.

Death's-head moth buttoned on the bathroom mirror.
I sing: keep before me the hollow between lines.

Name: terpsichore. Name: the mothers' prayer.
This is the crossing:

Super flumina babylonis we hang up our old skins.
A swayed song we scarcely recognize.

Notes on Summer

Michael Gross

a. The eyelid opens the
Tupperware container,
and the women laugh at.
The placid lake, surfaced
in a cellophane of mosquitoes,
and the thoughts
of knife wounds leap out
at them like trout,
and the couch floats
quietly by, nylon-clad
legs arched over the edge
sinking lead fucks to
the floor, and over the
mountains comes a wind:
honking, headlights
flashing, and the idea
of windblasted faces or
tricked-out Mustangs
free-leap from the mind
to the surface, wrapped
bodies and angry strikes
to the trees at the water's
edge, and past the
sphere of the cranium
into the radar view:
a heavy billow of wet
wet glances.

b. In the immediate moments
after the shot fired, a
mouse-sized yell hung
from the noose of the tongue,
a squirrel clung to
the side of your neck,
cheeks full of sayings said
before, never again,
you rusted out your finger
nails while the rain puddled

around the aperture of the
flame of a house, 3BR 2.5

BA, a zipper caught on
the granddaughter's lip.
What were we doing there
and who were we kissing
to get the fat of the land
ground up and stored off
in our fingers, grain
elevators, imagining the
clouds stopped and turn
into plane tails pointing
away from our dusted eyelash
to the silvery tossed memory
en route to LAX, only to be
seen 100 times in makeup
projected off the brick
wall, 100 thousand dollars
pissed away on a habit
of putting your hand deep in
the ground & pulling
out a fistful of worms &
birdbeaks & mice, all
clamoring for their spot
on MTV: a collective forgetting.

c. The only time I saw my
mother was her holding
a sack of groceries in
her mind like thoughts,
one bag of chips for
every three times she
looked out from
the porch, behind the ripped
screen door of her filmed
over eyes and saw a
swarm of bees burrowing
in the neighborhood asphalt
and running the show of
Summertime, like kites
tossed against the side
of your head, the ears
hear the coming storm:
stings reanimating the face.

d. Snowstorm of exploded
eggshells behind the glass
fishtank eyes looking

around with the deep
piranha mouth pupils, she
wears winter like a
coat of rabbits screaming
in front of the fox of the
field, her chest exposed,
mounds of prairie dogs
barking out the feathery
birds of hair wildly sweeping
across the surface
of her skin, to & fro,
a spirit making the world
in her spitting image,
she sells her ribs at
a neighborhood garage
sale to the first man
able to store her safely
in his beard, a yell from
the great plains end at the
feet of the Great Range,
a howl of wind full of
eggs, a fishtank tips
and explodes her ideas
into a dozen hungry
piranhas eyeing the winter
rabbit, screaming at the
feathers of glass mouthing:
a storm full of pupils.

e. Old man foresaw
the comely feet of warrior
women nailing a poster
to the neo-classical
columns, like a teabag
of flat surfaces
on edge and twisted
to the shapes of apples
and rolled to rib-
like horns worn
ceremonially at the witch
wedding, under a moon
the color of the ancient
tree-sap which caught
the mosquito, an image
of such minuteness,
& of the least of my
brothers, the small

square-inchage of skin:
the skins of boys don't
flake off in bed to dust,
but unravel like
the kimonos of Japan,
and reveal the
undressing of organs first,
then a man: the onion
white, the anti-raven:
moons over Broadway.

f. Holy be thy Grandson,
hollowing out his head
with the only stick left
in town, swearing at
each spoonful of onlookers
who wail at the walls
of his eyes, begging
for sacrificial smoke
to cloud the day
into thunderstorms of
treetops plumbing from
the seeds of the eye's
black beetle, the sprouting
pupil, blooming with
the gray billows of
the rest of the village
in awe at how big his
face has been, a dinner
plate swallowing the
dinner table, his
white teeth like bright
stones cupped in the
hand of his jaw, gnash
at the closest hand that
feeds, a Mexican vendor
selling his silvery
knives to every sun-
soaker. Hiding in the
old home's corner, a tiny
memory mouse, scratching
for some crumbs, the
smallest expressions,
and the echoes of the
murmurs compound into
the dictionary of
remember, his family cut

into pieces of leaves:
raked under the darkest cloud.

g. The bee on the bulb
denudes and a flow of
oratories glass the
pond upon which sink
a thousand children
through the ice, seeing
antithesis to the mortal,
floating unaided at the
edge of land and sea.

A scurry of footprints
like fish bones
fingered in the sand
& the only cry of the
gulls we hear is the
mother, swallowed inside
the season: a swarm of
stings on flower heads..

Notes on Continuation

Michael Gross

Assembly required: I want all the bulbs in the room to work as well as a window.

Trisect: The bird's head moves much like I imagine mine would if mirrors were see-through.

Burying bulbs: Registration is required at the entrance of vision: one is next, the other once.

Sung low: That satellite makes me think of entering atmospheres in flames: the orange dangle of bodies.

Broadsided: Trees topple tip-side last: roots-down let go, me holding the dirt he lowered in.

Visions & a bird: Slashing the tires into little leeches, sucking the curb and asphalt for more answers to questions.

Predated: The most impossible move, the owl reaches into the grass like I my pocket, and pulls out squirming.

Forts & showdowns: Saddlebags slump the back of the mare, snowing peaks jaw the mouse's red mind.

Foreordained: A tremendous blow renders the head a hundred apples tossed and staying: an orchard of memories.

After addiction: Slams the door, swallows the key, hangs a bag, climbs a vine, tramples the sore, and stitches hands to dicks.

The mouse of memory: A sandal means there is no use for this anymore, and she lays in bed crooning for bipeds.

The guns stop: Stomping on the grave, a gust of me snaps a tree's branch into toothpicks among the toothy stones.

Keys to the leeches: A bee on the forehead: thoughts swimming to a finger-press on the fish tank.

Saddlebags in the hips slump across the steering wheel and a stroke of family crosses lanes: painted.

Satellite beaming: He is looking bashful, full of innuendoes and prophecies: the times we summered in the winter.

The finale, orchestrated by: The opaque apples of sound slim into a blue, a frame, and further yet, into clarity.

fiction

Spanking Without a Cause

Kevin Killian

When I met fetish star Eric Avery at first I was a little scornful, and perhaps a bit jealous. But he was pretty meek and composed, all things considered. In person he wasn't half as cute as when he was on HD video—he had a long face like a hatchet and he was clumsy and earnest as a colt, just about falling out of the car when Adam Radley brought him to the L-Shaped Room, which is the other bar in Gavit and the only one you can have dinner in too. It's an L-shaped place and that's why they call it the L-Shaped Room, thereby sailing right over the head of all the students of today who don't remember that *The L-Shaped Room* was Leslie Caron's long-awaited dramatic debut after the frou-frou of *Gigi*. You know the Closing of the American Mind, well, this is it in its highest form of life. I was born in Gavit, and I've watched it grow from a farm village to a town of dumbasses, and does it ever hurt sometimes.

We had lunch on a Wednesday, I think it was, I know it was after Christmas, not January, maybe the very beginning of February. I know it's important to remember the exact date, due to the ongoing criminal investigation that I am anxious to assist the authorities with, but I just can't pin it down. Pretty sure it was a Wednesday. Pretty sure it was February. I know it was lunch.

The door opened at the town's one fire hydrant downtown, and Avery put one foot out on the wet, icy curb, whereupon it promptly skidded 18 inches before coming to a halt. "Be careful," Adam rebuked him, slamming the driver's seat door, so in midcourse Avery changed his posture so that his careful ass is what emerged first out of the car door. After watching it so many times on the plasma screen, I felt I could have recognized that ass anywhere, even covered up in khaki and coated with the long tail of his red checked cotton Polo shirt. It just had an aura about it, a charisma if you like. It spoke to me in an almost spiritual way, and I wasn't even much of what guys call an ass man. But remember Moses coming down from the heights with the two graven tablets in his arms? That's what I saw coming out of the car at me—the whole goddamn ten commandments tied off by a blue belt like the one Patrick Wolf sports in the "Magic Position" video.

Adam sort of wore his leading man as an accessory, though nothing obvious like holding hands. That would have been a PR disaster and probably would have led to prosecution. I was watching the two of them like a hawk, and it seemed to me that Avery was a little afraid of Adam and wanted his approval something fierce. Inside the restaurant, he picked up a menu and leafed through it but only half-heartedly, and waited until Adam ordered for him. This must have been how Tippi Hedren acted around Hitchcock in the Universal commissary during the making of *The Birds and Marnie*. If Avery was a star, then he was a star sadly dependent on the whims of the director-producer who had plucked him out of art school and made him a cult sensation in the matter of

a few months.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be, you know, super hot like Adam’s other guys,” he confided. Adam kept a small squadron of boys bent over in his productions, one a tall, rugged Russian, blond as a Cossack, another Hong Kong boy called Ming who played the defiant submissive in Adam’s exotic historicals, and a parade of others. Avery’s distinctions were multiple, however. He wasn’t sexy as Ming or Dimitri or Yves, but he had the American look; he had an expressive canvas, the several square feet of skin on his butt formed magic pictures on the viewer’s brain; and by now he had learned to cry real tears pretty much on cue. “Not everyone can,” Adam said, hinting of an understatement I couldn’t quite fathom. The real money, it developed, was not made on screen—whatever “movie” they were featured in was merely his boys’ calling card to success. The money was in the franchise and the franchise meant meeting the customers one on one, face to face. Fabulous sums could be made—if you could handle it. “I know I’ll never be foxy like Yves, but if I just stick to the script I can get by,” Eric Avery said. “You know I’m a dancer too.”

“Danced in my scanties,” sang Adam. “Three bucks a night was the pay. But I’m here.”

“Stephen Sondheim,” I added.

“Whatever. I’m more of a rock boy.” He raised a glass of water to his lips, nodded. “But Adam’s teaching me to like Sondheim. At first I was, shoot me, but after awhile I had an awakening.”

“A rude awakening,” Adam said.

“I guess.” This sounded to me like the private talk of lovers, that I shouldn’t be intruding on, but they had asked *me* to lunch, hadn’t they? It was up to them to keep their private little pillow talk off the lunch table. They were just passing through in what looked like a brand new Mitsubishi Spyder. In our town folks mostly go for the American-made cars, but I told Adam he wasn’t going to run into a bunch of yokels smashing the windshields of Japanese cars or anything like that. There were even a few Obama stickers I’d noticed around town—and not just in the black part either. A new liberal spirit was hitting Gavit. Maybe folks were outraged over the war, five years into a war that never ends.

Eric Avery stood and twirled and showed off a pair of red “suede” Emerica skate shoes, which we don’t see much of in Gavit. He said a fan had bought them for him. “That’s cool,” I allowed. After his second Cosmo Adam grew expansive about his admiration for Sondheim and his hope of making an unauthorized, and spanking-centric, video version of *Follies*. “I’d like to do a *Follies* that would have real, live, middle-aged men in it, and they’d be remembering when they were young. I wrote to Sondheim about it, thinking he’d see the revolutionary potential, and the fuckhead just sicced his attorneys on me with a cease and desist.”

Eric Avery frowned, the frown of great tragedy, just calculating the loss to the world of cinematic art.

“But the hell with him. I’m doing it anyway, and Avery will represent the boy of the 1950s.” He’d already, it turned out, produced a music-less *Pacific Overtures* with Ming as the eternally punished, colonized Asian geisha boy, and was further deconstructing *West Side Story* as a Cold War-inflected parable in which the Puerto Rican “Sharks” would be played by Russian nationals—led by Adam’s previous discovery, Dimitri—while the white “Jets” would stay American—and Avery would star as Tony, waiting for something coming. “You know

what Bresson said,” Adam reminded us, the white froth of beer around his red, sensitive mouth. “‘An image must be transformed by contact with other images the way a color is transformed by contact with other colors. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red.’ I keep thinking there must be some simple, in-the-camera technology for spanking an ass into the instantly recognizable red, white and blue pattern of the US flag. Now wouldn’t that be spectacular?”

“Ouch,” said Avery, pretending to wince.

“Robert Bresson said, ‘No art without transformation.’”

“Wow, you’re really into this,” I exclaimed. He was almost convincing me, and I was resistant to his ideas for the reasons advanced earlier. “But isn’t that a little bit arty for the crowd who downloads your videos?”

“He gives them what they want, and then something extra.”

“Something transformative,” Adam Radley reiterated. He tousled Avery’s hair and for a minute you could almost think he was genuinely fond of him. And I felt a little jealous because no man had ever done that particular thing to my hair. I was all-American too! Well, Adam preached transformation and he was playing Eric Avery like Pygmalion, molding him into his ideal object. Would it last? At lunch he wouldn’t let Avery eat a single thing but a lettuce and tomato salad, because later in the afternoon he was going to drop him off at Ethan Allen’s house for a few hours. As I saw it they were nothing more than glorified pimp and whore—but they had rationalized their relationship to the point where, the money that such hooking would bring in would in some way underwrite the budgets of Extreme Remedies’ next productions.

“Hope to see you again,” Eric Avery said, as he came back from the men’s room. He was now dressed in the familiar mailman’s uniform he wore to such dates. It looked good on him: Adam Radley had had his own tailor come and let it out a little here and there. Customized it to Avery’s unusually awkward body. The lower pockets were now double welted, giving the suit a vague air of the 18th century—he’d become a mailman in the age of *Dangerous Liaisons*. And did the gray wool now hug his big ass like a lover? Indubitably, as though they’d poured gray velvet soup all over his butt and let it dry on his skin like the fuzz on a tennis-ball.

“Come back any time,” I told them. “And thanks for lunch.”

“There was so much I wanted to tell you,” Avery called, over his shoulder, as he and his director left the L-Shaped Room. And he made that sign with his right hand that means, “I’ll call you.” Funny sign that looks as if one is punching oneself in the head, except with the thumb and the weak slim finger, what me and Jim used to call the “baby finger” extended at odd angles as if to soften the blow.

You can imagine all this glamorous Hollywood talk left me restless, unfit for serious work. I went down to my office after leaving the L-Shaped Room and just droned through my day, ending about fifty eBay auctions and getting some really good prices for about half a dozen items. I remember we were selling JFK’s own wallet, the one he was actually carrying when he got dunned down that awful day in Dallas. That transaction sticks out because later on we got into a beef with the buyer who was apparently, a leather expert who swore this couldn’t have been manufactured any earlier than 1966, when they first started adding pebbles to brown leather. I let my trusty wingman Eugenio handle the resulting flap. Oh boy! Sometimes I was glad

we were located in a tiny country hamlet hundreds of miles from anywhere, because so many of our buyers were probably aching to get their hands round our windpipes. Well, not all of them, naturally. In fact it takes a rare bird to actually sit there with an autographed photo of Jayne Mansfield in your left hand, and one of Fidel Castro in your right, and realize, the same man made both signatures. And most people don't care to examine their own dreams with any real, what, care. I don't blame them, I was the same way.

I just sort of sat in the corner, laptop on my lap, and watched the new DVD Adam had gifted me with, the way you might tip a waitress a quarter or whatever. It was, he said, his adrenaline-charged rain-streaked Nicholas Ray tribute, *Spanking Without a Cause*, with Avery in the James Dean role. They had commandeered San Francisco's science museum, the Exploratorium, for a single night of filming, in which Adam Radley made it seem like the planetarium in Griffith Park. I'm not into spanking myself but the sight of Avery getting it once again, under a blanket of fake stars glittering on a ceiling high above, was oddly touching. The LA-based filmmaker and photographer William E. Jones had been assigned by *Artforum* to report from the set of *Spanking Without a Cause* and I read his article on line over a TV dinner. "Radley stages the knife fight with what looks like authentic 1950s switchblades that—zip, flip, snip—hack away at Jim's blue jeans until they're a hula skirt of blue denim rag, and his white briefs glow with arcane knowledge from beneath the shredded blue curtain. When his dad appears in a frilly pink apron and wet rubber gloves in the door of Jim's bedroom, Radley's camera reacts like Medusa, freezing on the menace of those long wet gloves. The dad sits down at the edge of the bed, bends a sullen Jim over his knee, inches his palm over the upturned butt. 'Jim,' he asks, almost casually, 'do you think that the end of the world will come at night time?'"

Dust

Patty Somlo

The story started some place in the Southwest. It began as a small clump of dust, loosened from the sole of a pair of sneakers made in China. The shoes belonged to the story's hero who, when it was all over, became larger than life. He had, some said, died and been reincarnated. All in the blink of an eye.

Dust from the man's shoe had traveled across the border, between Mexico and the United States. A pale tan residue lifted into the wind, on a day so hot and dry nothing but a particle of dust would have even noticed. There were, one teller of the story was heard to relate, crickets spread across the desert, and they all began to sing.

Night fell, without a lessening of the heat. The man whose shoes pointed toward the sky lay where he had fallen, next to the border fence, on the Mexican side. Only the dust from his boot had gotten across, though the man's goal had been to come to America and make his fortune.

The dust glided through the air that first night. There were no clouds, which was good, because otherwise it might have rained and the dust would have turned to mud or been washed away, never to have been heard from again. If you were standing out in the desert, where lights are nowhere to be seen, a multitude of stars could have caused you to exhale slowly. A sliver of moon hung pensively, off to the side.

The dust did not want to go far that night. It lifted to a higher place, where the air currents sailed it north. The little beige particle had heard about San Diego and liked how the name rolled off a tongue. Plus, it was a name not unfamiliar to a morsel of dry soil from that side of the border, where saints were much more commonplace.

A woman with long gray hair and the hint of a moustache above her lip told the next part of the story like this:

The little piece of dust, you know, it was nothing really. Like dandruff or sand that blows in the door. It decided to come down from the sky and take a look around. This kernel of dirt from a tiny village in the Mexican mountains, not far from Guatemala, had never seen such highways and cars, and so many lights. Well, you can just imagine what went through its tiny mind when it first saw San Diego.

Meanwhile, the hero of our story who had risked everything for a dream, lay in the hottest part of the desert, where no one but the coyote was apt to find him. At that moment, his soul was beginning to sneak away, climbing right out of his chest, where sweat had gathered before the man collapsed.

The next part of the story isn't quite so clear. Some say the dust allowed itself to fall, wanting to see where letting go would take it. Others claim the wind at the higher part of the sky took a break and smacked the dust onto the ground. A man in a bar on the south side of town, in between swigs of Corona soured with lime and after wiping the back of his hand across his mouth, said the dust had taken the form of a man as soon as it hit the ground.

Meanwhile, a scorpion had marched its spindly black legs up onto the dead man's arm. The man didn't know, of course, what was happening, now that his soul had departed.

One old man, who snuck across the border too many years ago to count, and whose three gold-capped front teeth winked in the candlelight, heard that the dust slept in a downtown doorway all night.

The little dust was very cold, he said, being so far north. The poor thing was not used to this weather. But what most people do not understand is that this dust, it was not stupid.

Seeing the blue and green sleeping bags, lumps of stuffed nylon filling each of the spaces in front of doors, the dust understood how it might stay warm. It slipped underneath, at the corner of a bag, making sure not to slide further in, where it would surely be crushed.

At the same time, the dead man's soul hovered over the border, between this side and that. Without the man and his dreams of a better life in America, the soul had a hard time deciding whether to keep moving forward or turn back around. Being an old soul, a bit worn at the toe but carrying the wisdom of countless generations, this presence, which was like breath, water and light all rolled into one, thought a quiet life on the porch overlooking the dead man's corn and bean fields in Teptapa would suit it just fine. The soul had no use for gadgets made in China or a red Ford pickup truck, like the man might have wanted, and the soul was not the least bit hungry at the moment. It had also been around enough time to understand what the dead man had not yet realized – that the other side is often not better than the side where a man was born.

It's at this part of the story where the song comes up. Musicians fight over who wrote their lyrics first but credit is generally given to a band in Tijuana. The Border Boys, as they are known, recorded a tune called *Wetback Dust*. As the song relates, neither the border patrol nor the drug dealers, and not even the President, could stop the dust from the shoes of millions of Mexicans from making its way over, under and in between cracks in the fence, and settling down for a good long time in the United States.

You Are Here

Elizabeth Rosner

You board the train like everyone else, except you're the one carrying everything on your back, shoulders strained by the weight of your adventures. You've passed through a hundred towns whose names you've already forgotten, and you study the landscape as if it contains the explanation for your life. But the answers remain invisible, and instead you daydream about the lives of the people whose gardens so casually display themselves; you wonder what else they do besides hang laundry or push a silent mower or toss a ball to a laughing child. To all of them you are barely a blur on the horizon, someone they won't even catch a glimpse of, someone whose life has nothing to do with theirs.

For once, for today, you have a destination: a city in which you are planning to rendezvous with a man whose language you don't speak. You met him somewhere else, on a small island in the middle of the Aegean, but at the time you couldn't follow the urgings of your desire because you were with another man, one whose desire for you had not been part of the itinerary. You were supposed to be traveling partners, nothing more, but then he tried too hard to take care of you, to protect you from whatever it was he imagined you needed protection from, and in order to escape his solicitation you had to ride a motorcycle high into the verdant mountains. The villagers stared as you passed through, pausing to gossip about the unescorted woman with bare legs and bare shoulders and sunglasses. And all the time you were fantasizing about that other man, the one whose language you didn't speak.

So now you are surprising him with a call from the train station in his own city, suddenly aware that he may not have wanted you as much as you thought he did that week when you didn't touch each other. But his voice sounds pleased, very pleased, and he picks you up and brings you to his apartment on the artistic side of town where, you are utterly relieved to see, he lives alone. He asks if you are hungry, and with sweet eagerness, he takes your hand when you walk down the street toward the café. When he puts his arm around you, it's as though you are back on that island in the sun, soaking with heat. Later, in bed with him, your skin is electric, currents pulsing for hours. He seems to want to learn the relief map of your body. There are no words to describe to him what you are feeling, but in the darkness, you have long drawn-out vowels whose meaning is always perfectly clear.

When it is already time for you leave the next day, he drives you to the station through heavy traffic; he has to park while you dash for the train. Just when it's nearly too late you see him running down the platform in a cinematic blur, desperate and smiling. For one last scene, the two of you reach to join hands through the half-open window of your second class compartment, and you can't help knowing that you will never see this man again, that your life will continue as if this interruption never happened. You are leaving with nothing more than the baggage you carried on arrival, letting go of whatever it was you never had.

Brother and Sister

Grace Andreacchi

When I was eight years old something happened that changed the course of my life forever. My brother and I were skating on the pond in the woods behind our house when the ice cracked beneath us. I managed to roll clear of the hole onto a thicker patch of ice, but my brother drowned. He was only six. I wish I could relate that I made heroic efforts to save him, but in fact I did nothing of the kind. I lay very still on the ice, breathless with terror, and watched while he thrashed helplessly, then disappeared beneath the cold, black water and shards of broken ice.

For a long time after he died I didn't think about my brother at all. I pretended to myself that I'd never had a brother, and this was made easier by the way every trace of him soon disappeared from our house. Practically overnight his toys were gone, his clothes were gone, his drawings vanished from the refrigerator door and his photograph from the wall, just as his voice vanished from the echo in the stairwell and his footprints from the lawn. Then one day I found a box of toy soldiers that had once belonged to him. He had hidden them in a secret place under the stairs, and no one had thought to look there. I found them by accident one hot, sunny afternoon when I was playing hide-and-seek with my imaginary friend, Gretel. I'd been hiding from Gretel for a while in the cupboard under the stairs, it was cool and dark there, and I was enjoying the respite from the heat and wondering how long it would take her to find me when I slipped my hand up behind the curve of the stairs and felt something. It was a shoebox held closed with rubber bands, and inside were my brother's soldiers.

These soldiers were his favourite thing in the world. Not really soldiers, but medieval knights in armour, each sumptuously kitted out in individual style, and made of soft, pliable plastic that allowed you to change the angle of lance or plume. Many of them were on horseback, but a few were foot soldiers. The Black Knight, who straddled a black horse and swung a ferocious-looking spiked mace, was of course the villain. The knight with the sky blue plume on his helmet and the blue cross on his breastplate was known as Sir Lancelot and was my brother's favourite. As I took them out of the box and handled them, one by one, everything about my brother returned to me. I remembered once again the sound of his voice, which was unusually low for a small boy, the way he used to roar at the birds to frighten them and then laugh deliriously as they fluttered away. I remembered his smell, and the colour of his hair, which was light brown and very curly. I took the soldiers back to my room and hid them under the bed.

That night, when I was sure that my mother and father were asleep, I took the knights out of the box and set them up in battle order on the little table, just as my brother used to do. I didn't dare turn the light on, but I could see them quite clearly by the moonlight streaming through the window. Suddenly the Black Knight stirred, and swung his mace at Sir Lancelot, nearly chopping off his head. Sir Lancelot ducked just in time, then wheeled round and dealt the Black Knight a tremendous blow with his sword that threw him from his horse.

The Black Knight screamed in agony and shook his fist at Sir Lancelot. Now all the knights were in a frenzy, hitting and slashing at one another with their swords. I crouched behind the bed, frozen with terror, powerless to stop them. Soon the Black Knight had regained his composure and climbed up onto the bedside lamp, from which he rained down arrows at his enemies below. But when Sir Lancelot followed him the lamp tipped over and went crashing to the ground.

There was silence, followed by the sound of running footsteps, and my mother came into the room. 'What was that?' she said. 'Are you all right? I thought I heard something...'. She put on the overhead light and looked at the shards of broken glass and the toy soldiers that had belonged to my brother. 'What are you doing?' she said. 'It's the middle of the night,' she added, when I didn't say anything. Then she stooped down and began to put the soldiers back into the box. She took the box away with her. We never spoke of that night, and I never saw the soldiers again.

The Ugly Duckling

Charles Haddox

My fellow after-school art students and I had been assigned our task. We were to draw one of the Victorian houses that faced the stately Schiller Museum across a street that had once been populated by the founders of our town. Their children and grandchildren had long since abandoned the neighborhood for the suburbs, and the quarter had begun to show its age. Unkempt, towering cypresses grew behind tall iron gates, and partially hid the weather-beaten windows of those formerly impeccable homes. Despite the years of neglect, they still stood like an honor guard for the Neoclassical Schiller mansion, which was much bigger than they and a little older as well, a white marble and cream-brick temple with two outstretched wings. It had been left to the city by the last of the Schiller family, and was now an art museum. Cypresses also lined the busy street that had once been a gas-lit boulevard echoing with the sound of horses' hooves and carriage wheels. Over the years it had become a major east-west artery, full of shiny automobiles and the smell of leaded gasoline. Our class sat on the sloping lawn of the museum, sketch pads in our laps, charcoal pencils in hand. We had not been allowed to use charcoal before that afternoon. All of our previous drawing attempts had been with a pastel-crayon hybrid that bore a name both appropriate and stupid: the "craypas." I vigorously scratched paper with charcoal that afternoon, happy to be freed from the restraints of the smudgy and insipid "craypas," as we balanced our drawing boards on our knees under a calm spring sky. I was attempting to capture, in timeless art, the narrow two-story house with five sweeping, pointed gables that stood directly across the street from the museum. The house was a series of verticals, and built of dark brown brick. The wood trim that traced windows, gables, roof and second floor balcony was painted in a combination of pale yellow and pink, terrible colors that were nevertheless somehow suited to the time, the late nineteen-seventies. The house appeared as though it had been squeezed onto the lot where it sat, or had magically sprung up there, and, like a sunflower, been slowly and steadily pulled skyward by the sun. In my drawing I exaggerated its narrowness, attenuating it until it defied the laws of physics. I nervously awaited the critical judgment of Mr. de la Mordaz, our instructor. He had little patience for the limitations that the facts of our being fourteen and without prior artistic training might cause us to display; every failure of composition or perspective was a personal affront.

The class drew to a close and the sun sank low in the sky, throwing on our subject a light as clear and pale as watered-down tea. New shadows appeared that we had not previously incorporated into our drawings, as if each moment brought us a new and different house to capture with our pencils. Mr. de la Mordaz was suddenly at my side—having made his approach with the stealth of a cat in the tall grass—and speaking to me in his strange, rapid version of English. The smell of cheap cologne steamed off of him like poison in the late afternoon heat. His perfectly pressed black suit and arrogant manner made him look like a walking coffin.

"Your father is not on time today. When the class is over, you just have to wait. The museum close at five-thirty, so you just going to have to wait outside for him when he come."

“Did he say when he would be here?”

“Six-thirty. He have a meeting or something.”

He looked at my drawing and shook his head.

“What the hell you do to that building?” was all he could say.

The last student met his ride and Mr. de la Mordaz departed in his angry red sports car. I was left alone, and I sat on a low wall at the edge of the lawn that spread out in front of the Schiller Museum. Rush hour traffic whisked by and a soft little breeze blew up out of nowhere. The young evening was fecund as silver, patiently waiting to give birth to the artist. I looked up at the Neoclassical façade of the former Schiller home. Above a row of Corinthian columns a white marble scroll gravely unfurled, etched with the motto: “*Numen inest.*”

“Are you waiting for someone?”

I turned and found a tall girl about my own age standing in front of me. She wore a gray jumper and white blouse. I recognized it as the uniform of a private school that operated out of a church in the vicinity of the museum.

“Oh, nobody,” I answered guardedly.

The girl hesitated for a moment before sitting down next to me on the wall.

“I’m not waiting for anybody either. I’m supposed to be walking home from my dance class at the Y.”

“Actually, I *am* waiting for a ride.”

“I’m Tricia,” the girl said as she extended her hand.

I took it timidly and shook it.

“What’s your name?” she asked me after a moment.

“Charles. Everybody calls me Charlie, though.”

“What have you got in your hand?”

“Oh, it’s just a drawing,” I answered without showing it to her.

“Did you draw it?”

“Yes. It isn’t very good.”

I stole a glance at the girl’s face. It was white and round and covered with freckles. She wore granny glasses, and her mouth was small. Her lips protruded a little, giving her a tiny red beak. She wore a blue and white paisley scarf. Strands of her wispy dark gold hair had escaped out from under it and played around her face in the gentle breeze.

“How do you know that your drawing isn’t very good?”

“I did it for an art class, and that’s what the teacher said.”

“People really suck sometimes, don’t they?”

“You mean the art teacher? Yeah, he does, all the time.”

“Can I tell you about something that happened to me the other day?”

“Sure.”

“Do you know A. A. Milne’s play, *The Ugly Duckling*?”

“No.” I had no idea who, or what, she was talking about.

“It’s really silly. There’s a princess—and she’s ugly—so when the time comes for her to marry a prince from a neighboring kingdom they have one of her maids-in-waiting who is pretty impersonate her. It turns out the prince is kind of dorky, too, so they have somebody imitate him, but the real prince and princess meet accidentally and fall in love, and at the end of the play she’s beautiful. It turns out that somebody put a spell on her so she would look ugly and that way she wouldn’t grow up spoiled and vain, but when she meets her true love the spell is broken.

“My drama class at school is doing the play, and I was picked to be the ugly princess. And even worse, there’s a scene where the guy who plays the prince has to pick me up and hold me in his arms, and while he’s holding me in his arms he has to kiss me. After our first cast meeting, where the parts were given out, I heard him telling the teacher that I was so huge there was no way he could lift me and hold me for that long, and that he didn’t want to kiss me because I’m ugly. So the teacher went and cut out that part of the scene from our version of the play.”

We sat together quietly on the low wall, as the evening slowly turned the rich amber light around us to blush, at the end of childhood, a moment which always comes too soon. The rush hour traffic that had surrounded us a few moments earlier subsided, and the air was quiet, so quiet that we could hear the gentle breeze as it sang in the willows knotted with witches’ brooms, and in the tall, sheltering oaks; in the numinous laurel and sacred yew. The smell of fresh cut grass was like the incense of a shrine. I prayed that my father wouldn’t arrive for a few more minutes. A single star with the form and color of aqua regia appeared and ripened in the twilight sky.

Tricia smiled and leaned back on her hands. The hair that had escaped from under her scarf was as bright and delicate as corn silk, and her skin looked as incandescent as the moon. For some reason, a tiny freckle on the corner of her upper lip caught my eye; it was the most beautiful and irresistible thing I had ever seen.

“So you’re taking an art class here at the museum?”

“It’s a drawing class. I took ‘Pre-teen Basic Art’ last year.”

“I think artists are great. Do you know the painting, *Heiliger Hain* by Arnold Böcklin? You know, the Swiss Symbolist.”

“I don’t think so.”

“It’s my favorite painting. You should look it up sometime. Last year my mom took me to Chicago, and I bought a print of it at the Art Institute. They should sell prints of famous paintings at this museum, don’t you think?”

“It doesn’t seem like too many people come here anymore. I guess it’s just so out of the way. It’s a real shame, ’cause it’s a beautiful old building, and this park in front of it is like a great place for kids.”

“Wouldn’t it be fun to climb one of these trees?” Tricia asked, tilting her head back and looking up

into the shadowy sea of leaves overhead.

“I think it would be fun to climb one with you.”

“You’re nice,” she whispered, in a voice so soft that she seemed to be thinking out loud to herself.

I leaned over and kissed her. I had never kissed a girl before. It was a brief, tentative, clumsy kiss. We sat side by side on the little brick wall. Neither of us spoke. My face felt hot and my hands were trembling. For a moment the world took on the red of her lips and the white of her skin. I knew that I would never be anything but an artist. The lustral light, the trees, the planet in the heavens and the gravity of ancient earth were like emblems.

My father finally arrived. As he pulled his car to the curb, I stood up a little uncertainly. Tricia stood as well, and brushed the back of her jumper skirt with her hands.

“Can I see your drawing?” she asked.

I unrolled it and showed it to her.

“I like it a lot,” she said. “Can I have it?”

I handed it to her.

“It’s charcoal. If you spray it with hair spray the drawing won’t smear.”

“Okay.”

I got into the car, and my father asked me who the girl was that I had been talking to. I still felt numb from my sudden initiation into new realms, new life.

“Tricia,” I finally managed to answer, already thinking about my next drawing. “I don’t know her last name, but she’s a princess in a play.”

art

Siblings. Shadows.

Angela Simione



40" x 30" oil on canvas 2008

Lineage
Angela Simione



44" x 38" oil on canvas 2009

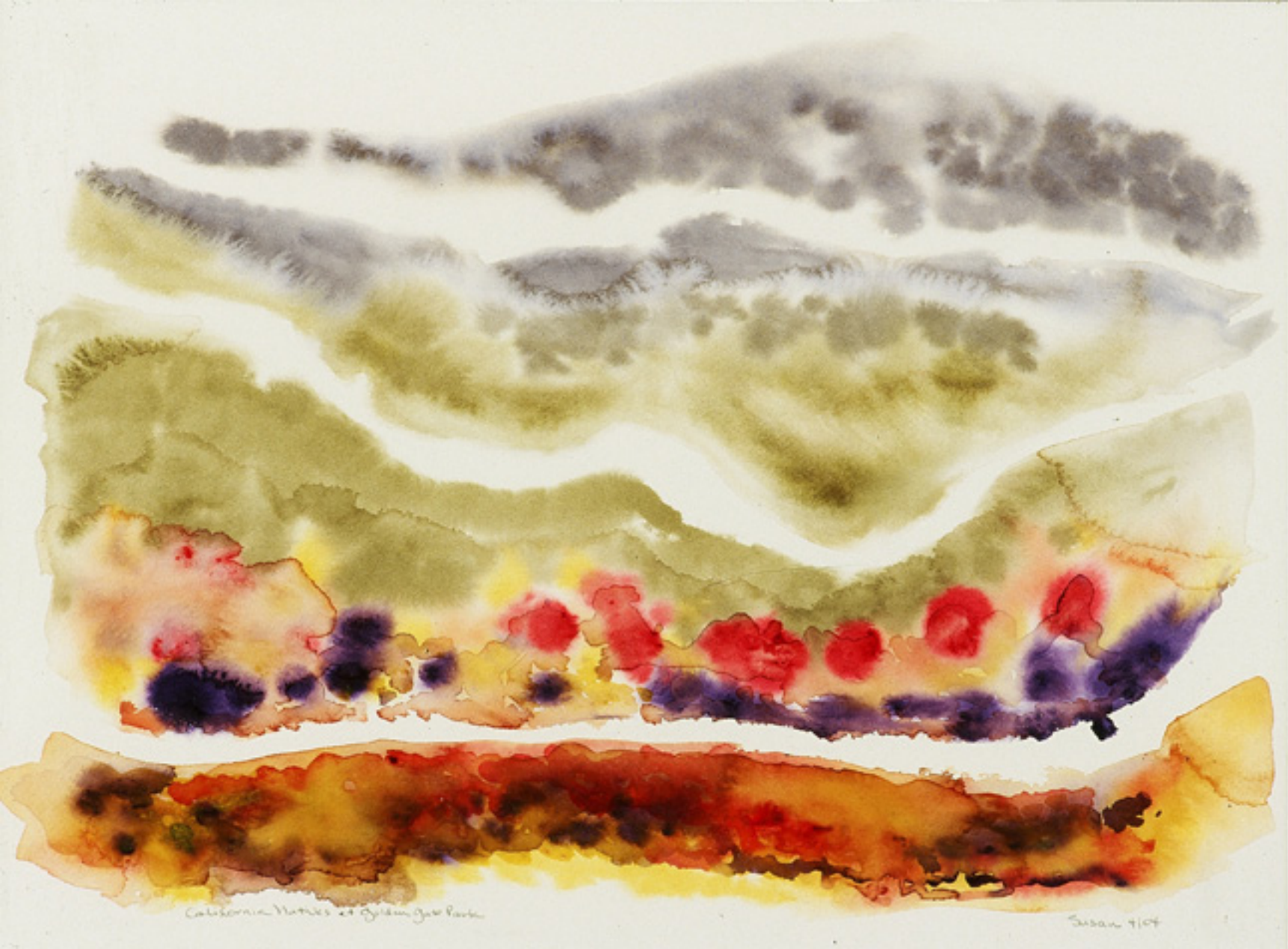
Telescope
Peter Schwartz



Photograph

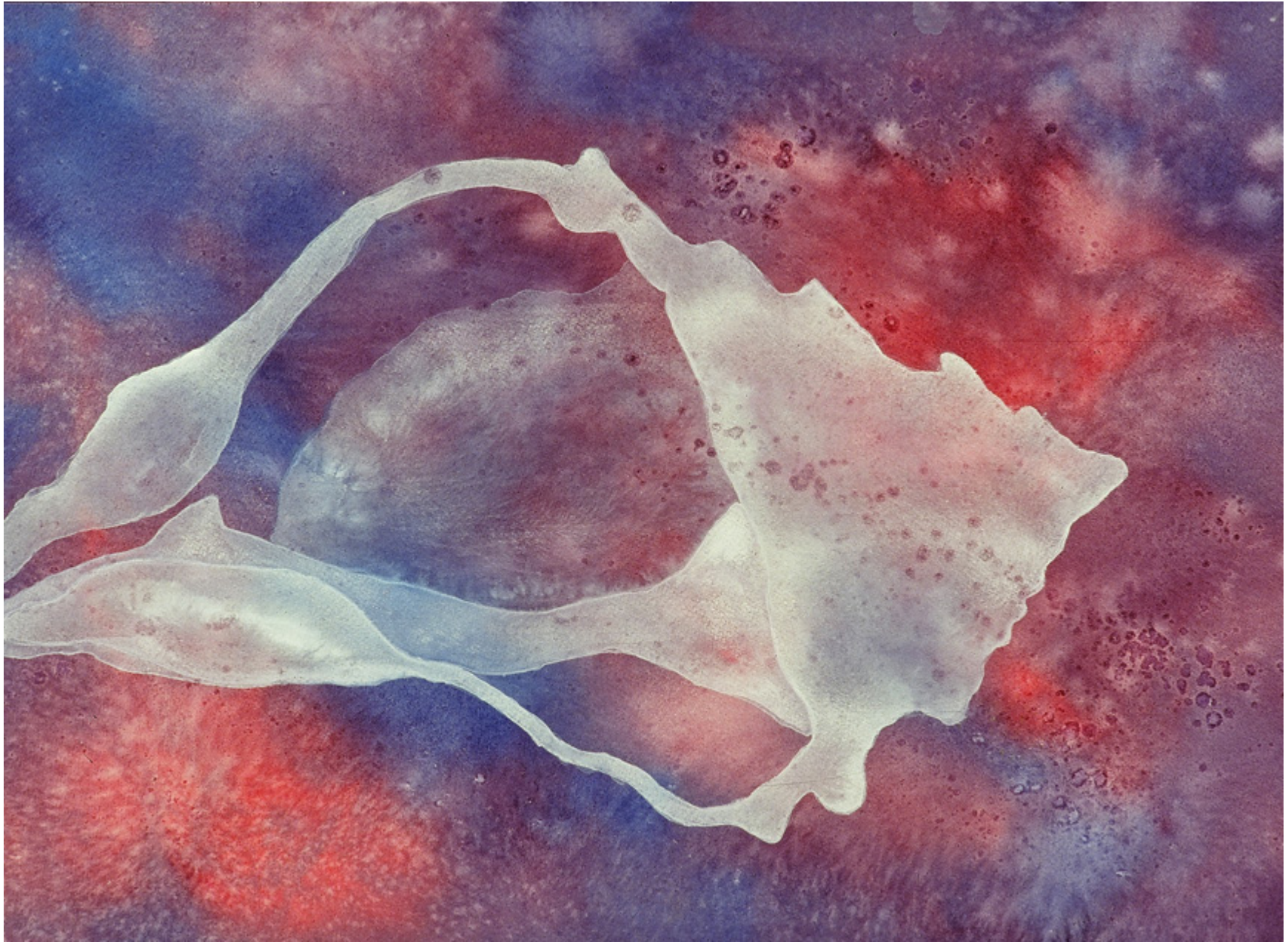
California Natives in Golden Gate Park

Susan Black



watercolor 13"x18"

Memory
Susan Black



watercolor/gouache 16"x22"

contributors

Grace Andreacchi is an American-born novelist, poet and playwright. Works include the novels *Scarabocchio*, *Poetry and Fear*, *Music for Glass Orchestra* (Serpent's Tail), *Give My Heart Ease* (New American Writing Award) and the chapbook *Elysian Sonnets*. Her work appears in *Horizon Review*, *Eclectica*, *Carolina Quarterly* and many other fine places. Grace is also managing editor at Andromache Books and writes the literary blog AMAZING GRACE. She lives in London.

Susan Black moved to San Francisco in 1996 after a 20-year New York-based career in corporate communications; she holds a BA in Literature from Connecticut College. After having made her living for so long using words, she found that California's light, scenery, attitude and whole way of life awakened in her a desire to communicate in visual terms. Her work has appeared in local, regional and national juried shows since 2005. Artist's Statement: My focus is watercolor, where I seek simplification and distillation. *California Natives* in Golden Gate Park expresses the local landscape in my own visual language. Memory is one of my many meditations on shells, which are powerful personal metaphors.

Gretchen Clark holds a B.A. in English and co-teaches three creative nonfiction courses online at Writers.com. Her essays have appeared in *Flashquake*, *Tiny Lights*, *Hip Mama*, *Toasted Cheese* and *New York Family Magazine*, among other publications.

Alison Doernberg grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, but has recently traded her native dogwoods for the palm trees of Oakland, California, where she works as a high school counselor and misses the sound of thunder. Her work has appeared in *Eleven Eleven*.

Michael Gross lives in Boulder, CO, where he reads & writes. He works as a quality control technician at a glass factory: he picks up pieces of glass and looks through them and if he can see the paisley prints behind, then it passes the test.

Charles Haddox lives in El Paso, Texas. Some of his most recent fiction is featured in the spring issues of *Desert Voices*, *Paradigm* and *The Sierra Nevada Review*, and is forthcoming in *The Raven Chronicles*.

Christina Hutchins teaches Whitehead's philosophy at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. Recent poems appear in *Antioch Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Missouri Review*, *The New Republic*, *Prairie*

Schooner, *The Southern Review*, and *Women's Review of Books*. *The Stranger Dissolves* (forthcoming, Sixteen Rivers Press) and *World Without* have been finalists for the New Issues Prize, Colorado Prize, Fordham's Poets Out Loud, Utah State's May Swenson Award, the Dorset Prize, and the National Poetry Series. She has won the Villa Montalvo Poetry Prize, received two Barbara Deming Awards, and is the first Poet Laureate of Albany, California.

Kevin Killian is the author of three novels, *Shy*, *Arctic Summer*, and *Spreadeagle*, and three books of stories, two books of poetry, 40 plays, and several other books. Born on Long Island, New York, he now lives in San Francisco. With his wife, the novelist Dodie Bellamy, he is writing a memoir *Eyewitness* in which the two detail their lives in the writing and art worlds of San Francisco and the things they saw there, for Atelos Books. In addition, Kevin is working on an anthology with David Brazil, *The Kenning Anthology of US Poets Theater 1945-1985*.

Caroline Knapp lives and writes in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Linda Phillimore, an erstwhile biologist/Balkan dancer, grew up in Los Angeles and has lived in Crete, Bakersfield, and plenty of places in-between. She's been published in *Bitterroot* and *Systematic Zoology*. Linda's currently a student in the MFA in Writing program at USF. When she's not writing poetry, she's either teaching, hiking, or up to no good.

Elizabeth Rosner is an award-winning poet, essayist, and author of two highly acclaimed bestselling novels. *The Speed of Light* (2001), which won literary prizes in the US and Europe, was translated into nine languages and is currently in development as a feature film. *Blue Nude* (2006) was named one of the San Francisco Chronicle's favorite novels of the year; the paperback edition will come out in 2010. Her essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Elle*, and numerous anthologies. She has taught writing for 27 years, most recently at USF in the MFA in Writing Program.

Peter Schwartz's photography has appeared in such online literary journals as: *CELLA's Round Trip*, *eyeshot*, *Litterbox Magazine*, and *Prick of the Spindle*. Poor and utterly in love with his camera, he will never give his Kodak up to the bad guys. Never.

Angela Simione is a Bay Area painter and writer with a tremendous appreciation for all things black and white. She graduated from California College of the Arts in 2008 with High Distinction in Painting and Drawing and is represented by HANG Gallery in San Francisco. In addition to running her own on-line gallery, black fence, and her daily blog, the shape of secrets, she is also a blog contributor for *ANTLER Magazine*.
Artist's Statement: Within the trauma of the redacted document, a new context presents itself... a context in which loss, experienced by the Other, may be felt and understood. Using methods of erasure to create my own

“redacted” documents, I make metaphors for the experiences of loss. I present fragments, tiny bits of evidence, allusions to a lost history. It is a poetry born of violence, and it is this violence with which my practice is concerned. What remains, in spite of secrecy, is a new document. A new identity has been constructed. A site of new hope emerges where understanding may be possible.

Patty Somlo’s story, “Bird Women,” was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She was a finalist in the Tom Howard Short Story Contest. Her work has been published in *The Sand Hill Review*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *Under the Sun*, and in the anthologies *Voices From the Couch*, *VoiceCatcher 3* and *Bombshells*. She has work forthcoming in *Lady Jane Miscellany* and in the anthologies *Rainmakers’ Prayers* and *Solace in So Many Words*.

David Vann’s story collection, *Legend of a Suicide*, is the winner of the Grace Paley Prize and a California Book Award, named a Notable Book of 2008 by *The New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Kansas City Star*, and the *Story Prize*. A contributor to *Esquire*, *The Atlantic*, *Men’s Journal*, *Outside*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *The New York Times*, *The Sunday Times (UK)*, and *The Guardian (UK)*, Vann is also author of the bestselling memoir, *A Mile Down: The True Story of a Disastrous Career at Sea*, a forthcoming novel, *Caribou Island*, and *Last Day On Earth: A Portrait of the NIU Shooter, Steve Kazmierczak*, winner of the 2009 AWP Nonfiction Prize.

Tania Van Winkle received an MFA from Eastern Washington University. She manages a retail clothing store specializing in the strange and unusual of pop culture and is currently teaching herself to play the theremin.