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wisconsin academy review

CELEBRATING
50 YEARS

THE MAGAZINE OF WISCONSIN THOUGHT AND CULTURE

THE MOSTLY LIT EDITION (Take This to the Beach!)

■
First in Their Class:
Stories by Wisconsin's
Debut MFA Graduates

■
First-Prize Fiction:
Janis Lives!

■
From the Killing Fields
to Dairyland:
A Refugee's Experience

■
A Bouquet of Poetry

■
Our Opening in Overture:
Mark Your Calendars!

■
Meet Five Amazing
Wisconsin Citizens

Price: \$5



Wisconsin's first-ever MFA grads are already signing book deals.
A story by each of them in this edition.

Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters

Summer 2004 Volume 50, Number 3

The Wisconsin Academy in Overture GALA OPENING WEEK

A DECADE OF ART

James Watrous Gallery of the
Wisconsin Academy

September 18–October 31, 2004

Gallery opens at 10 a.m. on Saturday, September 18

Opening reception and artist talk featuring
John Wilde and Warrington Colescott, 1–4 p.m.

A Decade of Art pays tribute to the rich array of Wisconsin artists who have exhibited with the Wisconsin Academy during the past 10 years. This exhibit features 100 artists working in a wide range of media and styles, including Tom Uttech, John Wilde, Warrington Colescott, Carol Emmons, T. L. Solien, and Dona Look.



May 1985, with a Churchian Landscape by John Wilde (1991)

WRITERS AT WORK

Sunday, September 19, 2–5 pm

Noted Wisconsin authors Margaret George, Michael Perry, C. J. Hribal, Tenaya Darlington, and Mukoma Ngugi read from their latest writing and discuss their art.

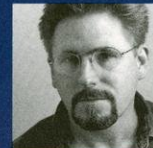
Tenaya Darlington



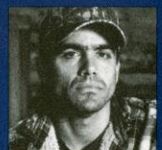
Mukoma Ngugi



Margaret George



C. J. Hribal



Michael Perry

Academy Evenings debut!

BE HAPPY LIKE A MONK

Tuesday, September 21, 7–9 pm

UW psychology professor Richard Davidson is searching for the source of happiness—and uses Buddhist monks in his lab as a model group. What has he discovered about the secrets and science of happiness? Presentation and discussion features opening words by jazz musician Ben Sidran.

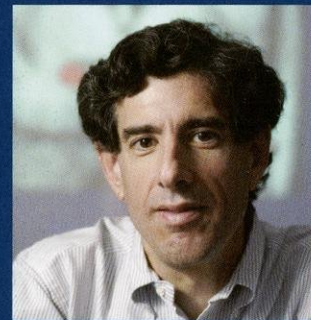


Photo by Jeff Miller

Richard Davidson

In partnership with Madison Repertory Theatre

STAGING A MEMOIR

Sunday, September 26, 7–9 pm

Gerda Lerner fled Nazi Europe, endured McCarthy-era discrimination in the U.S., and began university studies at midlife to become the world's preeminent expert in women's history, a field she pioneered. Heather McDonald is an award-winning playwright whose plays have been produced on Broadway. Lerner and McDonald will discuss the promise and the challenge of bringing Lerner's political autobiography, *Fireweed*, to the stage in a project commissioned by the Madison Repertory Theatre.



Photo by John Urban

Gerda Lerner



Heather McDonald

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of sciences arts & letters

ALL PRESENTATIONS TAKE PLACE AT

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Events are free of charge

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Trained in Wisconsin and ready to storm the lit world. Stories start on page 11.

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Look out, Iowa. Wisconsin's first-ever MFA program produced a bang-up class of graduates. We treat you to a story by each of them. Cover photo by John Urban, story photos by Bill Blankenburg.

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"Dancing," by Kathleen Richter, page 18

"The Book Buyer," by Dean Bakopoulos, page 24

"Suspenseful Build-up to Key Moment," by Laura Fletcher, page 30

"Demolition," by James Duncan, page 33

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The *Wisconsin Academy Review* (ISSN 0512-1175) is published quarterly by the nonprofit Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and is distributed **free of charge** to Wisconsin Academy members. For information about joining, see page 9 or refer to the contact information below.

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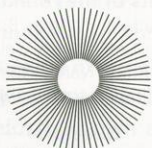
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45 FROM THE KILLING FIELDS TO CORNFIELDS

They fled the horror of Pol Pot's rule. What awaited "Khmer Americans" in the Midwest? Sarah Streed recounts their stories.

58 BEYOND PAT AND CHRIS

Your pregnant daughter announces she will raise her baby gender-neutral, and she won't even tell you what sex he/she is. (Black onesies, anyone?)

A short passage from Tenaya Darlington's first novel, *Maybe Baby*, a thought-provoking and funny consideration of gender, identity, and family.

59 SHORT STORY CONTEST WINNER: SUMMERTIME

Max Harris' first-place story features a long-dead blues singer and a chorus of angels and demons in a visionary reflection on good and evil.

He fled a brutal regime in Cambodia to find peace in Wisconsin—after some major adjustments. The story of Sophea Mouth, page 45.



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Our short story contest winners, a writers' group that means business, and a bookstore that sells booze (finally!).

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66 IN MY WORDS: THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

A job, an apartment, a boyfriend, a muskie—readers reflect on the things they couldn't get or keep.

70 INSIDE THE ACADEMY: THE NEW FELLOWS

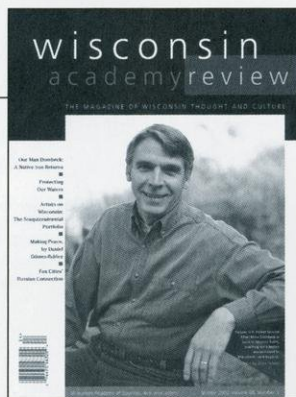
Meet five people who exemplify the best of Wisconsin.

Hey, what happened?
The one that got away, page 66.

Past and Present

"Literature may not save us. But if it can't save us, it's at least one thing that makes us worth saving."

—Ron Wallace, poet, UW English professor, and Wisconsin Academy Fellow, reflecting on the significance of literature in the winter 2002 issue of the *Wisconsin Academy Review*.



The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters connects people and ideas from all areas of knowledge and all walks of life to celebrate thought, culture, and nature in our state and explore how we can best address our problems.

We were founded in 1870 as an independent, nonprofit membership organization separate from the state and the university. Our mission is "to encourage investigation, disseminate knowledge, and promote integrated application of sciences, arts, and letters to preserve and further develop Wisconsin's heritage of cultural and natural resources."

Enrich your life by becoming a member! Find out more on page 9.

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Sneak a peek



I would be remiss if I didn't immediately point you to a particular place in this magazine—the inside front cover. After years of planning, the Wisconsin Academy is ready to open in the Overture Center, which will serve as a grand showcase and a springboard for our many activities around the state. The James Watrous Gallery of the Wisconsin Academy allows us to finally give Wisconsin artists a space more worthy of their achievements, and a much more accessible place for the public to learn about and enjoy them.

In addition to the gallery, we are debuting a monthly public forum series in the Wisconsin Studio, a light-filled multipurpose space adjacent to the gallery. We are proud to have as our debut presenter the pioneering psychologist Richard Davidson, who graced the cover of the winter *Review* and was just named a Wisconsin Academy Fellow (more about that on page 70).

We would love to see you at these events, which are all free of charge. And if you can't make it to Madison, know that we are making every effort to come to you. Many of our monthly presentations (henceforth known as "Academy Evenings") will travel around the state, and in coming years we will send art exhibits to other venues, too. You'll hear more about these programs in a playbill we'll send out late this summer.

LOADS OF LIT

Somehow in the summer our thoughts

turn to literature—to stories and poems we can read when the days are longer, warmer, and (one hopes!) a little less stressed. In this edition we deliver with stories by Wisconsin's first-ever crop of MFA grads, our first-prize short story, and poems from our statewide contest.

But we included a meaty work of non-fiction as well. Sarah Streed's book, *Leaving the House of Ghosts*, has been on the shelves for two years, but due to an exciting turn of events in Wisconsin, it is perhaps more relevant now than ever. In her book Streed gathers the life stories of Cambodians who fled their country during Pol Pot's rule of terror in the 1970s to settle in the American Midwest. Fast-forward to the summer of 2004, with anywhere from 2,500 to 3,700 Hmong refugees scheduled to begin resettling in Wisconsin. While the culture and life experiences of these new arrivals differ in many ways from those of the Cambodians, I am certain that Streed's story of Sophea Mouth has much to teach us about the refugee experience and how to better welcome those who seek peace and prosperity in our state.

THE CAT CAME BACK

For the second year running, we've won an award from the Milwaukee Press Club—this time, first prize in magazine writing, again by journalist Michael Penn (whose shrine is being built as we speak). Penn won for his winter 2003 cover story about Will Allen, an extraordinary man in Milwaukee who runs an organic farming enterprise with the help of inner-city youth. The story is posted on our website and is well worth reading for both Allen's inspiring work and Penn's vivid, intelligent writing.

Happy reading!

Joan Fischer, editor
jfisher@wisconsinacademy.org
www.wisconsinacademy.org



UP AND COMING

The Summer of Artbite

After 10 years together, this sassy artists' collective hasn't lost its teeth. This summer Artbite will fill the Wisconsin Academy Gallery on University Avenue with two mixed-media shows.

June 15–August 1

Reception Friday, June 25, 6–8 p.m.

Artists featured:

Debra Gottschalk, oil on panel

Kelli Hoppmann, oil on panel

Paul Nitsche, mixed media

Vincent Olmsted, cast glass

Paul Stroede, oil on panel

August 1–September 15

Reception Friday, August 6, 6–8 p.m.

Artists featured:

Theresa Abel, oil on panel

Dede Bangs, photography

Rachel Davis, acrylic on panel

Tim O'Neill, wood and metal sculpture

Sandee Peterson, mixed media



Lonely Road by Debra Gottschalk



Who Dealt this Hand (detail) by Kelli Hoppmann

Wisconsin Academy Gallery

1922 University Avenue, Madison

Tel. 608/263-1692

www.wisconsinacademy.org

SHORT STORY



CONTEST 2004

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS

A **SHORT STORY CONTEST** is a true success when it allows two of its winners to publish their fiction for the first time.

Such is the case this year for our first-place winner, Max Harris, an accomplished scholar with four nonfiction books to his credit, and attorney Sara Jane Rattan, our third-place winner, who has written essays, fiction, poetry—and, of course, legal briefs—but until now has not published a short story.

We'd like to thank judges Mark Turcotte, Heather Lee Schroeder, and John McDermott, and especially our lead judge, Dwight Allen, for their thoughtful work and excellent choices. It is with great pleasure that we introduce our three winners, who rose to the top from a pool of more than 100 entries.

And mark your calendars: You can hear these authors read to the public, along with the winners of our statewide poetry contest, on **Saturday, October 9, 3–6 p.m.**, at Café Montmartre in Madison (127 E. Mifflin Street) as part of the Wisconsin Book Festival.

Max Harris, Madison
First Place

"Summertime" (story on page 59)

Max Harris was born in England, where his father was a best-selling author of novels, history books, and children's tales. As an undergraduate Harris wrote plays that were performed in Cambridge, Oxford, and at the Edinburgh Festival. He later earned his Ph.D.

in religion and literature and taught at the University of Virginia before coming to Madison in 1993 to serve as executive director of the Wisconsin Humanities Council, a position from which he is retiring in July. He has published four nonfiction books, most recently *Carnival and Other Christian Festivals* (University of Texas Press, 2003).

Why I write:

"Some people enjoy gardening or walking. I enjoy both of these, but I enjoy writing more. I don't like shopping and I rarely watch television. I find writing far more satisfying. Trying to explain why is difficult. I might say, 'Shaping words into meaning and pleasurable form allows me to discover new ways of looking at the world and to accept the challenge of creating something beautiful and true.' That's an honest enough answer. But it's simpler and truer to admit that I write because I enjoy it."



Willa Schmidt, Madison
Second Place

"Flimflam"

(to appear in the fall issue)

Willa Schmidt is a former UW–Madison reference librarian whose prose and poetry have appeared in such publications as *Potomac Review*, *Calyx*, *St. Anthony Messenger*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, and *Mobius*. She recently took first place in the Annual Memoirs Competition of the Writers Workshop of Asheville, North Carolina, and she is currently working on a series of stories about growing up German-American in post-World War II Chicago.

Why I write:

"Because books and reading have so enriched my life, writing seems to me a natural progression—a way to attempt to pass on that enjoyment to others, to touch hearts as mine has been touched."



Sara Jane Rattan, Shorewood
Third Place

"Neighbors"

(to appear in the winter issue)

Sara Jane Rattan lives in Shorewood with her husband and two sons, where she writes fiction, essays, and poetry. She has a BA from Lawrence University (1981) and a JD from Marquette University Law School (1994), but has never felt more at home than she does in the writing classes and workshops she has attended at MATC, Woodland Pattern, and Redbird Studios.

Why I write:

"For me, writing is a way to capture and understand the many small events that make up our days. Raising children is wonderful, noisy business, but it leaves little time for reflection. Writing restores me. It is an opportunity to be silent and to think deeply. I have always been an avid reader. In grade school, I read even as I made my way home after the three o'clock bell, tripping over the places where the concrete walk had heaved up and broken off, making me rip the knees of countless pairs of tights. But it wasn't until I began to write

stories that I realized how much I love words. Writing is play. Writing is meditative. It can also be unbearably difficult. But a recalcitrant story is not so different than an out-of-sorts child who profits from time alone. Eventually, you must return and help it along. The satisfaction when it all works out is extraordinary!"

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**We thank these booksellers for their
generous support of Wisconsin writers.**



DUST OFF YOUR KEYBOARDS...

because we're doing this again.
Contest details for the *Wisconsin
Academy Review*/Harry W. Schwartz
Bookshops Short Story Contest 2005
are available on our website,
www.wisconsinacademy.org.

DEADLINE: Monday, December 6. Lead
judge: Larry Watson. Poetry contest
has the same deadline. Lead judge:
Jean Feraca.

Books, Booze, & Crones

With the explosion of cafés in bookstores, the next move was bound to happen: one day a customer would shove away the mug of coffee and demand something a little stronger.

The call was heard in tiny Richland Center (pop. 5,000) and answered by Ocooch Books & Libations, whimsically named for the nearby Ocooch Mountains. Housed in a century-old downtown building with a tin ceiling and hardwood floors, the store, which opened in November, is quirky and stylish enough to have landed a profile in a recent issue of *Publishers Weekly*.

In addition to some 2,700 titles—mostly fiction, regional books, and field guides—the store offers some 35 different wines, 17 microbrewed beers (many of them made in Wisconsin), and seven kinds of Scotch.



But the store's unique flair—dare we say eccentricity?—doesn't stop there. Ocooch's also carries small-batch handspun yarns, mostly to satisfy the needs of the Ocooch Mountains Spinning Crones group, of which store owner Jodee Hosmanek is a member.

Hosmanek, a former nurse and science teacher, had no bookselling experience but a good sense of what would fly in Ocooch country. The space's former business had sold wine and flowers, so when colleagues at the Upper Midwest Booksellers Association last fall advised her to sell something alongside books, she hit upon alcohol.

It was a popular choice, even though Hosmanek is not allowed to serve it; rather, people buy their hooch by the bottle and take it home. It is the only place downtown that sells liquor, and Hosmanek takes pains to provide a different selection than what is offered at the supermarket. She also provides rocking chairs and tables for the comfort of knitters and readers alike.

But the store's biggest draw is the books.

"This is a town that hasn't had a bookstore in about 10 years," says Hosmanek. "The most common comment I get is, 'We really needed a bookstore.'"

And that's a thirst Ocooch's can quench on the premises.

**Ocooch Books & Libations, 145 W. Court Street, Richland Center
608/647-8826, ocoochbook@mwt.net**

THE WRITERS' EDGE

Solidarity breeds success for a group of budding novelists in Madison.

For a small writers' group based in Madison, lightning struck three times.

In late 2002 it hit Heather Skyler, a mother of two preschoolers who edits the *Beloit Fiction Journal*. Last summer it struck Tenaya Darlington, features editor of the alternative weekly newspaper *Isthmus*, who counts a highly acclaimed collection of poetry among her credits. Next it hit Dean Bakopoulos, the new executive director of the Wisconsin Humanities Council (and one of the MFA grads on the cover of this *Review*), who had received national attention for a number of eye-catching short stories.

"It" refers to a first sale—a scream-inducing peak experience for any aspiring novelist. In terms of achievement, it is like scaling Everest, and the competition to get there is fierce. For three sales to happen within one year to a tiny group (only seven in number) in the Midwest falls just short of bizarre—it's the literary equivalent of a disease cluster.

Is it something in the water? Or, more aptly, in the port and dark chocolate the group uses to fuel their meetings?

No doubt the camaraderie is important. Over the past eight years, with a slightly changing cast, the members—rounded out by carpenter/writing instructor Guy Thorvaldsen, high school English teacher Andrew McCuaig, *Capital Times* books editor Heather Lee Schroeder, and UW English professor Ron Kuka—have become close friends. They go on writing retreats and have barbecues. They have silly nicknames. (Heater. Teensie. Sky.) They have lived through each other's marriages and divorces, births and miscarriages. The bond of friendship and trust allows them to share their writing in a safe environment.

"This group has been like a secret laboratory. It's given me the chance to try some horrendously flawed experiments," says Darlington. "And that's the beauty of the group. We've all been witnesses to one another's sad little explosions. We've seen the best and worst of everyone's writing, so when someone comes in with the good stuff, we get wildly excited, emit a lot of high-pitched squeals, and practically jump over each other for the chance to comment. It's a good gauge."

Amid the good feeling, standards remain high, notes Thorvaldsen. "They won't let me either embarrass myself with sending out bad writing or convince myself that I can't write and should give it up. In the end, writing can only get better through writing, and that's what this group instills in me, the



Together they stand, beer in hand: (from left) Heather Skyler, Tenaya Darlington, Dean Bakopoulos, Heather Lee Schroeder, Guy Thorvaldsen, Andrew McCuaig, and Ron Kuka.

desire to keep writing, to hold up my responsibility to my muse and to the group."

To envy is human. One can easily picture a chasm erupting between the published and the not-yets, given the competitive nature of the enterprise—but somehow the group keeps a grip on that, too. "We all seem to realize that abundance begets abundance," says Schroeder, who is entering the UW's MFA program this fall. "So when one person gets a book contract, we all win. Of course, there's a little envy there, but I think it serves a good purpose—it makes us work harder toward the goal of publishing."

Group connections in the publishing world have helped members achieve that goal. For example, Bakopoulos hooked up Darlington with his agent, the renowned Amy Williams of the Collins McCormick literary agency. The upshot? Darlington's book sold while Bakopoulos was still working to finish his own.

Many aspiring writers are looking for a group. Ron Kuka says he gets at least 10 calls every semester from writers seeking writers. Many form only to fizzle, falling prey to everything from lack of structure or commitment to a manuscript critiquing burden that is at best onerous and at worst savage.

"None of us wanted to re-create our MFA workshop experience, which often involves bullying or picking work apart," says McCuaig. "If you want really hard-hitting criticism, then

A Chex Mix of Chamber Music

find a friend who's also a serious writer and tell him or her that's what you want. But don't submit to a group doing that to you. Try to keep it positive and informal."

In this group, members bring work to read aloud for immediate feedback whenever they feel ready to share it. (Some members have gone for long periods without reading.) They meet monthly in each other's homes and start every meeting socializing before getting down to business.

It's a winning recipe that will surely cook up more books in the future.

By Joan Fischer

On the Shelves When?

Heather Skyler, *The Perfect Age* (Norton)—already out.

Recommends *Elle* magazine: Spanning three summers in splashy, sun-baked Las Vegas, Heather Skyler's skillful, sensitive first novel traces the twin trajectories of a mother aching for change and of her budding teenage daughter, whose job as a lifeguard initiates a painful and perplexing era. Their simultaneous sexual awakenings test the fragile trinity of love, loyalty, and family ties that neither can leave behind—nor leave unchanged.

Tenaya Darlington, *Maybe Baby* (Little, Brown)—out in August. See passage on page 58.

An often hilarious exploration of sexual identity in our culture as a group of young parents seek to raise their babies gender-neutral.

Dean Bakopoulos, *Please Don't Come Back from the Moon* (Harcourt)—out in February 2005. See a chapter from his second book (in progress) on page 24.

Fathers mysteriously abandon their families in hard-knock Detroit, leaving boys to become men on their own.

In its 12th year of providing "chamber music with a bang," the Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society is serving up a tasty treat for summer: Czech's Party Mix, a delectable series of concerts spotlighting the works of Czech composers including Antonin Dvorak, Leos Janacek, and Bohuslav Martinu. It will be held at three locales: the Hillside Theater at Taliesin in Spring Green, the Stoughton Opera House, and the Music Hall at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Czechmates Jeffrey Sykes, Kim Scholes, Stephanie Jutt, and Frank Almond (clockwise from top).

At center stage will be flautist Stephanie Jutt and pianist Jeffrey Sykes, co-founders of Bach Dancing & Dynamite. Jutt is associate professor of flute at the UW-Madison and principal flautist with the Madison Symphony Orchestra. Sykes is a piano soloist and accompanist and directs Opera for the Young. Joining them will be guest musicians including Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra concertmaster and violinist Frank Almond and principal cellist Kim Scholes.

Wisconsin is a fitting place to celebrate Czech musical heritage. During

the mid-1880s, Czechs emigrated to Wisconsin, putting down roots in Kewaunee, Manitowoc, and Price counties. Every village had its dance hall featuring music and dances from the old country.

Bach Dancing's selections are served up during three consecutive weekends. "Local Czechs Only," a meeting of old country and new, will be presented July 23-25. It includes Dvorak's lesser-known "American" string quintet for two violins, two violas and cello. "Czechs in the Mail," rare selections from the old country, runs July 30-August 1. This program includes Dvorak's serenade for flute, violin, viola, and triangle, which Jutt says "we had to get from the Dvorak Museum in Prague. We think it might be a U.S. premiere!"

Rounding out the season on August 6-8 is "Cash, Czech or Charge," a repertoire including a Janacek sonata for violin and piano and Dvorak's quintet for two violins, viola, cello, and double bass.

Bach Dancing offers a savory appetizer: preconcert talks by music scholars on the Czech composers and their compositions. In addition, David Wells, an artist and curator of the Gallery of Design at the UW-Madison School of Human Ecology, will provide an art installation to serve as a colorful backdrop for the musicians.

The Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society is named for a California concert series that concluded with fireworks and dancing on the beach. It is dedicated to making chamber music lively, enjoyable, and accessible to people of all kinds.

Tickets are \$24 for general admission, \$12 for students, or \$60 for all three shows. They can be ordered by calling 608/255-9866 or through the website: www.bachdancinganddynamite.org

By Sarah Aldridge

GIANT IN THE LAND

The Man from Clear Lake
by Bill Christofferson
(University of Wisconsin Press)

"GAYLORD NELSON WAS A SMALL TOWN BOY HIS ENTIRE LIFE."

That sentence kicks off what may be the most definitive biography to date of Gaylord Nelson, who became a Wisconsin governor, a state and U.S. senator, and the founder of Earth Day. He remains a guiding light at the Wilderness Society, an organization he serves to this day (Nelson turns 88 in June). Nelson mobilized millions of people around the world and received the nation's highest honors and awards, but none of these accolades, writes biographer Bill Christofferson, "changed, disturbed, or unsettled his inner core. He was always the boy from Clear Lake, Wisconsin, off on an adventure."

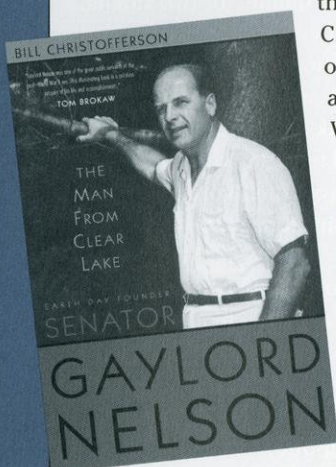
Christofferson, a Milwaukee-based political campaign consultant and former political journalist, ably chronicles how a man with simple, straightforward values could become such an inspiring and dogged advocate for humanity and nature. Like his Norwegian father, a country doctor in Polk County, Nelson dedicated his life to public

service. His political career as a liberal

Democrat was marked not only by tenacity—he was a three-term state senator, a two-term governor, and a three-term United States senator, a position he held from 1962 to 1980—but also by remarkable efficiency in getting things done. Among his achievements were several landmark conservation bills, including the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (including, here at home, protection of the Saint Croix and Namekagon rivers and portions of the Wolf River), the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act. These cornerstones of environmental legislation made Nelson a world leader in conservation.

This book, firmly rooted in Wisconsin, carries special meaning and even poignancy for readers from this state. If you've canoed the pristine waters of the Saint Croix River or hiked the wilderness trails past old-growth forests on one of the Apostle Islands, then you've experienced nature as Gaylord Nelson intended. This is the land that shaped Nelson. Christofferson offers compelling insight into Nelson the human being, and Nelson the towering figure who rose from the land he loved and fought so well to preserve.

by Sarah Aldridge



STEP RIGHT UP

IT'S BEEN 20 YEARS since the Great Circus Parade rolled down the streets of Baraboo, hometown of the Circus World Museum. (Of late the parade has taken place in Milwaukee.) That's far too long an absence, especially since this year Circus World Museum turns 50. So this summer, on Independence Day weekend, the parade is coming home, and it's got a four-day festival to go with it.

We should all turn 50 this way. Humans will be shot from cannons (eight times), and festivities include water, stunt and high dive shows, master Chinese jugglers, elephant



rides, camel rides, a Buffalo Bill Wild West encampment, a band organ rally with antique mechanical music makers, and a slew of new Big Top performances.

"It's one of the events that put Wisconsin on the map," says Larry Fisher, president and CEO of Circus World. "It's Wisconsin's national treasure, and a great way to celebrate the Fourth of July weekend."

Festivities begin on Thursday, July 1, and continue until Sunday evening. The parade begins at noon on Saturday, July 3. Visit www.circusworldmuseum.com or call 866/693-1500 for more information.





the idea

The Wisconsin Idea at the Wisconsin Academy brings Wisconsin residents together with a diverse array of experts and stakeholders to find solutions to statewide problems. Waters of Wisconsin was one of the significant initiatives of this program.



the gallery

The James Watrous Gallery of the Wisconsin Academy, opening in September in the Overture Center in Madison, will showcase new and established artists from all around the state—one of very few galleries dedicated to Wisconsin artists. Many exhibits presented there will tour to other galleries around the state.



the public forums

These gatherings bring the public together with experts on a wide variety of timely topics for fruitful discussion and learning. A forum series called Academy Evenings debuts in the Overture Center in Madison in September and will travel to venues around the state.

\$25 gets you here!

the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters connects people and ideas from all walks of life to celebrate thought, culture, and nature in our state and address our common problems.

Our programs are a catalyst for ideas and action.

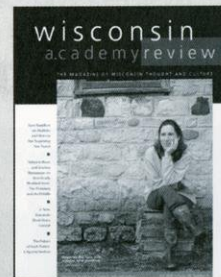
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- Our peer-reviewed journal, *Transactions*, devoted to topics treated in various Wisconsin Academy programs.

the review

The award-winning *Wisconsin Academy Review* is the only magazine in the state to highlight contemporary Wisconsin thought and culture. It features art, fiction, poetry, and articles by and about the thinkers who help shape our state.



membership directions

How to join? Send in one of the enclosed membership cards or contact us at:

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A black and white photograph of a woman holding a baby in a basket. The woman is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. The baby is wrapped in a blanket and is looking towards the camera. The basket is made of wicker and has a handle. The background is dark and out of focus.

By Eugene O'Neill
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First in Their Class

Left to right, standing:
Kathleen Richter,
Luana Monteiro,
Denise Miller.
Sitting: Laura Fletcher,
Dean Bakopoulos,
James Duncan.

Photos by John Urban



Wisconsin's first MFA program in creative writing debuted at UW-Madison in fall 2002. Now that class is graduating, and we are pleased to present a story by each member. Remember—you read them here first!

THE MASTER OF FINE ARTS DEGREE has become an institution in American letters. You don't need an MFA to become a writer, but most publishing writers and college-level writing teachers in the United States today attended MFA programs, and the training and support they received there enhanced their development as writers.

"The MFA in creative writing is a very American invention. I have always thought the programs were created as a response to the sheer size and diversity of our country," says Jesse Lee Kercheval, the writer and English professor who directs the UW program. "In smaller countries, all of the writers and artists know each other, and usually live in the capital city. In America, New York has played this role to some extent, but America is more than New York, and some of the early writers' programs—most notably the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa—were set up to have a place for writers to meet and mentor one another in the heartland. Now there are MFA programs in every region of the country."

Wisconsin was a notable exception. It was one of only a handful of states without an MFA program, although it had an excellent creative writing program for undergraduate English majors—directed by poet and Wisconsin Academy Fellow Ron Wallace—and a highly regarded post-MFA fellowship program. An MFA program was the missing link, and its creation makes Wisconsin the only state to offer undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate creative writing programs at a single institution.

The MFA program's first flight was hugely successful, its founders say. "It exceeded our expectations. Our students

flourished beyond our dreams," says Kercheval. "Two of the graduating MFAs already have books accepted for publication with important publishing houses. The other four completed strong, publishable MFA theses that I am sure will also meet with success."

The graduates with book contracts are Luana Monteiro, with a collection of short stories (*A Fish in the Desert*, coming out from Delphinium Books), and Dean Bakopoulos, with a novel called *Please Don't Come Back from the Moon* (Harcourt).

The two-year program challenged all of its writers to strive for their best, a demanding but highly productive experience for the students and for the professors who taught them.

"In some ways, I would say that the students changed us as much as we changed them," says Kercheval. "Teaching graduate students is so involved, so intense, I think it took all of us a bit by surprise. Every story the MFAs write means the world to them. For me, it brought me back in touch with my own sense of how important writing is, how we are all writing as if our lives depend on it—because they do."

The MFA program alternates its incoming classes each year between fiction and poetry, so that spring 2005 will see its first poets graduate. And six new students have already been selected from a pool of hundreds for the second class in fiction to begin this fall.

The program is on its feet and flourishing. We thank Jesse Lee Kercheval, Ron Wallace, and all six authors for sharing the fruit it has borne thus far on these pages. ●

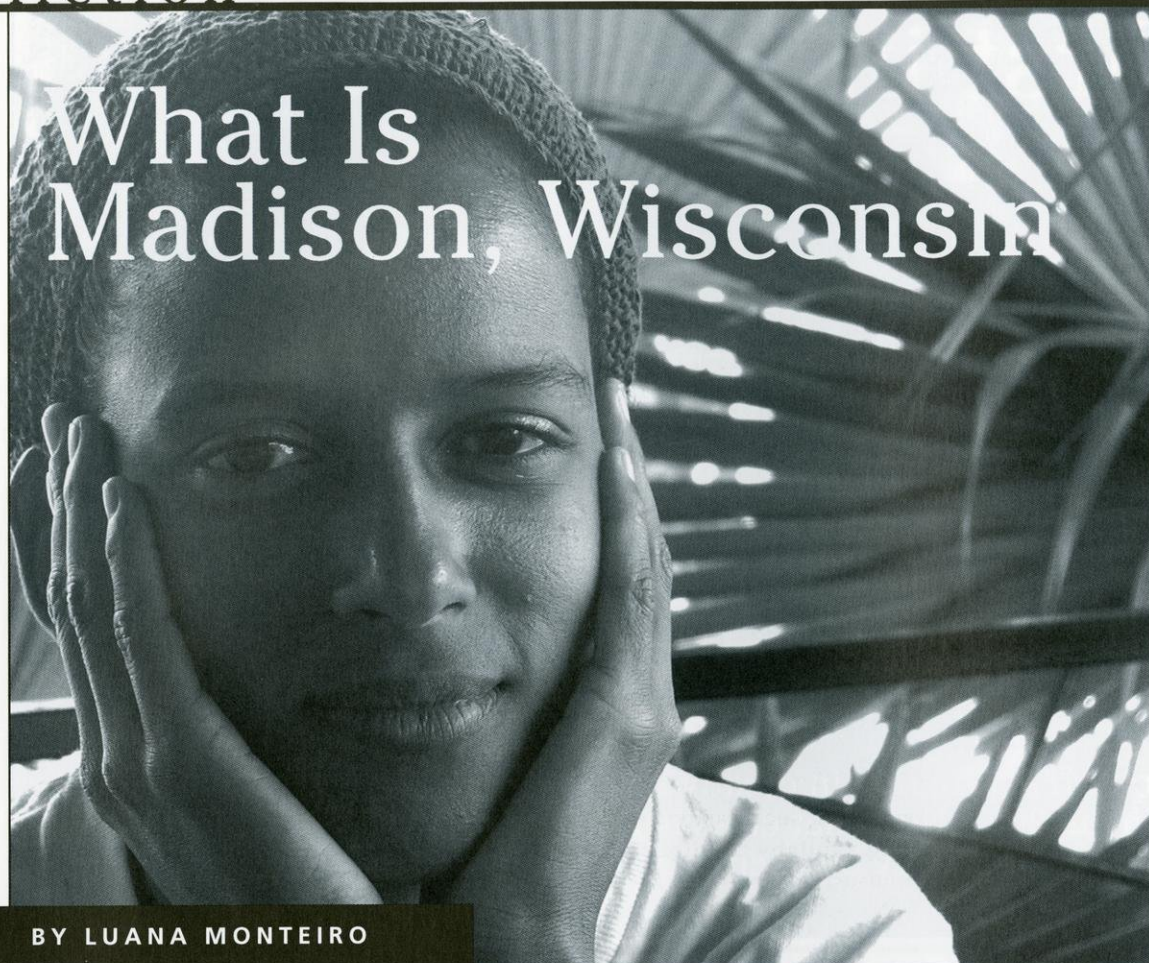


Photo by Bill Blankenburg

What Is Madison, Wisconsin

BY LUANA MONTEIRO

IRIS ARRIVED AT KING TUT'S CAFÉ three minutes after nine, one conga squeezed under an arm, the other barely balanced over her opposite shoulder—late once again, but armed with a good excuse. She would tell Alemán, Salsa Libre's bassist, lead singer and manager, that she had washed her car that afternoon and hadn't known to manually dry it afterwards. She would remind him, if need be, that she knew nothing of ice

that didn't float in drinks, had no experience with ice made by the cruel hand of God, therefore was caught completely unawares when the doors, all four of them, froze shut, forcing her to run up and down the stairs of her apartment complex like a madwoman, filling bucket after bucket with hot water from the bathtub to pour over the frozen seams until finally the ice sealing them softened and she was able to open the vehicle and load the congas, mic stands, and so forth, then rush downtown for the gig. She wasn't making it up, she had heard the anecdote somewhere, a TV show,

maybe, and it certainly sounded like something that could happen to her if she ever bothered with washing her car.

It was a Saturday night in January, Iris' first winter away from Miami and palm trees, sandy beaches, bikinis, mini skirts, refugees. Now she herself was the expatriate, seeking asylum in a city called Madison, in the state of Wisconsin, located in the Midwestern region of the United States, right beneath Canada, next to those great lakes shaped like the testicles of a bull.

So there she was, pushing the door open with her hip and lowering the

congas, trying hard to look relaxed, unlabored. She silently mouthed her mantra: *Just one more day, Irisangela, one more day, then Mexico, Costa Rica, sunshine, life.* No man came to her aid, as they always did, without fail, back home, but Iris took this as an example of Madison's notorious progressiveness. Here women were expected to fend for themselves. She scanned the small venue for familiar faces, recognized no one save the work staff. A young couple was still dining on the raised platform where the band usually set up, off to the far right ell by the plate glass window. Here and there others finished their meals, and Iris hoped the gig hadn't been cancelled because, along with the band's nightly earnings, not much split six ways, the venue offered each musician a dinner and drinks. Since waking up that morning, all she'd had was a pot of thick boiling black coffee. The more snow she saw piled up on her windowpane, the weaker her resolve for leaving her futon and its cocoon of blankets; a trip to the supermarket was akin to crossing the tundra on a sled. With the exception of coffee, ordered monthly through a Colombian website, Iris' kitchen was practically empty: In the refrigerator, three dried garlic cloves, two blackened bananas, a tube of Wisconsin butter. On the counter, by the abandoned toaster, a nearly empty bottle of tequila. As a result of this lethargy, Iris, who had always been this side of skinny, had lost almost ten pounds since her flight from Miami and her grandmother's rich Cuban cuisine. That was six months ago. The same pants that used to hug her hips were now held up by a belt.

Four men drank quietly at the bar, which protruded into the middle of the room like the prow of a ship. She knew one of them: Bosko, the wiry bouncer with prematurely gray hair who once, in between sets, had told her a story about Serbians, Croatians, and how his front teeth had been knocked out in Yugoslavia, during the war. He had yelled over the loud canned music. She had nodded. He had removed his bridge-work and showed her his gums.

"Hi, Bosko," she approached him, gingerly touching his shoulder. "Have you seen any of the guys?"

He lifted a finger towards the ceiling. "Up." She thanked him and lurched through the kitchen to the back staircase, waving a hasty greeting at the busboy. She ascended the steps two at a time and on the second floor saw Sergio sitting in front of the old house upright, his guitar on his lap. He had an extinguished cigar between his lips and a beer bottle beside him. A thin, Zorroesque mustache delineated his mouth, and the white hat he wore matched the rest of his outfit.

Sergio was the one who took it upon himself to distract the audience whenever arguments broke out between Alemán and Alejandro, the keyboard player, who threatened to end each performance with a knife fight for reasons varying from volume control to the set list to key changes to misplaced beer mugs. In his desperate attempts to drown out the *fuck yous* and *puta madres* behind him, Sergio's would put his mouth so close to the microphone that every consonant erupted with a deafening pop: *Please bear with us. We're having technical difficulties, dificultades tecnicas.* Sometimes, when the bickering took longer than usual to die down, Sergio raised the level of delay on the PA, and whatever room they happened to be in became a tinny echo chamber:

We—oui—oui—oui ... *Are having—aving—aving ... dificultades—ades—ades ...* Other times he would sing Elvis or Frank Sinatra, a cappella, and once went as far as bursting into a rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" a la Jimi Hendrix, complete with a mock guitar-burning.

He didn't notice Iris until she called out his name a second time. "*Ei, amiga!*" He touched the brim of his hat and bowed slightly. She asked him about everyone else and after a pause, long enough that she started to wonder whether he'd heard her, he answered in his slow, sleepy way that no, he did not know about anyone else, he was having a good time by himself, enjoying the beautiful night with his bottle of Spotted

Cow, his guitar, and the cigar he was about to smoke.

"So we're still on, then?" she asked.

"We are, *si, si,*" he said. He pointed at her, then at himself. "*Tu y yo, honey.*" He struck a high note on the decrepit piano and plucked a string on his guitar, simultaneously turning a knob until both notes reverberated in near unison.

"Sergio, is that thing in tune?"

"Wanna smoke?" he asked, arching his eyebrows. He placed the guitar on its stand and passed her the beer, which she downed in three long swigs. She had just recently acquired a taste for alcohol in all its forms; it helped her stay warm, at least for the present, which these days was the only tense she had any concern for.

"Are we playing or not?"

"Yes." He placed a hand on her shoulder, looking into her eyes like a hypnotist. "We are."

"Alemán said on my machine we were on at nine." She showed him her watch. "It's ten past, already. No one's here."

"Relax, calm down, *chica,*" he said. "Loosen up—we're not on till ten. We're playing this room tonight." He pulled out two joints, one considerably larger than the other, from either pocket of his shiny white pants, and shimmied his shoulders. "Pick."

Iris understood why Alemán had lied in his message about the starting time. He did it, she knew, so that despite her chronic tardiness she wouldn't be late. Others had resorted to this same tactic, including her grandmother, and although innocuous, really, it annoyed the hell out of her; in fact, Iris felt that it contributed to her delinquency with time, tardiness becoming a sort of unconscious rebellion, the same way she imagined a faithful wife constantly suspected of infidelity must eventually cheat on her jealous spouse, if only to enjoy the sin for which she is unjustly accused.

She followed Sergio and his trail of cologne down the stairs and through the bright corridor that led past the restrooms to the emergency exit, wondering whether she should confront Alemán about it right away, let him know that such manipulation was not only insulting, but unnecessary—after all, she

hadn't been late but two, three times, maybe, and only by five minutes, if that—or just let the incident pass. Sergio had to use his whole weight to open the door, which had been barred by at least a foot of snow.

She decided to let it pass (*then Mexico, Costa Rica*). She lacked the energy for confrontation tonight. Besides, as a conga player in the world of Afro-Cuban music, where women were almost exclusively singers or dancers, Iris struggled to maintain a friendly, distant relationship with her fellow bandmates. It required keen diplomatic skills, acquired after numerous bands and unpleasant incidents, a fine balance not worth disrupting unless unavoidable, much like a marriage, or the way she imagined a marriage should be. And playing upstairs was good news. It was. There, in a larger, more secluded room, those who felt the urge to could dance. The last time they had played King Tut's Café—the second show in a six-month contract—anyone who had stood up to dance, couple or single, had been immediately ushered back to their seats by an indignant Bosko. From their posts, the confused musicians saw it happening over and over again, song after song after song. Finally, when Alemán stopped in the middle of a verse and demanded to know what the fuck was going on, Bosko said, “No dancing allowed. No license.” He then summoned the owner's wife, a hefty, sad-eyed Egyptian woman who explained that they didn't own the cabaret license required by the city of Madison that sanctioned dancing and that, just last month, they had been threatened with a five thousand dollar citation because not only had dancing been committed inside the too-small room, but it had also spilled over all the way onto the sidewalk where an out-and-about city official had duly noted the infraction. Alemán had laughed his incredulous laugh in her face. He stood up from his stool—a rawboned mulato nearly two meters tall, symmetrical cornrows ending in perfect plaits at the nape of his neck—and once he spoke, all the croon and sweetness of his singing voice had been replaced by a rough, bilingual baritone.

“You *jodiendo*, right? I really hope you are. Tell me you people are kidding, *por favor*.”

Iris touched his arm. *Calmate, Alemán*, she whispered. He shot a look at her, and she pulled back. The owner, who was also the chef, emerged from the kitchen in his speckled apron, asking what the problem was. Alemán explained, with a loaded index finger, that *el problema, amigo*, was that they were a *dance* band that had worked hard to build a following, that these people—he pointed to the mute, uneasy crowd, a mix of young college hipsters and well-heeled ballroom dancers—faithfully attended every gig *spa-cifically* to practice their dance moves, that this music couldn't be separated from the *baile* in a million years, *amigo, entiende?* He placed both hands on his hips and asked: “*Dime, se necesita licencia para cagar, también?*”

The man and woman blinked nervously at each other, then at Iris, who, after a lifetime of translating people, letters, bills, TV shows back and forth to her grandmother, said, almost from force of habit: “He asked if one also needs a license to shit in this place.” She turned around, hoping her sudden exit looked natural enough, and sat back down behind her congas, joining Sergio in his feeble attempt to distract the patrons from the imbroglio with a sing-along:

Come on now, I know y'all know this one: Para bailar La Bamba ...



Outside, both street and sidewalk were covered in clean, new snow, the night deep and clear, the stars fixed in their Midwestern sky. Iris tucked her chin into her chest, feeling as though she walked in a dream, a white wasteland, the world an empty page, waiting. Had she not been so cold, she might have appreciated the beauty of the landscape—the ubiquitous formation of icicles on eaves, bare trees sugar-frosted by snow, knife-edged shadows cast by moonlight, the velvet muffling of sound. She might have studied these buildings, and romantically, longingly, summoned up ones she'd known and admired from

childhood. But all she noticed was this: her breath like smoke, the dangerous numbing of her ears, the stiffening of her legs, the tiresome leaking of her nostrils, the endless tearing of her eyes. She unrolled the scarf from her neck, wrapped it around her nose, and wedged her hands deep in the pockets of her puffy coat (*Oh Mexico! Ah Costa Rica!*).

They hurt the worst, her hands—right now, the tips of all the fingers, excluding the thumbs, were etched with minuscule cuts inflicted by the hard, dry conga heads. Alongside the cuts were old calluses that burst open, without fail, halfway through every gig. Her knuckles, too, ached, swollen from trauma. She had tried lotions, Vaseline, massages, often immersing them in ice at the end of the night, but since none of it made any difference, she gave up the maintenance and resigned herself to the fact that, in this weather, her hands would always be in a sorry state. Unless she chose a different instrument, an idea she occasionally flirted with. But whenever she contemplated taking up the guitar, flute, or violin, something less physically demanding, more portable, more feminine perhaps, Iris heard the siren song of the congas, against which all other sounds paled into insignificance. The truth was, she couldn't live without playing them. As soon as she had rolled into Madison, even before finding a place to live, she answered Alemán's *Experienced Conguero Needed* ad in a local magazine. And anyway, rough hands were the mark and martyrdom of a dedicated player; her teacher, Gumbi Ortiz, had hands that could deliberately scoop an egg from a pot of boiling water. He displayed them with pride to his young protégé, as corroboration to his well-worn anecdotes about Cuba and the reputation he'd left behind as the undefeated *rumbero* of Camaguey. Now, whenever Iris felt the warm moisture beneath her hands, she nudged Roberto, the *timbalero*, mid-song, urging him to look at the red stains on all three congas. During breaks she stood away from everyone and studied each new laceration, refusing to wrap them with the first-aid tape Julio, the *bongozero*, would offer her. She had become accustomed to the pain, had

learned long ago that the best way to deal with it was simply to keep playing.

Iris and Sergio turned a corner onto a narrow sloping street. Her cheeks burned, her breathing was shallow. She felt dizzy.

"Ay, *por el amor de Jesucristo*, Sergio." It hurt to speak, as though her voice had to pry its way out of her frozen trachea with a tiny pickaxe. "How far away did you park?"

"Oh Iris, Iris ..." he sang, "when will you embrace the cold, eh, *chica*?" He opened his palms towards the sky, closed his eyes and took a long, deep breath. "Feel that? It's invigorating." He halted his step, breaking into a slow samba. "If we were skating on the lake right now, you'd see the stars right through the ice. You'd love it!"

She smiled wearily, wondering how many Spotted Cows Sergio had already drunk that night. "Look, Sergio," she said, "for the tenth time: Miami, *mulata*," here she pulled out a strand of kinky hair from beneath her cap, "skates, ice—don't mix, okay? You've been here too long, *hermano*. Now come on, let's just smoke right here. The fat one." Iris enjoyed the taste of marijuana, but avoided smoking because it affected her ability to remember dreams, which, thanks to her grandmother, she learned to decipher with great aptitude. But now all she wanted was to make it through the night.

On the way back they stopped at her car to unload the remainder of the equipment. She unlocked the passenger's side and passed the mics and mic stands to Sergio, carrying the third conga herself. She hadn't smoked much, three tokes was all, but she almost lost her balance when she opened the front door to the café. The place had filled up, way too suddenly, she thought. The lights were dimmed, plates had been returned to the kitchen, and the few parties lingering from the dinner crowd now sipped glasses of red wine, their faces kindly lit by tea candles. She unwrapped the scarf from her neck and wiped her running nose on it. Voices echoed from the walls, laughter, bits and pieces of conversation mixed in with the tablas and electronic breakbeats streaming

from the speakers, a discord that had its own mysterious harmony. She heard the words *tribe*, *duende*, *swords*, *libre*, and wondered if someone somewhere was trying to tell her something, for she had inherited her grandmother's Old World sensibilities the moment the woman had taken charge of a two-year-old Iris, fresh from Havana—a belief in such things as angels, demons, fate, and the omnipresent power of the Holy Spirit, not the traditional ghost necessarily, but a spirit present in every living thing, wise and compassionate, sending continuous messages that, if heard and properly followed, could immensely ease the flow of one's life.

She saw Alemán by the mixing board, adjusting levels on the PA; it seemed they would not be playing the second floor after all. She rubbed her eyes, aware that from that moment on she would have to focus. Her stomach swirled, but she had no time to eat. Every instrument was in place, ready to be played: the baby bass out front, a space next to it for Sergio, who had run upstairs to fetch his guitar, Alejandro's keyboards directly behind the two, Roberto's timbales to the left, and her two scarred birchwood congas, the same set she had been playing since her first paying gig five years ago, off to the far right corner, already set up. It appeared that Julio had not made the gig—they would have to do without bongos tonight. She carried the third conga above her head, placed it next to its sisters and pulled it out of its case, making a mental note not to drink any more until after eating something.

"Ah, the smell of *hierba buena*." Alemán, coiling up a long cable, leaned over the keyboards and pecked her on the cheek. She caught a whiff of his aromatic hair, a scent like freshly cut sandalwood. "*Te ves preciosa*, Irisangela," he said. He always called her by her full name, and he always said she was beautiful, no matter how she looked. Tonight she had hurriedly thrown on her wool pants, black and speckled with a microcosm of lint and fur that she had given up trying to brush off, and a yellow wool sweater, one of her grandmother's parting gifts. Her frizzy hair was safely

tucked away beneath a gray felt cap, that lately she took to sleeping in, and her only makeup was a dark shade of lipstick, now smeared all over her scarf.

"You're being nice so I won't get on you about that lie on my answering machine. Nine o' clock, huh?"

He laughed and Iris took note, as she always did, of the perfection of his smile, the deep contrast of teeth and skin.

"I just want to make sure you're on time, *reina*, you know," he shrugged. "You're the flavor."

"Yeah ..." She began tuning the *quinto*. He leaned against a drum and crossed his arms.

"You should see the lie these motherfuckers gave *me*." He spoke in full Spanish, indicating the bar with his chin. "At the last minute they come with 'the only way we'll let you play upstairs is if you can guarantee us a full house.' Shit. I may be Cuban and I may be black, but I'm no *santero*, and after a month of this dancing moratorium, a witch doctor is what they'll need to get anyone in here."

"Look, Alemán," she said, waving the wrench in front of her, "leave me out of the politics, okay? I don't give a damn, really. This shitty gig is not worth stressing over. Consider it a paid rehearsal." She surprised herself even as she said it, and she could tell, by the way he cocked his eyebrow at her, that her words startled him too.

Until now she hadn't realized just how much his bitching irritated her. It seemed that Alemán always came to her *after* something had gone awry. She could hear her grandmother laughing, telling her she was just like her father, walking proof of the old Cuban saying that the longer the fuse, the bigger the bang. Iris knew it was true. She was masterfully adept at being self-effacing and agreeable, but every so often, with little or no warning, her anger and frustrations flared up in impetuous, reckless impulses, and at the worst of times. It was only after her first night in Madison, for instance, that Iris began to question her abrupt departure from Miami. After endless rumination she came to the conclusion that a change in scenery was essential in order to reawaken some forgotten life in her, some rare thing she

had once possessed but lost along the way. Oh, she didn't know what. A certain joy, maybe, something that could only be regained once far removed from the comfortable, the familiar, her friends, her teacher, South Beach, and, most especially, the affection of her grandmother, whom she knew wouldn't be around much longer. Iris was terrified by the thought that one day, maybe in two years, maybe ten, she'd have to deal with the death of her only family member, and when that time came, she wanted to be prepared. A strange place would force her to be independent, to find roots within herself, that way she wouldn't be subject to the ever-changing nature of the outside world. She had started packing her car, without telling anyone, a week before her departure. She quit her translator position at Miami Travel Network and her conga chair with La Briza Tropical, all in the same day. Her destination didn't come to her until that Thursday afternoon, however—she had been half-asleep in her bedroom after a big meal, her grandmother watching "Jeopardy" in the living room of their small apartment, when, with supernatural clarity, she heard: WHAT IS MADISON, WISCONSIN. And the Holy Spirit, speaking through Alex Trebek, confirmed: THAT IS CORRECT.

Someone called her name from the bar. Roberto, surrounded by the rest of the band, held out the ritual shot of tequila.

"Come on," Alemán said, offering her his hand.

"I don't know if I should, I haven't—"

"Come on, Irisangela."

The place now reeked of incense and cologne. She glanced at her watch. Five past ten already. She would have to wait until first break to eat, but she accepted the glass Roberto passed to her, refused the lemon. After tapping everyone's drinks—*salud!*—she swallowed the fiery, yellow liquid, glad when its burning trajectory ended at her chest.

From the door someone yelled. "Isn't a fuckin' band suppos' to play here tonight?" A lanky black man in a blue linen suit, his voice thick with the accents of the Caribbean, waved a cane in the air. His narrow face was framed by

thin and tangled dreadlocks. The beads woven into them were golden, as were his teeth, and the mass of chains hanging from his neck.

"We don't go on till ten, brother," said Sergio. He raised his glass to the man and finished the shot.

"Sergio ..." Iris showed him her watch. He squinted at it.

"Oh, oh. What are we waiting for, then?"

Iris kept her eyes on him. As the band took the stage, the man swaggered up to the bar and sat on a stool, laying his cane across his lap. He glanced at the customer sitting beside him, who looked away, but not in time. "What's your problem?"

What the hell is *your* problem, Iris wanted to shout back. His bellicose attitude, not to mention his ridiculous attire, as if he had strolled in from a tropical beach instead of subzero weather, could only be the indication of a serious personality disorder coupled with a slavery to fashion. And all that gold. He looked like a gaudy sea urchin.

They took their places onstage. Alemán tested his microphone, asking for the house music to be turned off. "A Tu Manera," he announced, counting off, *un, dos, tres*—a metallic flourish of timbales and the burst of sound on the one: the loping *tumbao* of Alemán's baby bass, Alejandro's montuno, his stubby fingers slipping deftly over the keys, Sergio's lively arpeggios probing the piano's silent spaces, and Roberto's syncopated ticking on the sides of the timbales defining the clave of Iris' limber, lazy guaguanco. It was the first rhythm she had ever learned, playing along on a wooden coffee table to the records her grandmother danced to over and over; in the birdlike symmetry of her movements, the old woman became young again, a transformation little Iris witnessed almost daily, right in the middle of their living room. *Won't you dance with me, hija*, she would ask, holding the hem of her dress above her knees. But Iris rarely joined her, preferring the ancient rhythm her hands were re-creating, or perhaps remembering, on the coffee table.

On Iris' tenth birthday, her *avuelita* took her to a *toque*, the religious ceremony of the Yoruba tribe. It was the first time Iris sat behind real congas. The room was small and lit by candles, replete with images of saints, some that she recognized, for identical replicas adorned the Catholic churches and households she had visited with her grandmother, but others she had never seen before. Those were black or red, naked, except for the beads wrapped around their bodies, their faces fierce, lustful, debauched. One had two heads: the head on the right looked like every other painting of Jesus she had seen, blond hair, long beard, sad blue eyes; the head on the left had horns, a bony jaw, a sharp, triangular beard, a wild grin. In front of each, an offering: a lit cigar or incense, a flower, a plate of fruit, a coconut shell. That day Iris played for hours, accompanied by the singing and dancing of the worshippers. The father-of-saints received many spirits, each demanding its own dance and rhythm, which Iris played instinctively. The man hollered and stomped, housing personalities that were obviously not his own (one look in his eyes and you knew he wasn't pretending). But Iris never feared because she knew that behind the drums nothing could harm her.

"*Mi menor, Alejandro*," Alemán yelled over his shoulder. Alejandro, staring down at his hands, did not change the key. For a second the song sounded murky, dissonant. "E minor, god-dammit," he yelled again, and this time the pianist obliged, but not without an air of disdain, as if he'd been oh-so-casually taking a stroll and just happened upon the right key.

By the time Alemán started singing the first verse, Iris was already far off somewhere, observing the street and the stars through the wide window, watching the passersby without noticing them, pondering upon things she would later forget. Her hands, however, persisted, unfaltering in the melodic beat. She closed her eyes for a moment, from pure weariness. It wasn't until the fifth song of the night, a breakneck timba, that she felt the tearing of her blisters. She enjoyed this tune; she preferred the

more energetic numbers, the songos and descargas, over the boleros and chachas. She looked at the room for the first time since they had begun and wondered how she could have missed so many people walking out the door. They practically played for an audience of three, if you counted the bartender and Bosko, his elbows on the counter, apparently lost in thought. The only remaining customer, she now saw, was the angry man. There he was, inscrutable, both hands on the cane between his outstretched legs, an empty shot glass on the counter beside him. He was staring at her. His yellow eyes disturbed her concentration, or lack thereof; she suddenly became very aware of her hands, paranoid in a surgical, dissecting way. She dropped a beat, winning reproachful looks from Alemán and Alejandro. The man's features then stretched into an odd, scornful smile, as though he were baring his teeth at her. The gold in his mouth gleamed in the candlelight.

She knew what he was up to. Her teacher had warned her about such men, would-be *congueros* who could never accept a woman behind the drums. *They'll be waiting all night for you to fuck up, telling themselves 'I coulda done that better, I woulda played that faster,' and it's imperative, for my sake, that you never give 'em the satisfaction, you understand?* He had instilled his mantra into her, *The congas never forgive*, always following it up with the story he had told her ten or a million times about three arrogant *pendejos* in Camaguey who made the fatal mistake of calling him out during a rumba. Her grandmother had also warned her against men in general, vampiric energy-suckers, soul-taxers, sons of Echu, instructing her never to reciprocate their devil-filled stares.

Whether vampire or *conguero*, Iris was caught in the man's eyes, and she had no doubt that if she looked away now, if she did not rise to his unspoken challenge, something would fall out of balance; something crucial could be stolen from her. This certainty was as real as the floor beneath her feet, the shiny hardwood that had been swept that very afternoon, as tangible as her right foot marking time, the heel falling

on the beat—one, two, three, four—as genuine as the cold stillness seeping through the glass of the window. Her hands flew through a fill, landing on the *quinto* with a resounding smack.

At that moment the man shot up from the stool and started dancing with his cane, as if in a trance. For every note from the head of the congas a flutter of his shoulders, his hips, his gangly arms and legs, corresponding so perfectly to Iris' hands that it seemed he had been dancing to her drums since the beginning of time. The blue linen shimmered across his body. She saw the ocean glistening under a full moonlight, and within its dark waters, the ancient unifying current of word and dance.

The man's pelvis defiantly gyrated in controlled, concentric circles. Bosko sprang to his feet, but was kept at bay by the dancer's cane, now a jabbing lance, a twirling baton, a fulcrum that moored his whirling form to the ground.

Bosko turned to the band and pleaded with his eyes, making urgent throat-cutting gestures with his hand. Iris must have missed Alemán's cue because every other instrument, except the congas, stopped.

She kept playing, oblivious to the bouncer's baleful glare, Alemán's frown of disapproval, the blood under her fingers, municipal prohibition. Mexico, Costa Rica. She was only aware of the sharp slaps, the muted thuds, the cadence of wood and skin translated into the dancer's breath, the quickening of his hips and the shuffling of his feet, which gracefully built to a feverish crescendo and didn't stop until the rhythm ran its full course. Then Bosko made as if to move, and the man straightened out his gold chains and bowed deeply to Iris, stalking out onto the white street without a word, jacket, or backward glance. *

Name: Luana Monteiro
Age: 27
Hometown: Recife, Brazil

Publication highlights: A book of short stories entitled *A Fish in the Desert: Stories by Luana Monteiro* is forthcoming from Delphinium Books in January 2005.

What this program did for me: Tamed my wild writing tendencies. Gave me invaluable teaching experiences. Allowed me to meet lots of wonderful people, both in and out of the field.

My plans after graduation: Start a cheese factory somewhere around the Fond du Lac area.

What MFA peer Jim Duncan says about Luana:

"Luana's work calls to mind writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez; the worlds she creates are dense with life, full almost to bursting with families, friends, and strangers of every kind, and have a mythic quality and scope to them that belies even the most straightforward of events. Whether following a young boy on his journey to have a wish granted by a magic fish, detailing the effects of a mayoral election on a small Brazilian town, or exploring the dislocating experience of a young Floridian woman during her first winter in Madison, there is always a strong undercurrent of mystery, of unknowable forces operating just under the surface and just beyond our ability to grasp, and of the always vivid and luminous experience of the world around us."




 A black and white photograph of a crumpled white paper napkin. Two pens, one silver and one black, are crossed diagonally across the napkin. A small, dark, round object, possibly a cherry or a piece of fruit, lies near the bottom center of the napkin. The word "Dancing" is printed in a blue serif font across the middle of the napkin.

Dancing

BY KATHLEEN RICHTER

MARYLOU WATCHED HER DAUGHTER STAND at the edge of the bar, which was crowded with men in boots and flannel shirts. They yelled for drinks over the music on the jukebox and kept getting served ahead of Francine, who held up her hand weakly, as if she wanted to be called on. Marylou wished she had offered to get the drinks. She would have forced her way to the center of the bar and shouted her order. But she knew Francine would never have let her. "Sit down and rest your back," she would have said, pushing her mother gently back into her chair, onto the pink orthopedic pillow she carried everywhere.

She was surprised at how old her daughter looked, even in the dim light. Her face was creased and creviced and caked with makeup, her hair was thin, and her hips and thighs ballooned under her silk pants, even though she had never had children. "I don't know how

you've managed to stay so thin, Mother," she always said.

"I don't do it on purpose," Marylou replied. "I'm shrinking." Once a month she stood in her closet and marked her height on the wall with a pencil. The marks got lower and lower.

She finally saw the bartender leaning toward Francine with his hand cupped around his ear. A minute later Francine crossed the room to their table, holding a glass of lemonade and a Manhattan against her chest. She set down the drinks and wiped her chair with a napkin. The glasses had left wet spots on her blouse, but she didn't notice.

Francine and Marylou stared out the window at the lake across the street. It was fall and the water was calm. Marylou watched a few honking geese circle in the gray sky, and thought they looked out of place, as if they had been left there by mistake. Soon the lake would freeze. Marylou remembered skating on it as a child, and she remembered taking Francine there to skate when she was a child. One year, while Francine skated and Marylou sat on a bench next to the lake knitting a blue scarf, two children fell through the ice, gently, as if traveling down a slide. They were rescued by a father who lay on his stomach and pulled them back onto the ice. The three slithered to shore. Marylou looked around and could not see Francine. She thought for a moment that she had fallen in and been lost, too, but then she spotted her lying behind a birch tree making snow angels, a row of snow angels, as if she were a cookie cutter. Marylou was so relieved that she ran to Francine, dropping the scarf. The next day she dug with her fingers in the snow around the bench but the scarf was gone—someone must have taken it.

Marylou wondered how much longer she would be able to remember that story.

Francine thumped her huge purse on the table and took out a bottle of vitamins. She gave one pill to Marylou and took one for herself. She washed it down with a sip of lemonade, and then opened a compact and started reapplying her bright lipstick. She rubbed her lips together and touched her silver hair, which was short, almost spiky.

Marylou did not know how her daughter had become interested in vitamins. Marylou had not tried to raise her in a healthy way. Francine had been a skinny, knobby-kneed child, and Marylou was lazy about cooking, so she was always

feeding her candy bars, hot dogs, bowls of ice cream. But she never gained weight. For a time, Marylou had thought she was bulimic and started pressing her ear against the bathroom door when Francine was inside. Once, she came out unexpectedly, brushing her teeth, her plaid pajamas baggy on her tiny arms and legs. She gave her mother an irritated look, and Marylou never listened at the door again. She was sad that Francine tried so hard now but was fat.

Marylou strained to lift and turn her head. The men at the bar shouted at the basketball players on the television in the corner. Whenever someone opened the front door, they pulled their flannel shirts around them and leaned in closer. Balls knocked together on the pool tables across the room. In a nearby booth, three men were playing poker. Their cigar smoke wafted over. Marylou inhaled it and wanted to join them. She removed the little straw from her glass and laid it on her napkin. She looked at her hand, which was bony and covered with age spots, and couldn't believe it belonged to her. She took a sip and then placed her hands on the armrests, which were too high. Her shoulders hunched.

"You shouldn't drink," Francine said.

Marylou pretended she didn't hear. Even when she was younger, she had trouble hearing her daughter. Much of the time, she was only guessing at what Francine was saying, although it was usually pretty easy to guess.

"It's not that late," Francine added. Marylou could see gray eyeshadow caked on her lids, spreading into her crow's feet.

"But it's my birthday." Marylou put the vitamin in her mouth and took a drink. A few drops spilled down her chin and into her lap.

Francine stared at the table, absently rubbing a napkin between her finger and thumb. Her nails were silver, like her hair.



Every year on Marylou's birthday, Francine took her to her favorite restaurant for catfish. Usually they went home

right after dinner, but tonight, Francine had agreed to sit in the bar and have a drink. Marylou liked it here. No one stared at her, even though she was so bent over with osteoporosis that she couldn't walk too far without having to stop and lean against a wall. Her back ached almost all the time. Her chin pointed down and she had to strain to look up at everyone who talked to her. Francine had to drive her everywhere. It was for the best. Marylou knew how absurd she must have looked as a driver, tiny and bent over, a leprechaun behind the wheel of a car.

Marylou knew Francine hated the bar, any bar, and viewed her acquiescence as a bad sign—it meant they would probably never be back. Though Francine would not bring it up tonight, she was planning to force her mother into a nursing home.

Marylou imagined the day it would happen. She could see herself standing in front of the living room window with one hand holding back the thin curtain, watching Francine pull her Lexus into the driveway. Francine liked to do things the proper way, so she would probably bring a wheelchair, which she would take from the back seat and unfold as if unwrapping a gift. Marylou pictured her wheeling it onto the porch and into the doorway. "Please get in, Mother," she would say. "It's better for your back if you let me help you."

"I don't need that," Marylou would say, and they would argue, Francine looking around to see whether the neighbors were watching. She would finally get out of her mother's way, let her hobble to the car by herself.

When it was all over, when the papers were signed, when Marylou's clothes had been folded and placed in her new closet, and a digital clock and photographs of Francine arranged on her end table, Francine would kiss her forehead and leave. And that was the hardest thing to imagine, this instant, the moment when she would be left.



"I want to give you your gift," Francine said. She leaned over and dug in her

purse. Keys rattled. Marylou could smell her expensive perfume. She wondered what her daughter had bought that was small enough to fit in a purse. Jewelry? A gift certificate? Usually Francine got her something boring but agreeable—a year's supply of oranges delivered monthly to her front door, or a collection of relaxation cassette tapes. Last year, she had, for the first time, bought something Marylou loved: a small CD player, and several CDs—one by the Maguire Sisters, and a collection of classical music. Francine showed her how to work the CD player, how to pause a song in the middle, how to skip ahead to a new one. Marylou put it on the kitchen counter and listened to it all the time. Most of the classical music made her depressed, but she liked Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." At night, she kept the music playing so she could hear it in the bedroom, so it put her to sleep.

"Actually, I'm having the gift delivered. This is just a picture of it." On the table Francine unfolded a page torn from a catalogue. It was a picture of dishes, hideous mint green dishes with little gray birds decorating their perimeters. There were large plates, small plates, bowls, teacups, and saucers. Tiny sculpted birds perched on the handles of the cups. A drop of liquid soaked through the center of the photograph, making it stick to the table.

"They're handpainted," Francine said. "Very good quality. They'll last forever."

Marylou stared at her through a fog of cigarette smoke. Francine smiled politely, her manicured hands folded on the table, waiting for her mother's reaction.

"How could you buy me this?" Marylou said.

"You complain about your dishes all the time." Marylou could hardly hear her voice above the jukebox. "They're old and the edges are cracked."

Marylou said nothing. She leaned as far back in her chair as she could, as if to distance herself from the photograph.

"You don't like them," Francine said. "It's just so hard to buy for you."

Marylou didn't remember complaining about her dishes. But maybe she had. "I do hate my dishes," she said. "I'm sorry. Thank you for the gift." This was

one good thing about getting old. You could say stupid things and people forgave you right away. Suddenly it occurred to her that Francine might have bought the dishes so she could have them after she put her in the home. Maybe she would stop by the house on her way back from dropping Marylou off, steal the dishes from the cupboard and the dishwasher, and take them home in her Lexus. Marylou didn't want her daughter to have the satisfaction of forcing her into a home and taking her dishes. She thought about where she could hide them. Under the basement stairs, maybe. Francine wouldn't look there—she was terrified of spiderwebs. The problem was how to get them downstairs. Marylou wouldn't be able to carry them herself unless she took them one at a time. And all that climbing would be hard on her back.

But maybe she was just being paranoid. It wasn't as though Francine needed to steal. She had plenty of money from that intolerable man she had been married to in her 30s. Marylou couldn't even remember his name anymore. What she did remember was that whenever Francine took her to the grocery store, or the mall, or the movies, he reminded her to park their car—which was already old and beat up—at the edge of the lot so it wouldn't get dented. In the winter, she dropped her mother off at the doors of buildings. From inside, Marylou watched her daughter park. When she slipped on dirty slush and held her hat down over her ears, Marylou wanted to beat the car with a hammer.

Francine's husband had made a fortune in real estate and, as if on cue, immediately died of a heart attack. It happened during Thanksgiving dinner at Marylou's house. He clutched his chest and fell sideways off his chair, elaborately, as if he were a bad actor in a play. Marylou had thought he was choking and dragged him from the floor and given him the Heimlich maneuver. She held his body up, her arms around it, his head lolling back on her chest, as if they were trying to do some kind of dirty dance.

Now Francine could afford all sorts of things she did not need. She was always

getting massages and face peels and oxygen treatments. She paid people to inject her body with chemicals meant to neutralize the mercury in her blood. She had something she called a tai chi machine, though it didn't seem to have much to do with tai chi. It was a tall, cushioned electric pod; when a person stood inside it, it conformed to the shape of the body and moved the torso gently from front to back, from side to side, massaging and stretching it. A few years ago, Francine had become convinced it would help Marylou's osteoporosis and talked her into trying it. Marylou took off all her clothes except her underwear, stood inside the machine, and relaxed, let it move her hips, then her stomach, then her chest, from side to side, slowly, fluidly. Her arms were in the air. She closed her eyes. She thought, "Maybe this is what it feels like to be a stripper." When it was over and she stepped out of the machine, her back hurt so much that that she thought she would be unable ever to walk again. Francine had to lead her to a couch where she could lie flat for several hours and recover.



Marylou had tried to tell herself it would be okay when Francine left her. After all, she had been left before. When Francine was a baby, Marylou's husband had run away with a loud woman with bleached-blond hair and wide hips that stretched her jeans until the zipper almost burst. Everyone in town knew they were seeing each other—except Marylou. She was not like many women who were cheated on and suspected something was wrong. She simply did not know. She even let him sell their house and move her and Francine to a little rented apartment in the country—"to save money." A week later, Marylou came home from the grocery store, Francine a crying lump under her arm, and found his clothes removed from the drawers, the checkbook disappeared from its place on the kitchen counter, the beer gone from the refrigerator.

Marylou and Francine moved to a one-room, government-subsidized apartment. There was little recourse back then against a married father who cleaned out his accounts and left town. If he did that to her in this day and age, Marylou often thought, she would eat him alive. But instead, she had had to become an underpaid secretary in a dentist's office and leave Francine all day with her next-door neighbor, an old woman with huge, crumpled thighs snaked with blue veins. In exchange for babysitting, she asked for no money, but wanted Marylou to cook all her meals and the three of them to eat dinner together every evening.

Francine despised her father. While she was growing up, she had refused to talk about him, even to mention his name. When he had died five years ago, Francine had not attended the funeral.

*

Marylou worried that when her daughter put her in a home, it would be some kind of "alternative" place, a collective of elderly people who practiced

holistic medicine and did yoga. A few years ago Francine had wanted Marylou to take up yoga. Actually, she had given her an ultimatum. "It's either yoga or weight-lifting," she said. She had read a book about how women who lifted weights stayed healthy longer. "It's all about what you *believe* you can do," she said. "The belief that old people can't be strong is arbitrary." Marylou wanted her to think she was effecting some kind of change in the world, so she said she would try yoga. The next morning she put on the only sweat suit she owned, which she had not worn in years and which was too big for her shrinking body. She had to roll up the legs and sleeves. She sat in the kitchen drinking a Bloody Mary, waiting for Francine to come and take her to the gym. But she called and canceled—there was some business of her ex-husband's she needed to attend to. Marylou went back to bed and slept for three more hours, like a teenager on a snow day.

*

The jukebox stopped playing and no one moved to choose a new song. Glasses clinked behind the bar. Someone won a poker hand at the next table and shouted while his friends groaned. Coins slid across the table. One of the players pushed his chair back and it bumped into Marylou's, making her spill a few drops of her drink on the floor. "Sorry!" he said, and gently touched her shoulder with a hand that was stained with car grease. A fat man at the bar slipped off a stool and grabbed the counter to heave himself back up.

Marylou had been listening to Vivaldi the day she had fallen.

She had been browning pork chops in the kitchen, swinging her bony hips slowly to the melody, and had slipped on a small puddle of water in front of the sink. The fall was not that painful—it did not hurt her back more than, say, a long walk—but she found that she could not get up, that she barely had the strength to roll over. So she had lain on her back on the kitchen floor, trying not to panic, breathing deeply, as Francine's relaxation tapes had taught her. She folded



her hands on her chest. The CD repeated several times before Francine dropped by to check on her. Until then, Marylou had not known it would repeat on its own. This discovery made her feel surprisingly content. The world would go on without help.

The fall was the reason Francine said Marylou should think about moving to an assisted living environment. "Not a nursing home," she always stressed. Whatever she said, Marylou knew the real problem was not the fall but the orange juice, the tiny paper cup of juice that Marylou had drunk at the family reunion last summer, on a lawn chair on Francine's deck. It was a hot day, and she had drunk too fast, her head tilting back as far as her osteoporosis would let it. When she was finished, she looked out over the smooth grass and suddenly felt as though someone touched her shoulder. She turned around and no one was there. She dropped the cup. A voice whispered, "There would be peace on earth if everyone would just do what they're supposed to do." This seemed like the truest thing Marylou had ever heard, and she stood up drunkenly and shouted the phrase to her relatives, a breeze lifting the ends of her hair. After the reunion was cut short, after everyone left, Marylou tried to tell her daughter: someone had spiked that juice.

"I don't think so."

"Fine," Marylou said. "But maybe I'm not getting senile. Maybe I'm just going crazy."

Francine had not laughed.

"It's possible," Marylou said.

"What about the time you couldn't find your way out of the bathroom?"

Marylou should never have told her daughter that story. She was just so scared because nothing like that had ever happened to her before. While standing at the bathroom sink, she started to feel dizzy. She wanted to lie down, but couldn't remember where the door was. It was as if she and the sink were the only things that were real in the world. She stared into the sink for a long time, noticed how her face powder was gathered in the corners of the faucet, how hot water had worn

away the porcelain around the drain. After some time she thought, "The toilet is around here somewhere. If I can find it, I can sit down and get my bearings." She reached out behind her and felt around until she touched the cold seat. She sat down, put her head in her hands, and tried to breathe deeply. She cried. When she finally looked up the shower was in front of her, a towel thrown over its rod. The tile was cold beneath her feet. She turned and finally saw the door.

She did not tell her daughter about the second time, the time she found a stroller outside the restroom at the grocery store with a baby in it, a fat white child with curly black hair. Marylou assumed its mother was in the restroom, and decided to entertain it until she came out. She started pushing the stroller back and forth, back and forth. It banged softly against the wall. After a while, she looked at the stroller and saw there was actually no baby inside, just a blanket decorated with ducks; the stroller was an abandoned stroller, a forgotten stroller, something someone had accidentally left at the store. She had dreamed up a whole baby.



"Fuck, yeah!" a man at the bar shouted. There was cheering around the TV. Marylou felt embarrassed for Francine. She was glad her face was already pointed down, so she would not have to look in her daughter's eyes. Francine had always been conservative, easily frightened. As a child, she never got in trouble. She liked to read classic, uncontroversial novels. She was quiet, secretive. Why? Marylou was a tolerant woman. She knew things. She remembered Prohibition, when her father made liquor in their basement and sold it to men in heavy coats, who filed solemnly up and down the cellar stairs; she remembered wars; she remembered Gloria Steinem as a young woman. She had always subscribed to the most liberal magazines, believing that was the best way to keep up with the era. Lately, the feminist magazines contained ads for things like vibrators. Marylou

thought Francine would be appalled. She hid the magazines in a large box under her bed. She wondered what Francine would think when her mother died and she had to clean out the house, had to pull the box from under the bed and open it.

When Francine was in junior high, Marylou was making her bed and found a pack of cigarettes, tucked under her pillow like something the tooth fairy had left. Marylou took a cigarette from the pack, lighted it, and then replaced the cigarettes, feeling glad that Francine was living a little.

Marylou was shocked when Francine got married. Marriage did not seem to fit her. Marylou had wondered for years whether Francine was a lesbian. There had always been signs. She cut her hair very short while she still young enough not to have to. She loved cats even though she was allergic. As a teenager, she once took a stray cat home with her; it defecated in two corners of the living room and fell asleep in her bed—the couch folded out—as she held it, red-eyed and sneezing in her sleep.



In the corner, a burly man was setting up speakers and a microphone. A cigarette hung from his mouth. He tapped the microphone to see whether it was on.

"Oh no," Francine said. "They're setting up a karaoke machine."

"I've never heard karaoke," Marylou said. There were a lot of things she'd never heard.

"It's going to get even louder in here," Francine said. She put on her coat and buttoned it to her chin, as if to fend off the noise.

Marylou tried to finish her drink, straining to tip her head back. It might be her last ever—they would not serve alcohol at any nursing home, and Francine would not smuggle it in. Brandy spilled down her chin and Francine got up and rubbed violently at her shirt with a napkin.

"Oh, stop, I'm not an invalid," Marylou said. Francine sat down and put the crumpled, stained napkins in the center

of the table. The bartender was staring at them, leaning against the cash register, a toothpick in his mouth. He was young and good-looking, with messy black hair that was too long on top. He kept pushing it out of his eyes. Marylou had never seen him before, which was odd. It was a small town and she knew nearly everyone's face. Suddenly she realized she might indeed have seen him before, might even know him, and had just forgotten who he was. "Can I have another Manhattan?" she shouted. She felt a little lightheaded. "It's my birthday."

"Well, then, this one's on the house." He winked at her.

"Honestly, Mother," Francine whispered. "You shouldn't drink so much. And you shouldn't be around all this noise and smoke. And these chairs are so *hard*." She knocked on the seat of her chair.

"I have my pillow."

The bartender brought the drink and set it on the table on top of a fresh napkin. He took the dirty napkins away.

"Thank you," said Marylou, and took two dollar bills from Francine's purse. She pressed them into his hand, which was coarse and cracked from alcohol. "You know," she said, "my daughter is rich and single."

The bartender looked from Marylou to Francine, smiling uncertainly, and then walked away.

"I can't believe you said that," Francine said. "Everyone's going to think you're a crazy old woman."

"Oh, please," Marylou said. "He's a child. He's a baby. He very nearly hasn't even been born yet. He's probably a lot more out of touch with reality than I am."

Music started playing on the karaoke machine, loud, fast music Marylou did not recognize. It was dark and the geese were disappearing from the lake. The bartender shut off the TV. A tiny woman with hair wispy as a child's clapped her hands in the air and did a little turn on the little dance floor that had been cleared in front of the karaoke machine.

After the song ended, the man who had set up the machine picked up the

microphone and said they were going to bring in the weekend with a bang. "We're taking requests starting now."

Marylou looked up and saw the bartender standing next to their table, his rough hand extended toward her. "I have a break," he said. "Would you like to dance?"

Marylou looked at Francine. Her large legs were crossed, and her hands were in the pockets of her coat. She shrugged. Marylou put her hand in the bartender's and let him pull her out of the chair, her back stretching out with a series of snaps, like ice cracking in a glass of warm water. She winced. "Slowly, slowly!" she said. "I'm not a spring chicken anymore."

The bartender held Marylou's hands in his. He was more than a foot taller than she was. Without meaning to, she stared down at his feet, clad in heavy black boots.

A slow song started to play, something Marylou vaguely recognized, something from the '60s. The woman on

the dance floor took the microphone and began singing in a low, sad voice, a voice that did not seem to fit her. Marylou leaned against the bartender—his chest was strong and solid. She let him hold her up, her face pressed into him, her teeth clenched against the pain, as he moved her body from side to side. *

Name: Kathleen Richter

Age: 28

Hometown: Waukesha, Wisconsin

Publication highlights: Work has appeared or is pending in *Ms. Magazine*, *Z Magazine*, *The Sycamore Review*, and *So to Speak*.

What this program did for me: Allowed me to fend off a real job for two years.

My plans after graduation: To live long and prosper.

What MFA peer Dean Bakopoulos says about Kathy:

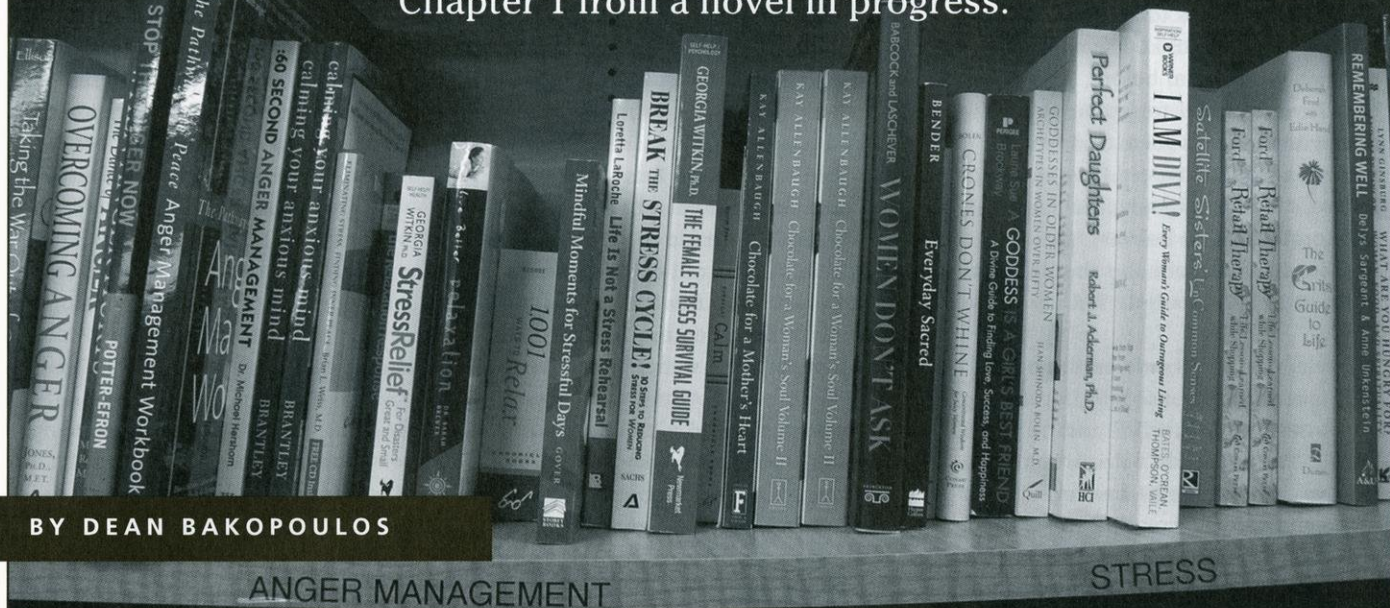
"Kathy, who has a master's degree in biology from Cal Tech, brings a scientist's eye to her fiction, which is full of keen details, tightly crafted prose, and insightful observations. Her stories are resonant tales that depict the dark edges of our inner lives. They shine with a kind of magnified loneliness and are populated by vibrant characters—from a painfully shy piano prodigy to a booze-drinking, chicken-wrestling grandmother—characters who suffer from a seemingly insurmountable isolation from the world around them. A stunningly intelligent and compassionate writer, Kathy weaves stories that depict the saddest realms of solitude, but in a way that is often funny and always life-affirming and hopeful."



The Book Buyer

Chapter 1 from a novel in progress.

Photo by Bill Blankenburg



BY DEAN BAKOPOULOS

NOVEMBER—WITH ITS SAD, purple afternoons and its charcoal nights—found Forest at the crosswalk, easing his hand into the hair of the woman standing next to him.

He had been at the corner of State and Dayton, waiting for the light to change, and had seen, in the corner of his eye, a brilliant shade of red moving in the wind beside him. He'd been humming some vague, wandering melody, which he couldn't quite place. Around him, he'd sensed people, but their faces and voices were blurry. He had trouble focusing, and for a moment, he had lost his hearing, and the world went from car engines and conversations and construction to the rushing whirl of wind. The red had flickered in the air, and he swore he heard the snapping of flames.

Then this: he plunged his hand into the red blur beside him, expecting heat, but the red was cool and soft.

The act was innocent; imagine an infant reaching for a piece of dandelion fluff. His body relaxed and he heard himself sigh, as if his double was behind him, sighing in his ear. He counted the slow, silent seconds—one, two, three—until he heard a woman's scream, and he

found himself shoved from behind, snapped from his dreaminess. He hit the ground. A crowd formed. A woman was swearing. He was kicked in the ribs, and then, rolling over to see the pale light of mid-afternoon, the struggling glow of a nearly frozen sun, he saw the red-haired woman hovering above him with clenched fists.

"What the hell?" she said. "What did you just do?"

A crowd gathered. Forest remained on his back, the cement icy underneath him. He squinted up at the faces over him. He didn't speak. He wanted to close his eyes and begin humming again, hoping everyone would disappear.

"What's this?" he finally said.

He shut his eyes. He hummed. He opened his eyes. Nobody had moved. Nobody had disappeared. The red-haired woman, dressed in brown leather boots, a brown skirt and a cream-colored, cable-knit sweater, said, "Get up."

She wore small glasses with black frames. He realized what he had done, but he had an explanation. The wind had been knocked out of him and when he gasped for a breath somebody said, "He's having a seizure."

"No, he's not," someone said.

"Did someone call the cops?" a woman asked.

"I did," a man said, "from my cell phone."

He said it with real bravado, as if the act of a cellular phone call was somehow grave and noble.

Forest was finally able to take a full breath. This was all just a misunderstanding, he thought he might say. He would stand up and explain himself—he'd blame the meditative bliss and the November light for sparking the impulsive act. How would that sound? His blood quickened, as if he were an elk recognizing a predator on the horizon. It would sound terrible and unconvincing.

He rolled onto his side. Someone came up from behind and kicked him in the ribs again.

"Stay right where you are, pal," a young man said. He'd been the one with the cell phone. Forest considered going for his throat, but curled up into a fetal position instead. He couldn't focus his thoughts. His eyes pulsed. His chest seemed to fill with warm water. He felt himself stifling great sobs, and instead of crying, asked for something to drink, which nobody brought him.

Tom and Dino, the Greek brothers who owned Nick's Place, a restaurant where Forest often ate lunch, came out and joined the crowd.

"Forest," Dino said. "What's the matter with you?"

Tom bent down to help Forest stand. The Greek brothers were broad and powerful, like two fierce ogres, and nobody interfered with them. Forest wanted to weep on their shoulders as they propped him on his feet. He couldn't speak. All at once, the circle around him closed in and people started to speak.

"He groped this woman," someone said.

"He grabbed her hair," said another.

"Hey, that's the guy from the bookstore," someone said.

"Fucking pervert," another woman said.

The red-haired woman groaned. "My god, I can't believe this," she said. "It really is the guy from the bookstore."

Somebody started laughing.

Forest, his head swollen, his throat tight and thick, followed Tom and Dino into their restaurant. Dino got him some coffee. Tom offered something to eat.

"Just some water," Forest said. "I should get back to the store."

"You better stay here and talk to the police," Dino said. "It will save you trouble later."

"The police?" Forest said. He had meant it as a question, but nobody bothered to answer.



The police talked more to the red-haired woman—who waited outside the

restaurant—than they talked to Forest. Forest watched them through the window of Nick's. The woman was talking too fast for Forest to try and read her lips, but when she moved her hands and yanked on her hair, he could imagine what she might be telling the police. But that was not right. He had not *yanked* anything.

Forest's police interview had not gone well. They did not buy his explanation (and admittedly, he didn't really have one) partly because he kept using phrases like *spiritual reverie* and *intoxicating autumn light*.

At the station, where they took him, he was allowed to call Angela. He tried to explain his afternoon, and he heard her struggling to believe him. "You what? In her hair? How? Why?"

Hours passed, and finally Angela arrived to claim him. Where had she been? She said nothing on the way home, only handed him an instant cold pack from the car's first aid kit and offered it for the bump on his forehead.

"Ice it," she said.

In the car, he was too sad to move or speak. The incident had left him burdened by an overwhelming sorrow. He felt none of the surreal absurdity of the long, confusing afternoon; he only felt sad. He had a hand on his knee, and the other hand holding the compress to his wound, and he looked straight ahead. The thought occurred to him that he'd finally lost it, that he was completely and deeply insane. He said the thought aloud.

"If you were insane," Angela said, "you wouldn't be having those thoughts."

At home, Forest greeted the dog, a young red bird dog whose love was without boundaries. The happiness of the dog lifted his spirits enough so he felt he could speak without crying.

"Petey," he said. "Hey, Petey-Guy."

The dog's whole body wriggled in ecstasy. Forest broke into tears.

He and the dog entered the kitchen. The dog was showered with Pork-O-Rama treats.

"That's a good boy," Forest whispered. "That's my guy."

Angela came into the kitchen.

"Hi, sweetie," Forest said. "Do you want a Pork-O-Rama, too?"

His effort at levity wilted in the air. Angela's voice took a few seconds to leave her throat.

"Inconsistent, Forest," she said. "You're being inconsistent."

He turned his back to her, rummaged through the cabinets, and tossed Petey another pork treat. It was nearly two in the morning. She had picked him up at the police station and now he was looking for something to drink. They had nothing—no beer, no wine, no booze—because Forest had given up drinking six days ago, making a sudden dramatic speech that he was too fat, too lazy, too easy with the cocktails in the evening. He had made a big show of pouring bottle after bottle down the sink while he played Beethoven's Ninth at full volume. Now, he was furious at himself. Think of the waste! It was too late to buy booze in Madison. It was always too late to buy booze in Madison; the stores stopped selling at nine o'clock. What kind of man knows how much he'll want to drink before nine o'clock? In Detroit, you could get booze until two or three. He was lamenting this, half-aloud, when he found something—cooking sherry—and turned back to Angela. She was crying, wasn't she?

"This is all very regrettable," Forest said. He took a drink of the sherry, winced, shook his head, then grinned. He went to the freezer for some ice. "We regret everything that has occurred. Don't we, Petey?"

The dog sat and waited for another pork treat.

Angela went to the table and sat—no, collapsed—into a chair. Forest stared at her for a moment. Maybe now was not the time to discuss this, he thought.

"Maybe we should just go to bed," he said.

"Sit," she said. He did.

This is how Angela explained it:

When she had come to get Forest at the police station, she was able to persuade the red-haired woman, whose name was Brenda, not to file charges. It had taken a long time.

Brenda finally gave in when she discovered Angela was A. Z. Walton, the writer.

"Your celebrity status saved me," Forest said.

This was a desperate, groping joke, and Angela did not laugh.

It was easy to be a celebrity in Madison; the city was starved for celebrities. A. Z. was becoming a celebrity simply by publishing one book of stories with a New York house. It turned out that Brenda—like everybody else in Madison—wanted to be a writer of short stories, too. Angela—who hated teaching and all the pleasantries that went with helping eager, novice writers—agreed to read some of Brenda's work, provide honest feedback, and possibly help Brenda find an agent.

"That's so nice of you," Forest said.

"I lied," Angela said. "But I don't know why I was so eager to help you."

The important thing was that he was free. Because of Angela, suddenly, the assault (a regrettable misnomer assigned by the police department, Forest thought; it was not an assault!) was forgiven. Brenda seemed suddenly to understand everything, Angela said. She had taken Angela's card and asked if she could call her the next afternoon.

Angela had said, "Yes. Fine. Call."

With all that in mind, Forest knew he owed Angela something. Tomorrow, he would make it up to her. He would think of a grand, loving gesture.

"You saved me," he said.

"What's happening to you, Forest?" Angela asked. "What were you doing?"

"Inconsistent," he said. "You nailed it: I'm suffering from inconsistency."

She turned and left the kitchen.

"It's better than being incompetent," he called after her. He laughed. "Or, worse: incontinent!"

He heard her going up the stairs; he heard her heavy, exhausted, despairing footsteps, and his heart tore a little, but not enough for him to follow her, throw himself at her feet, and beg forgiveness.

Instead he called, "Or impotent!"

He put some ice in a tumbler and filled it with the sherry. He called the owners of the store, leaving a message: "I'm okay," he said. "I'm fine. What an

odd day. I'll explain everything tomorrow. I'll be in to open up tomorrow."

He laughed, then shook his head, and hung up the phone. "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," he said to Petey. Petey went to lie down on the rug. Forest was suddenly worried. Maybe he really was on his last mental legs. One false move and, snap, there went his life.

Upstairs, he heard water running, heard Angela getting ready for bed. "Inconsistent," he said. "At least I'm not incontinent."

He laughed again. It was almost dawn. He looked at the couch, and the couch beamed at him and opened her arms. He fell asleep in her softness, fully dressed, a glass of cooking sherry jammed into the cleavage of her cushions.



Morning came, bright and certain, an antidote to gloom, the sun filling Forest's head with light. Still, he could barely lift his neck from the pillow; still he was in gloom. The couch was old and uncomfortable. He finally pushed himself off the cushions. The dog was asleep behind him, snoring. The sherry was spilled all over his shirt, and the glass lay empty, on the floor.

The smell of fresh coffee and fried eggs nearly broke his heart.

When he heard the voice of Katie Couric, he pulled himself from the couch, nudging the dog to the floor. Some mornings, lately, the only thing that could get him out of bed was Katie Couric. He loved to see her in the morning; her smile and bright eyes made him smile, made his eyes bright. She was stronger than the darkest coffee. If his love for Katie Couric made him mundane and too much like other countless, mindless Americans, so be it. He had his loves, and she was one of them.

"Good morning," he said to Angela, who was at the dining room table already, wearing her robe, reading a manuscript, a red pen in her hand. The small TV on the kitchen counter—to which Angela had objected early in their relationship—was tuned to the "Today Show."

"There's coffee," she said. "I made a frittata; your half is in the oven. It may already be too dry. I've been up for a while."

"It'll be fine," he said. "I'm starving."

He wasn't at all hungry. He hadn't been in a long time.

He went into the kitchen. "Hello, Katie," he whispered. "If you only knew the kind of night I've had."

"She can't answer you," Angela called from the dining room.

Forest came back to the table with a cup of coffee and his eggs. He took a bite of the frittata. It had dried out. The sulfur smell of the lukewarm eggs was nauseating. He sipped his coffee. Petey came and whined at his side. The dog loved eggs.

"I hadn't been feeling right all day," Forest said. "And then Charlie and Ben came into my office and told me that the bookstore was officially closing, that all their back-up plans had failed. Not that it's an excuse, Angie, but my head didn't feel right, and I was standing there, with that late afternoon autumn light, the wind, the warmth of a crowd around me, the dull roar of a progressive college town going about its business ..."

He was having trouble capturing the feeling. Angela was unimpressed.

"I don't know, I lost myself in the moment," he said. "I couldn't really hear anything. I couldn't see much. But I saw this beautiful shade of red, and I had the idea to touch it. It was like a spiritual fever, really, like something you'd read about in Dostoevsky."

Angela looked up from the *Times*. His appeal to the Russian sensibility did not impress her. She was wearing her glasses, white cotton pajamas, no socks or slippers; her eyes were bloodshot and flat. She looked exhausted. Even her hair looked exhausted: Her blonde hair had lost some of its shine since summer and hung limp, flat, discolored, down the sides of her face. He was exhausting her; she was beautiful, but he was erasing her beauty.

"Just go to work," she said. "I'm on deadline."

"Do you want to go upstairs? And make up?" Forest said.

"Please," she said. "This deadline. We need the money."

Angela's debut collection, a book titled *Heaven Is a Place for Losers*, had been published six years ago when she still lived in New York. She'd been a published author at twenty-six, and had received quite a bit of attention. "Erudite and witty; tender, yet mean as a snake," said one reviewer. "This is a narrative voice you can't help but love, despite its caustic, harsh worldview."

Since then, Angela had published one new story in *The New Yorker*, and had written several long nonfiction pieces for *The New York Times Magazine* about young women and body image, and a cover story for *Rolling Stone* about an all-girl metal band. She was still at work on her first novel, which her patient agent was promising to sell as soon as she had two hundred pages. She was on page thirty-four and had been there for some time.

As a writer, Angela had been praised as having "a keen eye for trenchant detail." And Forest knew there was a detail she had not missed: The red-haired woman, Brenda, whom Forest had "encountered" the day before, had hair the exact color of Forest's late wife, Oksana, whom everybody had called "O."

In fact, she had the same color eyes and skin as O. Had a man, like Forest, been under a great amount of emotional anguish in the last few weeks, he might, in a weak moment, mistake Brenda for his first wife, with ease.

He felt like a fool; suddenly the strangeness of his action seemed stark and apparent. He'd groped a woman's hair and nearly knocked her to the ground. He was a creep. He couldn't be trusted. Angela had to sleep beside him, sleep in the same bed with his foul thoughts and misplaced desire. Why would she want to do that anymore? She would leave him.

"I'm a creep," he said.

"You're also a fucking freak," Angela said. She gave him her first smile of the day.

"You're not mad?" Forest asked.

"I'm still mad. And still on deadline."

She stood, kissed him on the top of the head. She headed upstairs to her office.



Forest took the bus downtown. The buses in Madison were the clean, spacious buses found only in well-off college towns, liberal pockets of the country where the use of mass transit makes one swell up with a bit of well-earned self-righteousness. Madison's buses were a pleasure to ride. Forest had sold his car, an old Ford station wagon, two months before, for one thousand dollars. He and Angela had been running out of money, and he couldn't keep up with paying for oil changes, parking, new serpentine belts and CV boots.

Lately, money seemed to leap from his hands; it tumbled from his pockets, skittered away through cracks in the floor. The moment a paycheck arrived the water heater would explode, or Petey would get an eye infection and need antibiotics, or a faucet would fall off in a guest's hand. In the evenings, if they wanted to go out for burgers and beer, they searched the house and car for loose change, every quarter uncovered worthy of a cheer. The gas bill was three weeks late; the cell phone bill went unpaid for two months, and then finally the account was canceled. Forest took out cash advances on his Visa account without telling Angela; he didn't want to depress her with their destitution. She had no idea how close their credit cards were climbing toward their absurd and ambitious spending limits. The feeling of failure was acute, and Forest grew to resent his neighbors, with their stable jobs and their concert tickets and their brand-new Volvo station wagons and gleaming black Saabs.

And Forest knew their problems with money were only going to get worse.

The store—the independent bookstore where he'd worked as the buyer for the last five years—was in its last season. How could this store stay open? The reasons behind the closing were financial; it was an old, old story. In the local newspapers, feature writers already had written syrupy profiles of the small store, struggling in a world of megastores and online merchants. Forest found the sentimentality in the local papers and the sympathy from loyal customers awkward and embar-

rassing. Do people get weepy when a florist or a hardware store goes under?

They might, Forest thought. He decided that he wouldn't know.

The owners, a quiet gay couple, Charlie and Ben, had told Forest, just minutes before the incident with the red-haired woman, that it was now official: the days of the Book Bank were limited. He almost cried, then felt foolish for crying. But he liked his job. He had a quiet office in what used to be the vault (the store had been a bank from 1928 until 1972), and it was lined with galleys and signed copies of novels from visiting writers. Stacked in piles at his feet were the season's new catalogs, page after page describing the new ideas and visions that were about to be sent into the world. It was exciting work. Quiet work, but still, in its own way, exciting. When he had graduated from college in Michigan a decade ago, he had no idea such a job existed.

Now, soon, he would be unemployed. The owners were unsure about exactly when, but by the spring, for sure. One more holiday selling season to pay off some debts, a few months of selling off the inventory at absurd, low prices, and then the sale of the building. Then he'd be finished.



The morning was damp and gray, the color of concrete, and cold drizzle fell in a hazy mist. In the muted fluorescent light of the bus, the passengers turned blue. Forest imagined that they were all trapped in some giant freezer together. He got off on Capitol Square, where the last gold leaves tore themselves from slick, black branches and fell to the pavement. The air was heavy with six months' worth of winter, all of that cold and snow just waiting for a green light. Forest winked at the sky, as if he and the sky shared a secret. The act was involuntary and inexplicable, and when he realized that he had just shared a private joke with the earth's atmosphere, he shuddered. He would have to be vigilant. He would need to secure his sanity, while he was still sane enough to

secure it. He felt a headache growing at the base of his neck.

Forest unlocked the store and made a large pot of coffee at the small café the owners had added the year before, when the finances had already turned desolate. The café was crammed into a corner of the store, cluttered and disorganized; with its afterthought quality it projected the feeling of desperation. It was perpetually staffed by bored college dropouts, people five or six credits away from a degree in comparative literature or Asian studies, who for reasons financial, emotional, political, or all three, refused to finish their degrees. They often forgot to show up for work, so Forest had to start the coffee in the mornings and fill the bakery case with the freshly delivered scones and muffins.

Forest turned the digital sound system to the chamber music channel. Classical before noon, jazz after lunch; this was the rule at the store. It made sense. Forest had filled his life with rules just like that, and respected the rules of others.

He made the rounds, straightening the sections, moving stray novels out of the new nonfiction section and fitting them snugly back into the alphabetical rows of fiction and literature. He moved Nature texts out of Latin American Studies, and pulled reference books out of the Art section. He picked up abandoned coffee cups, stray bits of paper, a penny, a dime, a Post-it note with three phone numbers. He found a Post-it note on the floor: *Jim, Please buy cookbook you heard on NPR for Kate and Sue's housewarming. Ask at counter. Title something like Nude Cooks. I'll be home after tai chi.*

There were moments in the shop, before it opened, before any other souls wandered in through the door with that serious, puzzled look that washes over bookstore customers, when Forest felt something great and spiritual in the ordered presentation of books. He savored the smell of the wooden shelves, the burnt residue of coffee, acid-free paper, and ink. It reminded him of being young, of sitting in the pews of St. John's Ukrainian Catholic Church with his grandfather, Gregory. If you burned incense in the store, the smell would be

the same. The masses then were high masses two hours long, sung in Ukrainian. Forest knew the language, had understood every word, and, while the rest of the children shifted and whined well before communion, Forest stood as upright as his quiet grandfather, following along in his prayer book, mystified and overwhelmingly pleased by the order and ritual that started each week.

Here in Wisconsin, since O died, he'd become secular. There were no Ukrainian churches in Madison; this was a mark against the town—not enough Ukrainians with their square shoulders, short legs, thick necks, heads shaped like upside-down triangles. The land was a land of Scandinavians. In Detroit, Forest had never considered himself short. In a land of Swedish giants and hulking Finns, he found himself dwarfed and insecure.

At nine o'clock that morning, Forest booted up the computers, unlocked the doors, took a seat on the stool behind the front register, and began looking through a computer listing of the books that had sold the day before. Fifty-two titles altogether, a pathetic amount given the time of year. They should have been selling at least two hundred books a day.



At two o'clock, Forest had an appointment with Mack Fences, a sales representative from Benson & Miller Publishing. Mack was a relic in the book world—a sales rep who wore a coat and tie, who actually read most of the books on his list, who'd been with the same company for almost two decades. Benson & Miller specialized in the sort of literary fiction and narrative nonfiction that raked in the honors—Pulitzers, National Book Awards, NBCCs, even a few Nobel Prizes graced their list—but had very few best sellers. But this was Madison, and Madison never cared much for national best sellers; instead, Forest sold copies of Kant and Kerouac and Murakami at the same pace that airport bookstores could sell a new Danielle Steele novel.

However, what Forest liked best about Benson & Miller appointments was this:

Mack Fences preferred to sell his books over a cocktail in some dark barroom where he could smoke between sales pitches and sip gin and tonics. And Forest already was feeling his mouth go dry, and longed for something to drink.

Mack suggested they stop in at Paul's, where Jim, the bartender, knew them and always offered them the corner table with a small desk lamp, which they could use to better see the catalog copy. Mack was a homosexual with impeccable taste. He favored personal service and tended to tip generously, if not absurdly, and thus had devoted bartenders and waitresses in every town in his territory. Forest, when drunk, also had this tendency to overtip. Once, after a particularly saturated sales call, Forest and Mack both left a waitress fifty-dollar bills for a fifty-dollar tab, and all the way back to the bookstore, they remarked on the waitress's friendliness and grace. The last time Mack Fences had been in town, Forest had gone into a long, unrehearsed account of Petey's vet bill, and Mack had loaned him four hundred dollars. Mack had never had children and now he spent his money on needy adults who, for one reason or another, had not become mature enough to be financially solvent. Mack had loaned money to countless friends, to the oil change shop manager in his neighborhood, to his now-retired barber, and to the Avon Lady who called on him because he served afternoon cocktails, not because he had ever bought a thing.

While Mack went up to the bar to order the cocktails, Forest flipped through the pages of *Isthmus*, the alternative weekly, and read the personal ads. He always started at the back of these free weeklies; something about the desperate "Divisions" ads, the low-end jobs abundantly offered under "General Employment," and the free New Age self-help seminars always made him feel better about himself, no matter how low his mood.

Then, as smiling, smoking Mack Fences, in his Bill Blass suit and shining shoes, came back to the table with the gin and tonics, Forest read, under an "I SAW YOU" subheading, these words:

I SAW YOU: At Magic Mill. You, a blonde, fair-skinned woman wearing a Dearborn High School Swimming sweat-shirt and blue Yankees knit cap. I was man in jeans and gray sweater who told you about Serrano peppers. We exchanged a longer-than-casual glance again at register. You started laughing when I waved. I can't stop thinking of your green eyes and your smile. More pepper talk? Call ext. 3557.

Mack sat down at the table. "Now, the lead book this season is fabulous," he began. "I brought you a galley ..."

"That's her," Forest said.

"Who?" Mack said.

"Angela."

Mack turned around in his seat and looked toward the entrance of the bar. "Which one? Her?"

He was pointing at a sorority girl who was waiting on a table near the window.

"No. In this ad. Right here."

Forest pointed at the personal ad so furiously he almost punched a hole in the newspaper. "What are the odds that somebody else in Madison has a Dearborn High School swimming sweat-shirt?"

"Oh my God," Mack said. "Really? That's fabulous? I've always wanted to be in an 'I Saw You' ad."

"Fabulous?" Forest said. "No, it's terrible. I mean, and a blue Yankees knit cap! It's her. Somebody else loves her."

"Well, it's not like she's encouraged this," Mack said. "It's not that big a deal. I've seen her book jacket photo. She is very attractive."

"Don't you get it, though? It's a sign. Maybe there's somebody out there she'd be better off with."

"Oh, come on, you're being dramatic. Drink something."

Mack was nearly done with his gin and tonic and didn't like it when his drinking company fell behind him. Forest saw him motion to the bartender for two more drinks.

"Maybe she's already seen it. Maybe she's already responded. Maybe she's meeting him for a drink right now."

"No, that's insane. About this lead book," Mack said. "It's called *My Teeth Hurt*."

"How many should I get?" Forest said. The sales reps did not yet know that the Book Bank was closing. Charlie and Ben were still holding out hope that the holiday season would be their best ever, and they didn't want the publishing world lamenting their loss prematurely.

Ha! Forest thought. Ha!

"Do you want to know what it's about?" Mack said.

"No. I trust you. How many?"

"It's very good, it's about a dentist who moves to Guam with ..."

"How many?"

"All right, fine. Start with six, or maybe eight?" Mack said.

"How many are in a carton?" Forest said.

"Eighteen."

"I'll take ten cartons," Forest said, rereading the ad one more time.

"Ten? One hundred eighty copies? Isn't that a little high? I mean, it's good, but won't you just end up returning all of those copies?"

"You said it's good, right?"

"Well, sure."

"I'm the book buyer," Forest said. "I want ten cartons."

"Are you sure you're all right?" Mack said. "I mean, you're being, well ..."

"Inconsistent?" Forest said.

Mack frowned and took a long drag off of his cigarette. "Well, yes."

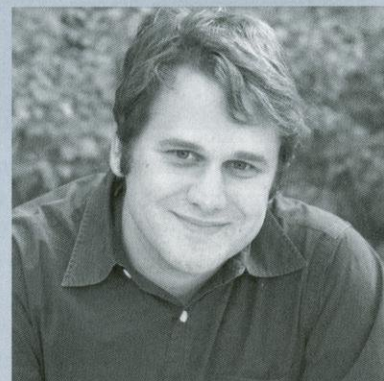
"I know," Forest said. "You've nailed it. Now, what's next?" *

Name: Dean Bakopoulos

Age: 28

Hometown: Detroit, but has lived in Madison since 1997.

Publication highlights: Work has appeared or is pending in *Zoetrope*, *The Believer*, *Highway 14*, *Madison Review*, *Prism*, and other journals. My novel, *Please Don't Come Back from the Moon*, will be published by Harcourt in February 2005.



What this program did for me: We don't have a culture or a government that's particularly keen on helping young writers. The MFA program at UW-Madison provided the kind of emotional and financial support a writer needs. My teachers in the program were heroes of energy and enthusiasm. I might have quit writing altogether had I not landed in this wonderful and bright community of novelists and poets.

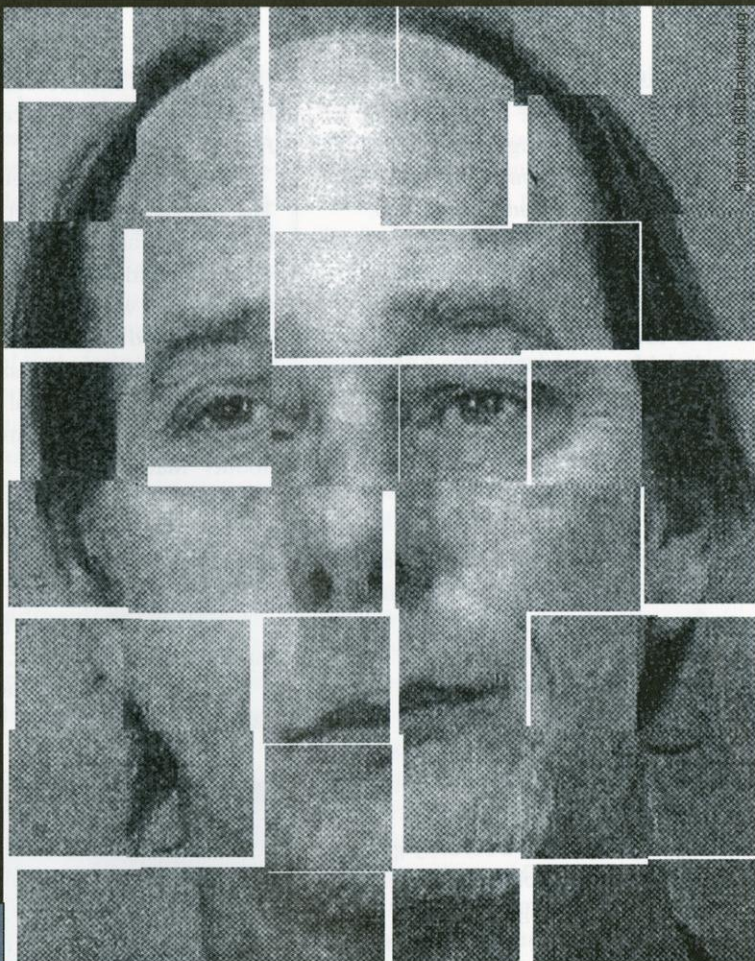
My plans after graduation: Keep making stuff up and keep writing it down. I am also excited to begin a new job as executive director of the Wisconsin Humanities Council.

What MFA peer Laura Fletcher says about Dean:

"Dean's work explores a narrative landscape where the ordinary dramas of working class and suburban Americans intersect with the profound, the spiritual and the bizarre. It's a world populated by addicts, slick salesmen, redeeming temptresses, poetic losers, and average guys fumbling toward self-knowledge. Along with all this comes a morose humor balanced by a refreshingly honest yearning for something in this world that's true. This is a narrative world that taps into a lot of what we're feeling in these dark and confusing times."

Suspenseful Build-up to Key Moment

BY LAURA FLETCHER



LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE DAY I FOUND THE BODY. Okay, no, let me tell you what the body looked like. Or let me tell you the story of the last five minutes before I actually found the body. You could let me tell you about the ride to the coroner's with the body in the back of the ambulance truck. Actually, that wasn't that interesting. The day before

I found the body I spent relaxing on the deck of my outdoor aboveground pool in the seventy-five-degree early summer heat sipping an icy glass of Crystal Light Lemon Flavored Tea, which has only five calories per serving, and reading *Time* magazine, which has, in my opinion, devolved into a tabloid. Perhaps you really don't want to hear this story. I spent most of that day there, until my wife came home at five-thirty-eight p.m. exactly, at which point I was commanded to put on a shirt and barbecue three chicken breasts, two for my wife and me and one for the dog. I normally wouldn't be caught dead drinking a

pansy drink like Crystal Light, except the higher-ups at the force say I'm over optimal performance weight. Wednesdays are my day off, you see. That was a Wednesday. What can you do with a Wednesday?

There was this one time I went fishing off the coast of Alaska, in this boat with these guys, old buddies of mine. Well, actually, I guess you couldn't really say we were all buddies, but we all liked to fish. Man, let me tell you about Alaska. It's cold up there. Remote. The guy at the bait store told me that he went to school in a town that was 168 miles from the next school. He grew up in St.

Lawrence Islands or something like that. If he wanted to go to another school, he would have to fly over the Bering Sea. How about that? I mean, how do they play football? Boys against girls?

Sometimes, before and after I found the body, I would try to go into the mind of the killer. To imagine what it takes to go that far outside of yourself, of your humanity, you know, to do what he did to that body. What he did was horrendous. You wouldn't believe it if I told you. Maybe if it was someone he knew, someone who'd abused him as a child, maybe then I could begin to understand, the way the hate builds up. This hate would have to be building a long damn time, obviously, given the circumstances I stumbled upon that infamous day. Yet they never knew each other, victim and killer. Sad, how that word victim seems so passive and the word killer so active, so vibrant. It's the "er," the German signifier that tells you a trade has practitioners. Being a victim isn't a trade. (My grandpop was German.) This sometimes leads me to imagine in the mind of the killer that it's not about disconnecting from your humanity, about being withdrawn. It's about being so immersed in your humanity and your human desires and conflicts and obsessions and your pitiful, petty, oh-so-human needs that you can't even see anything else; anywhere you turn to look it's you, you. The halls of the workplace are your scarlet galleries of gripes to pick, the church you go to glittering and candlelit with the wishes you think you deserve, your basement worktable a shrine at which you meditate revenge, your bed the sinking island where you bury resentment. I know you. But sometimes I think it's not worth remembering. I mean, it's not worth imagining at all. The murder. Because what it would take for me or you to go that far, it's incomprehensible. It's hard even to contemplate.

Like, sometimes I think about snapping the neck of my brother-in-law Barry right in the middle of a family outdoor barbecue, right at the picnic table in his big backyard, just because he's such a know-it-all prick who always needs to put me in my place to let me know that he went to college and got a computer

science degree and I didn't, and I don't have an in-ground pool or a fake tower on my just-built brick house or live in the right suburb with the nice schools, but I also think, immediately after thinking about snapping Barry's neck, that as soon as I'd felt that crack in his vertebrae and he was crumpled on the grass (he's a little man, it would be easy) and my wife had started wailing and pulling her hair and his wife had fainted, I'd feel really bad, you know? Especially with the kids dropping their food to come over and feel his body to see if he was really dead or what it was like to touch a dead man and the dog sniffing and maybe taking a lick or two. And "Fly Me to the Moon" by Frank Sinatra or some summer ditty like that playing in the background and the sky all bright and cloudless except for the arc of 747 exhaust that could be a rocket ship. And party hats, even. Maybe even party hats. It would be awful.

Then, after the trial, during which I would of course plead guilty (or maybe, just if my wife asked me to, insanity), I would be stuck in some cell with white walls and a single window by myself in a tan jumper, and I would have to think every day for the next twenty years about how I had killed my obnoxious brother-in-law and ruined my family's life, and even though a person is obnoxious, it doesn't mean they're a bad person, or if obnoxiousness is a sin, they still don't deserve to die for it, and anyway, how would my sister-in-law's kids get through life, especially college, though I think that Barry has an excellent life insurance policy. Anyway, they would hate their uncle. My sister-in-law, well, she would really feel like I had taken something from her, like I had robbed her of something vital, of something crucial to happiness or life, of her soul even, never mind the fact that she and Barry have been having a lot of problems lately and will probably get divorced. Barry hits her. Also he cheats on his taxes. Fortunately, I do not have any kids, so their futures will not be affected by this. Nor will the future of my dog, who never liked Barry anyway. But what about Barry's dog? I mean, can you just see Barry's dog, every day, waiting for five-thirty to come, lying by Barry's

favorite leather recliner in his personal library on the first floor in the rear of their huge, well, let's just say it, fucking mansion, grabbing Barry's slippers in his teeth and racing all the way across that fucking ridiculously huge castle every time the doorbell rang, only to find it was the postman, or an Amnesty International collector, or the cleaners? Imagine the endless cycle of that poor dog's life, always running back and forth, waiting for the moment that will never come. It's like those two Greek gods who had to push that boulder up that hill for eternity. It was Greek, right? Anyway, basically, I have sentenced that dog to hell.

And that dog of Barry's isn't even in good health these days. It's an old dog, maybe ten years. Running around like that could kill that dog. It could mean death on top of hell.

My wife, of course, though horribly saddened, would stand by my side through the whole ordeal, after raging and not speaking to me for approximately one month, because she's good like that, and she would always pray for my well-being in prison and look forward to my eventual release as a source of hope and a guiding light in her life. To be honest, she doesn't like Barry that much, either.

That settled, I would have nothing to do but feel sad about my horrible act, but the trouble is, it would be forever, all the time. Twenty years in that white room with the window, thinking about how I'd ruined things for my family, and it was all over the papers. An eternity times two. Maybe I would stop being sad when I got out. I would have paid my dues. The poverty my wife and I would have to endure living solely on her meager retirement pension would make up for any lightness of spirit I had finally achieved. Or maybe I would just get over it. I mean, hell, being dead's better than being in prison. That makes us even.

Except, there isn't really going to be any white room. I mean, who the hell am I kidding, I'm a cop, I know what prison's like. They're going to put me in an orange jumpsuit, not a tan one. But I'll only get that shit after they flatten my balls with the jet spray from a fire hose and examine the inner suitcase of my anus. They'll be mannish-looking women without lip-

stick or pity and pale, reptilian men with Nazi sneers and terrible childhoods who will offer me a pack of cigarettes in exchange for my life's savings and when I say no they'll laugh as they stroll away with my clothes and my wallet. Then, in my cell, which I will share with eight other hoodlums, all of them murderers, all of them half my age and twice my size, there will be the lice, and the public john, and the rapes. Terrible rapes upon terrible rapes at unforeseen intervals and all because I used to be a cop and I killed my own brother-in-law and I'm kind of pretty for a middle-aged guy. I will try to kill one of them with a paper clip like they showed us at the Academy, but it will backfire and the guy will cut up my face, disfiguring me for life. Then maybe they will rape me less because whatever sort of middle-aged prettiness I guess I may possibly have will have become hideous and disturbing. This wouldn't be so bad, except that it will frighten my wife at the visits and she will get so worried that she will start to lose her hair and she'll raise a ruckus to get me out of there, but it won't work, and eventually I will see that her hair has grown back and she's sleeping with other men. Meanwhile, every day I will have to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with Simon, a lifeless office worker who never made more than forty grand a year but cheated on the firm's taxes and got caught, and now his crooked boss is in rich guys' prison while we're both here. Simon recites tax laws and market trends at virtually every conversation, even when we're talking about sports and sex. He is my only friend, because none of the other guys want anything to do with me except to fuck; that is how low I've sunk. Not that I care anyway because they're all a bunch of brainless thugs and I probably arrested some of them myself. It's just humiliating with all the fucking. Plus the food stinks. I mean it stinks.

But wait, why should I have to go through all this, even if I did kill my brother-in-law? Isn't there a network, an order? The guys from the force will spread the word about me, and then maybe I will befriend Lutus, the seven-foot prison guard, who will help me wreak a cruel revenge on my cell mates

and perhaps, with the help of other unscrupulous public servants, upon the entire inmate population. I will decimate the prisoner hierarchy and insinuate myself into their rotten network, which I know so well and have suffered so long, which I have fought so vigilantly only to fail, to fall. Well, I will become the new head of the Latin Kings, the oldest, squarest ganglord that ever was, and with Simon at my side, why not, I will finally teach that outfit how to deal with the cops so that once and for all we can stop this stupid war. There will be an alliance, and the blue will work with the yellow and black to ensure that every suburban teenager gets an expensive taste of smack and that if we accidentally gun down a five-year-old in the Disciple neighborhood, nobody hears about it. We will crush the Disciples. We will crush the Folk. We will be tough with the Russians and Chinese and only moderately friendly with the Italians. People will see crime fall and will sing the praises of my old force, but meanwhile, I, the scum-sucking enemy and mastermind of it all, will be at the center of a ring of wealth, power, and wanton liberality. I and my pee-ons will bathe in the kind of excess that heads of state only dream about. And my hairless wife? Let her sleep with whomever she chooses. I can buy my women now. And buying is better. A bitch is better

bought. Better to buy. Better. Blissful. Bright. Be.

(Because the thing was, you see, it was really disturbing to look at the body and see it like that, it kind of opened something up, and I can't exactly describe it except that it's this terrible familiarity. I've always thought of myself as a nice guy; I just like to play a little sport and do a little fishing; if I had kids, I would be good to them, you know? In school I always had trouble speaking up in class. They called me gentle Joe. I'm not even a good cop. Me. I want to be a desk jockey. And it's horrible to be familiar with something so ugly; if you could only have seen the face, the victim's, what was left of it; what mind could make this mess? How? Why? I, me, used to run crying to my mother if I saw a baby bird on the street. I don't even kill bugs, me, unless I have to. I thought we might retire to some place warm and soft where they play a lot of bingo and swim in the evenings. But now that I've seen this body, there's just this, *oh*, there's just this recognition—*oh yes!* There you are! I always knew you were there! Well, this isn't any different than before, is it? It's that I should be scarred, but I'm not. I recognize it. It was there all along. An old friend. Hello.)

So let me tell you about the time I found the body. *

Name: Laura Fletcher

Age: 24

Hometown: Bartlett, Illinois, and also lived in Chicago.

What this program did for me: I went to the House on the Rock, Taliesin, and New Glarus and read a number of important authors.

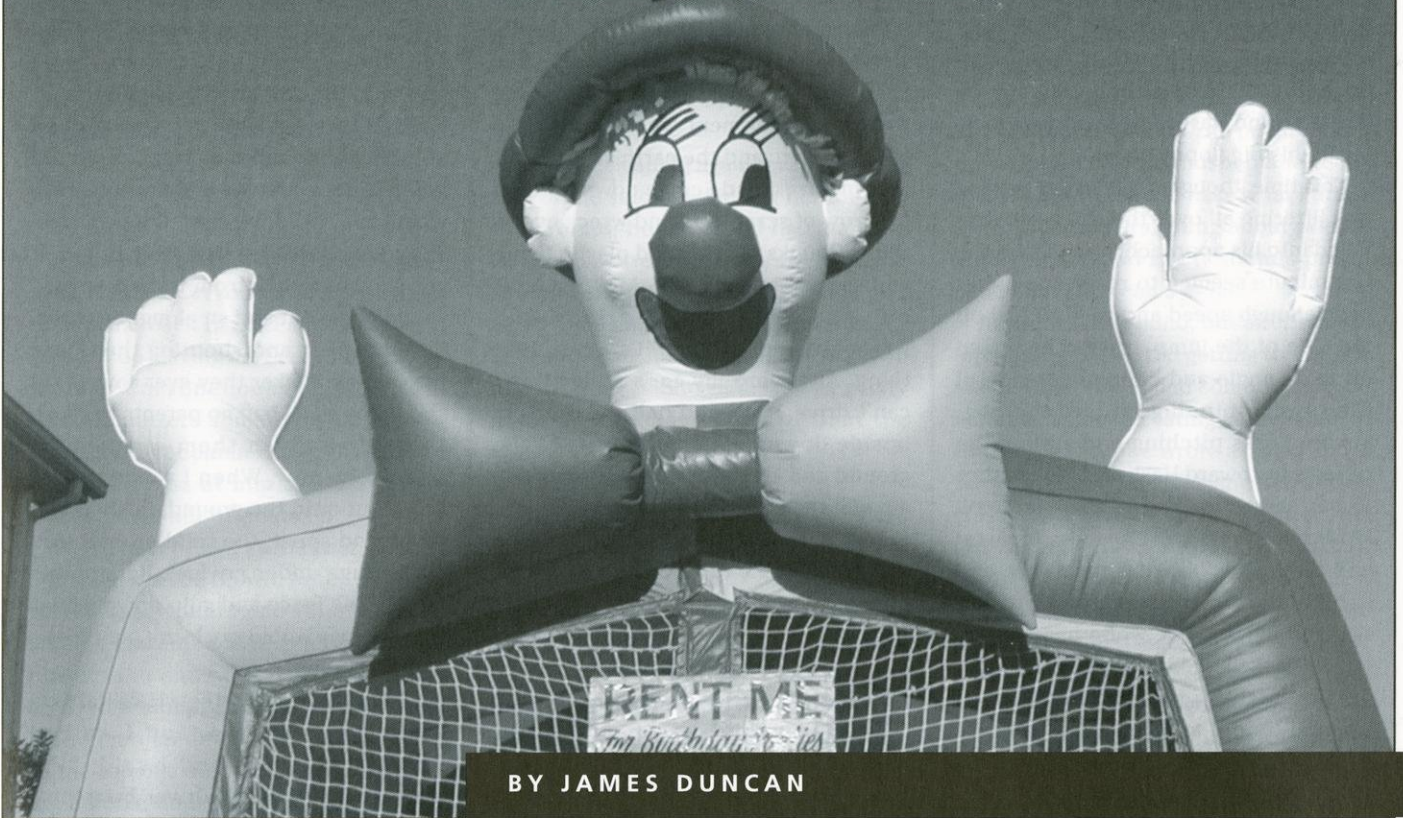
My plans after graduation: I will return to Chicago.

What MFA peer Kathy Richter says about Laura:

"I admire Laura's ability to experiment beautifully with the traditional structure of the short story, and also her talent for creating unique stories and characters that walk the line between the very funny and the very dark."



Demolition



BY JAMES DUNCAN

HALFWAY THROUGH OUR TACOMA DOME SHOW a car almost drops on Haskell. He comes up to me, dirt smeared into the smiling clown greasepaint on his face, and says, "Hey Malkowski, I'm still here, what do you think about that?" I tell him I don't give a rat's ass one way or another and I've got a Cannon Jump to do, so why doesn't he bug off. Out in the arena the show's still rolling: four drivers tear through a precision course, navigating a series of tightly placed columns at the other end of the stadium. The columns shoot fire in time with a pounding techno soundtrack.

Haskell laughs. He rips the green wig off his head and shakes it at eye level. Then he bugs off. He knows better than to mess with me: I've got no fear in me, none at all.

What happened was, we were running a Tower Crash, with a forty-foot stack of burned-out shells piled in the center of the arena. The idea is that Haskell walks

around the tower, leans against it, pretends to snap pictures like a tourist, gets the audience leaning forward in their seats, anticipating. Then all at once howling heavy metal guitars explode from the loudspeakers as Carvone comes hauling ass out of nowhere in a souped-up Pontiac Sunbird, mud flying out from under his back wheels. He hits

a jump in front of the tower and launches himself straight into it so that the audience gasps, like: *What's going to happen to the clown?* But if Carvone slams the tower straight like he's supposed to, the whole thing flies in one direction and Haskell dances away, kicking up his big floppy shoes.

This time, though, right away Carvone was jittering all over the place. He fish-tailed into his approach, and then at the last minute seemed to realize he didn't have enough speed and tried to bail off the side of the jump. Instead he jiggled off at an angle and clipped the side of the tower, spinning off into the dirt, sending cars pitching and sliding the other way, toward Haskell. All of us shot to our feet as the rest of the tower collapsed in a great twisting mass of metal and glass and rubber. Dirt flew up and hung in the air, the stadium lights cutting through in wide white beams onto where Haskell had been. We all stared.

Then Haskell's painted head popped up, and he did a little dance, and the crowd erupted into a frenzied, deafening roar.

June was with me when it happened. She leaned over and whispered, "*You damn well better not do that to me.*" Then she kissed me on the cheek. The show makes her nervous, even though I keep telling her, look, out there I'm in control, there are no accidents—just drivers who lose their concentration, and drivers who get scared. Carvone, he's been downhill for a while. Last year he took a steering column in the chest during a ramp-to-ramp, cracked three ribs and punctured a lung. He let it get to him. Now we can all see he's through.

After Haskell bugs off, the crew's out setting up the Cannon and June finds me. "Good luck!" she says, like she always says, because she thinks that has something to do with it.

The Cannon's ready for me so I strap into the car, the helmet wedged tight around my head, breathing the familiar smell of sweat and padding. Out in the arena an approach lane in the dirt leads to a long steel tube, angled upward. I'm going to hit the base of it at fifty, shoot up through the tripwire at the end to set off the explosion, and then hurtle out

into the open air. I've done it a hundred times. When I emerge from the mouth of the cannon all I see is the overhead lights and the fading edge of the explosion and sometimes the sky, and it's like I'll keep going forever. Then of course there's that moment when I reach the top of the arc and the earth starts dragging me back, and I come down hard on that row of scrap cars and wreck everything. Chunks of glass and plastic fly up and sparkle in the lights. My tires blow out and the chassis grinds and wrenches and squeals. It's a beautiful thing. Afterward my car's so bent up I can't drive away, and half the time I'm upside down, so I climb out onto the ground and throw my arms up into the air, and the cheering is enormous.

One of the crew guys waves me on and I shoot forward. Everything else falls away. I fly.



This is my third season on the tour, the Hell Raisers Auto Stunt and Demolition Thrill Show. We're the best in the country. Everything's run by Burt Lazzari, an old-time Hollywood wheelman who used to drive for the James Bond movies: *You Only Live Twice* through *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Anyone who knows stunts knows Lazzari. He thought up the ramps they used for the rotating jump in *For Your Eyes Only*, and drove it himself. I saw that when I was thirteen, before I busted out of St. Peter's Home for Children, on the tiny thirteen-inch television in what passed for the rec room in that place. My eyes went wide and I said to the other kids, "Holy *shit*, did you see that? That thing went upside down!" I couldn't even pay attention to the rest of the movie: guns, Roger Moore facing down the bad guy, rescuing the girl, whatever. I kept picturing that car twisting through the air, what that must have been like on the inside. I dreamed about it for weeks: the dizzying spin, the lurch in your stomach, the blur of the outside world.

I busted out of there when I was sixteen and got jobs working in scrapyards, rebuilding cars. Engines always made sense to me. I could take them apart, put

them back together six different ways, get them running however you wanted. At night sometimes I'd take one of those old junkers out into some grass field and see what I could get it to do—rope myself to the seats and then pull a bootlegger's turn, whipping the car around at forty or fifty miles an hour, or I'd roll it, flip it, set up ramps and try out a two-wheel run. I did my first Triple Three-Sixty out there, my first Dive-Bomb. It got so other guys from the scrapyard would come out and sit along the fence, drinking beer and shouting that I was the craziest fucker they ever saw, that I should be glad I had no parents because I would've given them eight heart attacks by now. When I was done I'd climb out onto the ground, flushed and dazed and spent, the solid ground feeling strange under my feet. I'd stumble over to the fence and gulp down a beer and the guys would say I sure put on one hell of a show.

When I was seventeen Hell Raisers came through town, and I walked straight up there and I said, "I'm Malkowski. I'm a stunt driver. I want in." They said, "How old are you, kid?" I said, "Old enough. I want to talk to Burt Lazzari."

They were impressed I knew who Lazzari was.

So Lazzari comes out, a tall guy with a belly and a thick graying mustache, and he's wearing this white polo shirt that says "Hell Raisers Auto Stunt and Demolition Thrill Show" in fiery block letters. Below that two cars flew past each other in midair while a third one drove crosswise underneath. I'd seen that stunt before. I pointed and said, "I can do that."

Lazzari crossed his arms, looking me over. "And what do your parents think about that?" he said.

I said beats me, they sent me out on my own when I wasn't even a year old—they didn't seem to care much then and I doubted they'd have anything to say about it now. I said I had references, which was true: six guys from the yards who would swear up and down I could do anything with a car, fix it up or tear it apart, roll it over and walk away like it was nothing.

Lazzari looked away like he was wrestling something through in his head. "I'll tell you what," he said, "you come along and we'll see what we've got."

I said my bag's right here, I'm ready, let's get rolling.



When the Tacoma Dome show's over Lazzari takes Carvone aside, and when they come back Lazzari says Carvone's going to be leaving us. Everyone gathers around. Carvone looks dejected and Haskell mutters something about how it's a good goddamn thing, the guy's a menace. I hiss at him to shut up. He glares at me, but he shuts up.

We've never liked each other, Haskell and me. He's the Clown. In the show he wears baggy pants and thick colorful smiling makeup and a small hat with a flower in it, and he acts like he has no idea what's happening all around him. He'll climb up and sit in a chair bolted to the top of a stock car and start reading a book, and he won't even look up when the car starts speeding off toward a pool of flaming gasoline. Or he'll come out with a broom and sweep dirt off one of the low ramps right as two lines of cars speed by on either side of him, inches away, and do parallel Two-Wheels. He hams it up for the crowd. He's comic relief. But he walks around here like he's the center of the show, like he's the one everyone's watching, because he's the only one of us out there without a shatterproof faceplate and a fire-retardant jumpsuit and a steel-reinforced roll cage. But all he does is stand still, stand still while the rest of us keep him alive.

We all say good-bye to Carvone. He tells us all to drive fast out there. We all say good luck to him. Then we get on the bus and start thinking about the next show.



June and me, we've been off and on since the start of this season. We met outside the back entrance after a show in Richmond. There was a line of girls

out there waiting, like there is sometimes. We came out and signed autographs and got our pictures taken and made small talk, and the girls said wonderingly, "Do you ever get hurt?"

"Not if you know what you're doing," we said.

June was leaning against the concrete wall of the stadium, kicking her toe into the ground, honey-blond hair hanging down into her face. I saw her and thought maybe she was just shy, so I went over and said, "I'm Malkowski." She said, "I'm June." I said, "How'd you like the show?" She said, "It was pretty good. I could have done without the clown."

I liked her right away.

We ended up in one of the back offices of the stadium together, so that I almost missed the bus back to the hotel. As I was running out I told her, "Look, I'm going to Philadelphia tomorrow, but come catch the show if we're back around here sometime." I liked her, but it's not like I could hang around. She said we'll see about that, then showed up outside the back entrance at the Philadelphia show with a black duffel bag and a wide-brimmed hat perched on her head like she was some kind of Southern belle. The guys remembered her, and called out, "Hey Malkowski, your prom date's here!"

"Surprise!" she said. She told me she was sick of Richmond, that she hated her job and had no friends, and she sat up in bed that morning thinking, over and over, *What am I doing with my life?* She said then she thought of me, and now here she was. She pushed the hat back on her head. "So what do you think?"

She waited, tugging at the duffel bag.

I said I thought she was crazy.

She came anyway. The guys ragged me about it, bringing along one of the backdoor girls, but then they got to like her. She hangs out with everyone during the shows, bringing the drivers water and whatever, and she'll stand with Lazzari and watch while I pound through four flaming barricades with Haskell clinging to my hood. "You say I'm crazy," she'll say afterward.

But she likes it, the life, being in a new city every couple of days. She started this thing where first off she always wants to go out and find a cemetery. She has a blue spiral notebook she carries around with her, and she likes to look at inscriptions and then write poems about them. When they're finished she reads them aloud to me and asks what I think, like I know the first thing about poetry, but I'll listen and say it sounds pretty good, and she beams at me.

At first I didn't mind, but after ten different cities it started getting to me, like she thought death had something to do with me. It started eating at me. Then in Oklahoma City she wrote a poem about burying me, and me burying her, and as she read it aloud I could see that this really was what she thought I was all about, and I blew up. I told her that if she thought she was trying to send me some kind of message she was out of her mind, and I'd had it with the goddamn tombstones and the goddamn poems, and nobody was burying anybody. She started crying and then grabbed her bag out of the bus and went hauling it down the street, the bag practically as big as she was, and she hadn't come back when we pulled out for Santa Fe. I thought she was gone. But then she showed up again in Phoenix, right in the middle of the show: I had my helmet on, and she got behind me and punched me hard in the back of the head. It didn't hurt me at all, but she had bruised knuckles for a week. She yelled that she was pissed off, and I was pissed off, so we might as well be pissed off together, and I was so glad to see she was back and okay that I took her out to the closest cemetery as soon as the show was over.

On the drive to Spokane everyone spreads out over the bus, laughing and joking. June and I sit together and watch the road go by. The bus is a 1981 Greyhound, long and spacious with blue seats. The guys like to talk about rolling it, about spinning it and jumping it, about how that would feel having all that mass behind you, around you, crushing everything in your way. Haskell sits in front by himself, a few seats behind Lazzari, and he mutters things

about how we'd probably all love it if the bus crashed, flipped over, and burst into flames, and I start to say something back, but then June tells me to leave him alone. She thinks Haskell's lonely. "All you guys talk about is cars," she says.

I tell her that's Haskell's problem as far as I'm concerned.

I know that when we get to Spokane she'll find a map somewhere and say "Come on, here's one, let's go," and we'll end up in some place like Ralston County Cemetery, acres of grass and stone and trees. She'll copy down things like "Tyler William Sweat/Born January 29 1892/Died February 16 1959/Erected by Christine S. Sweat, his sister" or "Crosby/b. and d. July 1 1929/Infant Son of Carl and Mina R. Crosby." We'll walk for an hour or so and then lie down in the grass and stare at the sky while she writes in her notebook, running fingers through my hair with her free hand, and sometimes now I like it: the quiet of the place, the stillness.



In Spokane we climb off the bus and there's a woman waiting for Lazzari, tall with light brown hair, fingering a purse strap over one shoulder. Lazzari stands there staring like he can't move. I say,

"Who's that?" June doesn't know but one of the guys pulls me aside and says, "Shut up, that's Lazzari's ex-wife."

"Holy shit," I say. I didn't know Lazzari was ever married. I've never even seen him with a woman.

What the guys tell me then is that Lazzari's ex-wife has been in Cleveland for four years. She used to come along on the tours with their twin girls, these cherubic little blondes, but then when the girls were six they wandered off at a show in Cleveland and disappeared. Lazzari was directing the show. His wife came up frantic and said the girls were missing, and he said okay, let's be calm, and he had the announcer give a call for people to be on the lookout for them. Lazzari said everything would be fine. But the girls were just gone. Afterward the police came, took statements, gathered photographs, and left. Everyone else went on to Dayton, but Lazzari and his wife stayed behind in the hotel. They talked to the police and sat by the phone. After two weeks Lazzari said look, we can't stay in Cleveland forever, we're not doing any good, if the police find anything they'll get in touch with us, I can't stand sitting in this city any longer. There was a big fight. Lazzari stormed out, left her there, and drove out to Oklahoma City, where the show

was. When he got there, they tell me, his eyes were wide and red and he looked like he hadn't slept in days. He didn't say anything to anybody.

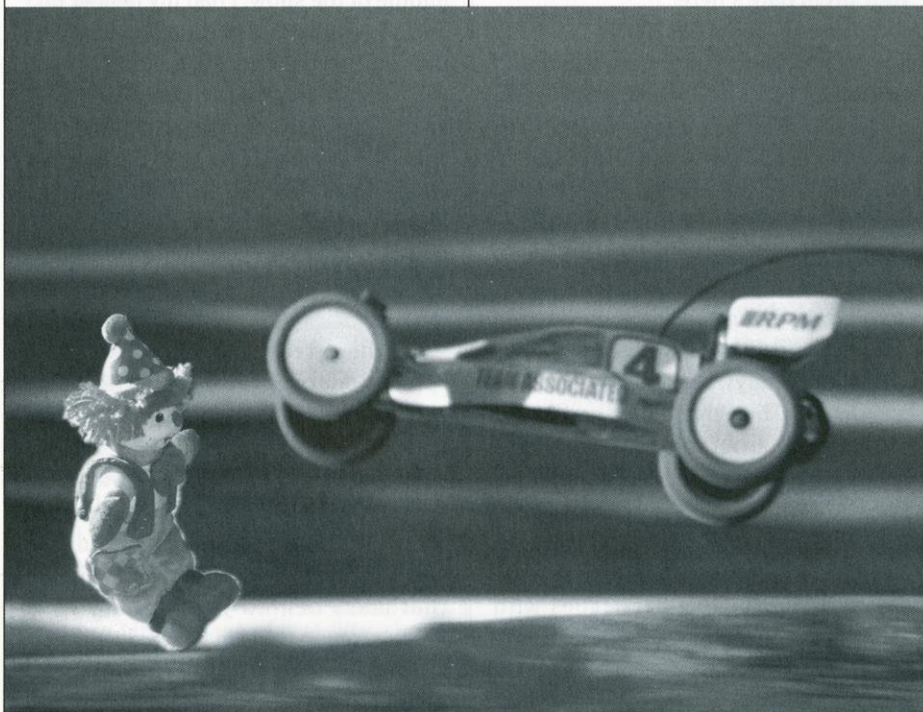
After that Lazzari was never the same. His wife refused to leave Cleveland, tried halfheartedly to kill herself with aspirin, then Fed-Exed divorce papers to Lazzari at the motel in Tucson. She said if he wanted to come to Cleveland she would take him back. He said he wouldn't ever go there again unless it was to come get his daughters. He never turned off his cell phone in case they called, even took it into the bathroom with him, kept it within reach of the shower, and every time it rang he would start and fumble for it. They say you could see that he was hopeful and scared every time of what they might say.

"Nobody talks about it," they tell me. "Don't say anything to him."

Outside the bus the woman says, "Hi Burt." She takes a tentative step toward him. We all pretend like we don't notice. We busy ourselves with our coats and bags, chat, say how good it is to be off the bus. It's warm out but June pulls the hood on her jacket up. When we've got our stuff we all head up to the rooms. I'm thinking about how I used to show June Lazzari's movies and explain what he was doing: how to stand on the emergency brake while cutting hard on the steering wheel into a skid, how to do a heel-and-toe dump into a lower gear without stripping the clutch out. We'd watch the screen, everything else dark, Bond's car squealing around a tight corner and inside there was Lazzari, younger and happier when nothing could stop him.



Lazzari comes up ten minutes later looking old. We're torn but finally we go knock on his door, crowd into his room. He's sitting on the bed with his head in his hands. We all shift our feet around. Nobody wants to be the one to ask what happened. Finally he looks up and tells us his wife wants a funeral for the girls. Not because they were found, she said, but because she says she can't go on like this, she's desolate, she needs this



so she can have her life back. She says she's going through with it, and that Lazzari can come if he wants.

We all look at the floor, the thin beige carpeting.

"When is it?" someone asks.

"A couple weeks," he says. "In Cleveland." His voice wavers a little. We all keep looking at the floor. After a minute Lazzari says he'd like some time alone, and people start to file out, touching Lazzari's shoulder as they pass. I hang back. I feel guilty for some reason. When everyone else has gone Lazzari looks up at me. "Malkowski," he says, smiling ruefully. "How's June doing?"

"Good," I say, which seems like entirely the wrong thing.

"She's a nice girl." He puts his head back into his hands. "God," he says, "I don't know what I'm going to do."

I look around the room for the first time, at the papers piled on the tables and chairs, the scheduling and vehicle lists and transport logs and spare part requisitions, the payroll files, the diagrams of choreography and timing. There isn't even a place to sit. Out the window I can see the transport bus taking up half the parking lot. And when I look back at Lazzari his eyes are full of an awful helpless sadness, a look like nothing I've ever seen before, and even as I'm ashamed to be doing it, I make some excuse and flee as fast as I can.

When I tell June what's happened, she looks stricken. She always liked Lazzari, how he took me on, how he let her come with me. "The poor man," June says. After a moment she asks, "Is he going?"

I tell her he didn't say and we didn't ask. How do you ask something like that?

"The poor man," June says again.



Lazzari's ex-wife stays around for the show. She sits in the back of the staging area. We're all polite, but we don't know how to talk to someone who's going to be sinking two empty caskets into the ground because there's nothing else to do. Even June keeps her distance. Lazzari walks around like he's drowning, like he's barely keeping his head above

water. I concentrate on the cars. I slam them around, sail through the air, jump fifteen crunched-up junkers and go *bang* right around in reverse on the landing. I do a Double Crossover Jump and a Simultaneous Reverse Spin with four other guys, weaving around Haskell, and it's like for that little time I see how June could feel sorry for him, that all he can do is stand there and act like he doesn't know. The audience loves how he barely survives every time, but he's a target. He's got nothing to do with it.

The thing about driving is that everything gets super clear, sharp: your body reduced to the width of the windshield, the press of the helmet encasing your head, the easy give of the pedals and steering wheel. There's no room for anything else. The audience is out there roaring, but you can't hear a thing except the engine and the pounding of your tires over the pitted ground and your own breath filling the helmet. Sometimes I finish and glide back off the floor and I'm surprised at all the people there, the other cars, the fuel lines coiled together. Someone comes and releases the harness, and after I climb out it's like suddenly I'm slow and soft, exposed. I've tried explaining this to June but she doesn't see, she doesn't see how it's hard to let go and come back out into this place where you've just got yourself, no armored roll cage built around you, where your feet are nothing but dead weights that can barely move. It makes me love her, that she doesn't see.



On the bus to Salt Lake City everyone's quiet. Nobody's talking cars, or barreling the bus off a jump. Haskell stares out the window and doesn't say anything. In Boise we ran the Tower Crash again with a different driver, and you could see he was wary, that he didn't want to get too close, that he didn't trust the guy. Afterward I waited for Lazzari to say something to him, but Lazzari was just sitting at the arena entrance where the cars shot out and didn't seem like he was seeing anything at all.

"Do you ever wonder about your parents?" June says to me. I've told her about St. Peter's and the scrapyards. She said she understands: she hasn't talked to her parents since she dropped out of high school at sixteen and hitchhiked east on her own.

I shrug. I don't see what there is to wonder about. A couple of teenagers, probably: kids who got scared.

"I bet it was hard for them," she says. "I bet they wonder about you all the time."

"Maybe," I say.

"Maybe they've come to one of your shows. Can you imagine? That they've seen you and never even knew it."

I don't have anything to say to that and she gets quiet again. I'm thinking about Lazzari, and Lazzari's ex-wife in Cleveland all these years. Then June leans her head on my shoulder and we watch the highway railing blur past.



In Salt Lake City things go to hell. We open with the columns of fire, and right off one of the drivers misses his timing and sideswipes his partner into a pool of flaming gasoline. Then someone else runs a jump too fast and misses the catch cars by about fifty feet: he comes down hard nose-first, and they have to pry him out with the Jaws of Life while the announcer keeps the audience distracted. June asks me what's going on, what's happening out there, and all I can tell her is that things will be fine.

Then Haskell flinches.

He's doing the sweeping bit, out on a ramp in the center of the stadium, busily brushing dirt from side to side, like he thinks the show's over and it's time to pack it all up. But of course it's not: we've got twin lines of cars driving counterclockwise around the edge of the arena, bumper to bumper at fifty, and then we split off and head for the ramp, to come up on either side and use it to bank ourselves up on two wheels with Haskell between us, sweeping away in that two feet of empty space. I'm in front of the left line, my fingers wrapped around the steering wheel, not thinking about anything but the speed and the

curve of the turns and the other line leader keeping pace to my right, and then we both cut hard left at the same time and the ramp looms up with Haskell in his bright clothes, and then in that half second before I hit the ramp Haskell looks up and he *twitches*, he jerks toward me, and for an instant through the windshield I see his face and his mouth open and his eyes wide like he knows what's happening but can't do a thing about it, and I've got no choice but to haul off away from him, plunge off the ramp, and the car behind me catches my bumper as I fall and then I'm flipping over, rolling, the harness cutting tight into my chest.

When I stop I'm upside down in the middle of the arena, damp with sweat. In front of me the seats slant away, filled with thousands of people looking down at me. The announcer's saying something I can't make out. I twist around in my seat and see Haskell, still on the ramp, looking around in miserable disbelief. Behind him is the wide door where the rest of the drivers and crew are standing, and even from here I can make out Lazzari and June, standing together at one end, both of them looking out at the wreckage. I pull my helmet off and let it drop to the ceiling and then try to climb out, but the harness is jammed, wedged tight under my arms and across my body and legs, and all I can do is hang there, watching her look frantically back and forth, watching her say something to Lazzari, waiting for someone on the crew to come and cut me free.



When I get in off the floor June comes running, saying, "You're okay? You're okay?" She throws her arms around me. "What happened?"

"Haskell," I say. "It was Haskell." The show has resumed behind me: flames shoot up from the floor as two trucks tear around in a circles. The audience is cheering like they don't even remember the mess we just had five minutes ago. But then again, that's what they're here to see: wreckage.

Haskell's sitting on a wooden crate in a corner looking at his hands, his wig on the ground next to him. Lazzari's crouched beside him, talking. I cross over and point at Haskell. "He flinched," I say.

"It happens," Lazzari says, looking up at me. "Nobody got hurt."

From behind me comes cheering and the boom of an explosion, and I realize that June's still next to me, feeling around my arms and my chest. As I shake her away she turns her face up to mine. I don't want to tell her what I see there: the relief in her eyes, but also the same look Haskell had just before I swerved off the ramp. Wide and helpless and afraid. I don't want to tell her that I see the fear in her, the fear for me, and I hate it. There's nothing I hate more.

"You're okay," June says, smiling.

I look back at her. I don't want to tell her what I see, that suddenly it's everywhere, on her and Lazzari and Haskell, who's still staring at his hands like he

could take hold of something and right himself. I don't want to tell her that when Haskell flinched toward me the world came rushing in for an instant and I thought of her, how she was watching me, how she was never sure what would happen when I drove out into these arenas, how for that instant I didn't know what she was doing there or what I was doing here. I don't want to tell her that if Haskell's eyes had fixed on mine, he might have seen that same look on my own face, that as my hands came loose from the wheel, I was just a guy strapped into three thousand pounds of metal and explosives, trying like hell to stay alive. ✱

Name: James Duncan

Age: 26

Hometown: San Jose, California, via Seattle, Washington.

Publication highlights: Work has appeared or is pending in *Santa Clara Review* and *On Wisconsin*.

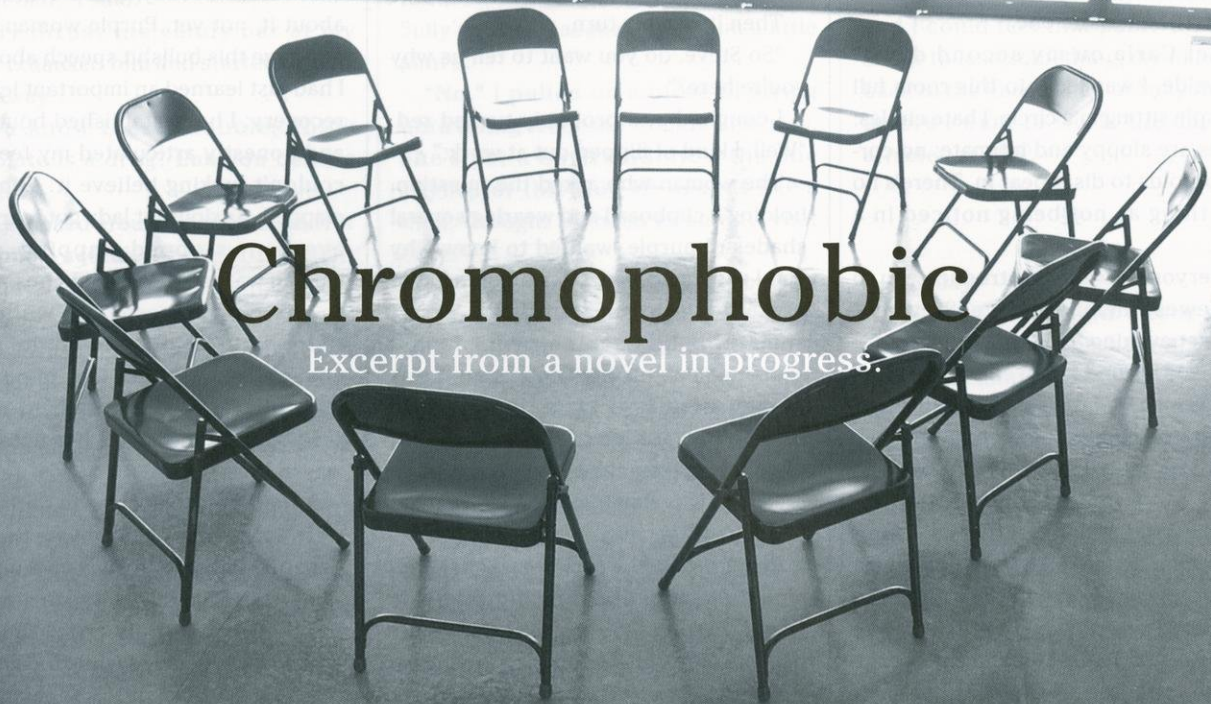
What this program did for me: Made me buy my first real winter coat and increased my coffee dependency. Also, I write more good.

My plans after graduation: Coffee rehab, then be a stay-at-home dad for my cat. Also to try and write even more good.

What MFA peer Denise Richter says about Jim:

"Jim's writing encompasses much of what I admire in good fiction. Reminiscent of George Saunders, Jim's work is often hilariously funny, driven by unique and quirky characters who, despite their bizarre circumstances, manage to engage their reader in a very real way. From a homeless Bible salesman to a grade-school nurse haunted by the image of auras, Jim has the unique talent of transforming the ordinary to the surreal, of rendering a disturbing yet darkly humorous depiction of a skewed American landscape and the profound loneliness and alienation of those struggling with themselves and one another to find their place within it."





Chromophobic

Excerpt from a novel in progress.

BY DENISE MILLER

THE WALLS IN SUNNYSIDE ARE MAUVE. To me the color is more pink, but Carla insists it's mauve. She says mauve is a soothing color, the color of choice for the insides of mental institutions, for chemical dependency treatment centers. She should know. This isn't her first time, or her second. Whatever color it is, I hate this color, the color of the insides of carnivorous plants, the color of my insides, the color of Pepto Bismol and

disorder. Soothing to me is white tile, something clean and non-porous, something that doesn't soak in everything that touches it. Carla told me if I had it my way, I would bleach all the color from the sky and comb the knotted labyrinths of tree branches into perfect straight columns. She really said that.

I was working the bumper car rides at Maple Bluff Park before my freakout. MBP is the reason I landed in rehab. Something about the place wrecked me. It gave me nightmares. It made me not want to sleep just so I wouldn't have to dream. I was going to work all frayed and stressed out because I really wanted to stay on top of things, to keep an eye out for the kids so nobody got hurt. It's

so easy for little kids to get hurt; they're like walking landmines, organs like water-filled balloons waiting to rupture. I tried everything to stay awake. I tried coffee, those energy drinks in the skinny silver cans, even these yellow jacket pills that truckers take, but nothing was doing the trick. One time I'd actually dozed off standing up, leaning against the wall at my post, and that really freaked me out. That's when I decided to talk to Harold.

Harold ran the hammerhead ride, a real puker that races you in vertical circles, upside down, like a pendulum with too much momentum. He was the kind of guy you'd never speak to unless you needed something from him, and only

then if you really had to. He was the kind of guy who would freeze the hammerhead upside down just to get a good look up a girl's skirt. It was Harold who'd suggested I try meth, but I didn't actually use it until the day I'd nodded off on the job. I thought of all the things that could have happened during those two and a half minutes I'd been out. Someone could have gotten hurt, and anyway, Harold was a pretty good salesman.

So I tried it. Caffeine had nothing on this stuff. I bought some, and for a couple of weeks, things were running in perfect order. I had those kids driving in counterclockwise formation, each one no more than a hand's width apart from

each other. Sure they complained, but kids are dumb as hell; they never know what's good for them. And nobody ever got hurt, except the one.

I met Carla on my second day at Sunnyside. I was led into this room full of people sitting in a circle. I hate circles. Circles are sloppy and intimate; no corners or folds to disappear in. There's no such thing as not being noticed in a circle.

"Everyone, I want to introduce you to our newest member, Steve. Steve got here last evening."

I looked around for an empty chair. An anxious-looking fat woman patted a seat next to her, smiling big enough to look kind of crazy. *Sit here! Over here,* she said.

I was afraid of her enthusiasm. I spotted Carla. She looked at me and gave a kind of upward nod with her chin. The seat next to hers was piled with stray papers, a notebook. I looked over at the anxious fat lady and made for the chair next to Carla. She let out a sharp sigh and took her time clearing her papers and moving them to the floor. I sat down and gave her a quick smile. She looked in the other direction and crossed her legs away from me.

All at once, just like in the movies, they all said, "Hi, Steve." I looked around. All eyes were fixed on me.

They went around the circle. Most of them looked older than me; Carla and I were the only ones who looked to be in our twenties. They told me their names and the drugs they were addicted to and the problems they'd caused and things I would never want to know about anyone. It was like they had no pride. I could feel myself blushing for them. I wanted to tell them to stop, to have some dignity. And because I was sitting in a circle I didn't know where to look; I just knew I couldn't look into their faces.

When Carla's turn came, her breathing changed to shallow gulps. The transformation was instantaneous, her voice sharp and deep and spiked like a puncture wound, composure crumbling like sheets of ash flying in the air. One by one, she pulled syllables from her mouth like razors strung on the thread of a sentence. She'd been drinking too

much, she said, and it made her self-destructive. A few weeks before, she'd tried to off herself.

Then it was my turn.

"So Steve, do you want to tell us why you're here?"

I coughed and probably turned red. "Well, I kind of flipped out at work."

The woman who asked the question, holding a clipboard and wearing several shades of purple, wanted to know why and I explained how I'd been doing a lot of meth at the time, but that it wasn't something I'd been doing for long. I explained my job, how important it was to stay alert, how I had to make sure that no one got hurt. The woman with the clipboard leaned forward.

"Steve, why don't you just tell us what happened?"

Purple. Who the fuck wears that anymore? I remember thinking that this woman with the clipboard, she probably has one of those vibrators shaped like a dolphin. She probably thinks she's a goddess, someone who aligns her chakras and shit. Purple.

"Look," I said. "I'm basically here because I overdid it on the speed. It was a one-time thing. I just had a little incident at work and the drug test didn't come out clean, that's all. It's all pretty circumstantial, really."

Purple bitch persisted. "You still haven't told us what happened."

I fidgeted in my seat. I looked away and stared off, but that doesn't work in a circle. She pressed and pressed, asked the same kinds of questions in different words over and over again. My brain was throbbing and when I couldn't take it for another second, I stood up, ready to call the social worker, ready to tell her I'd changed my mind, that I would take the three months of prison, the possibility of anal rape, parole, anything.

Carla pulled me back down in my chair. Purple woman was still poised on the edge of her seat, waiting for me to say something. Her pants were purple. Her socks, oh Christ. Everything.

Without moving her lips, Carla whispered something, urgently, out the side of her mouth.

"Say you're not ready."

I didn't need any coaxing. I was desperate. So I said it. I told the purple lady that I wasn't ready, that I couldn't talk about it, not yet. Purple woman smiled and gave this bullshit speech about how I had just learned an important lesson in recovery; I had established boundaries and honestly articulated my feelings. I couldn't fucking believe it. They even clapped. Anxious fat lady got teary. After everyone stopped clapping, purple woman warned that I would be expected to share my experiences while I was there, but for today I had done good enough. I shot Carla a look of pure gratitude. She rolled her eyes at me and scribbled something in her notebook. I was in love.

After that I stuck close to Carla, and it wasn't too bad. She taught me the things I needed to know to survive Sunnyside. They were little things, strategies, really, but they made a difference. Things like how to look engaged while focusing just to the right of people's faces. How to give up the easy details, the unimportant, and make them sound like deep, painful secrets. How to mix enough truth with fiction so I'd never have to give something up that I didn't want to. *What they want is surrender,* she'd say. *Just remember that the harder it comes, the harder their breakthrough. Whatever you say, just be sure to make it sound like it's the hardest thing you've ever said in your life. If they think they got something good, they back off.*

In group sessions, Carla and I would compete to see who could do a better job faking everyone out. We'd give tips on how to improve our performance. Carla was always better. She had more experience.



Sully came to visit halfway through my stay. I didn't want to talk to him at first because the day I'd been arrested, he'd called my parents to make bail. He knows how I feel about my folks. When I met him in the rec room, he was flipping through some motorhead magazine, a candy bar balanced on his knee. When he saw me, he stood up too fast and clasped me in an awkward hug.

"How are you, man? How's it going here?"

"Not bad," I said.

Sully thrust the candy bar at my chest. I thanked him and started in on it right away.

"You know these assholes think chocolate is a drug? Can you believe that shit?"

Sully looked around, nervous, and for a second I actually thought he might take it away.

"Oh. Sorry. Is it okay?"

"Oh Jesus. Please tell me you're not serious."

Sully stood frozen for a second and then he laughed and slapped me on the arm.

"You know I was just fucking with you," he said.

I knew that he wasn't, but I went along with it anyway and we sat down and shot the shit for awhile. Sully talked about his car project. He knew I didn't know half of the lingo he used, much less care, but I enjoyed hearing him talk anyway. I kind of missed him.

I asked him what was new at home.

Sully rubbed the back of his neck. "Not much."

I knew Sully well enough to know he wasn't telling me something. Carla wandered in and sat down beside us.

"Sully, this is Carla."

Sully stood again and offered his hand. His hot rod magazine fell to the floor. Carla looked at the magazine and then at him. She didn't get up.

"Charmed," she said.

Sully turned red and sat back down.

"Hey, Carla. It's nice to meet you, but I was wondering if I could have a minute alone with Steve. I kind of need to talk to him about something personal."

"Like what?"

Sully started to stammer. I asked Carla to give us a minute to talk. She sighed like she had that first day I met her, and got up, very slowly, and walked into the adjacent room.

Sully shook his head. "What's her problem?"

"Oh, nothing. She's cool; she's the only thing that's kept me together in this place. You'd like her if you knew her. I think you two would really hit it off."

Sully didn't look so sure.

He asked me if I had a thing for her. I focused my gaze just to the right of Sully's stare. I laughed, gave him a little shove.

"No." I pulled on a piece of string unraveling from the couch. "No way. She's got a boyfriend. He's the one paying for this shit. He sounds like a dick, though. He hasn't come to visit once."

I could feel his eyes on me. I could feel his internal lie detector taking my pulse, measuring out the bullshit from the tone of my voice. I don't know why it mattered so much, but I wanted him on my side.

"I think the only reason she's here is to get away from him."

"Wow," Sully said. "Some people just break up."

"Well I'm sure it's a lot more complicated than that." I said it a lot louder than I meant to. I was getting rattled. One of the RNs looked in on us from the next room.

"Hey. I'm sorry. None of this really matters. I mean, you're here to get better, right? That's the important thing."

I crossed my arms and frowned. I couldn't believe Sully was being such a tight-ass.

"What do you mean, get better?"

Sully looked away and rolled his magazine in a tight cylinder.

"Forget it, man. Forget it. It's just good to see you."

I asked him what he wanted to talk to me about and he said it was my folks. They'd been calling him the last couple weeks and asking him to talk to me about coming out for a visit. I said no fucking way. I don't like to talk about my parents; we hadn't spoken for years. Sully knew why. He reminded me about the bail and how they'd arranged for me to go to Sunnyside. I said it again, slowly this time, and more calmly. No. Fuck no. I didn't ask for this, for any of it, and he never should have called them to begin with. We sat there for a minute without even trying to make conversation, and when it was clear that neither one of us was going to, Sully got up and said he'd be back to pick me up when I was dis-

charged. He clapped me on the back and said goodbye.

After he had left and my throat seized and I could feel that panic that I was about to lose something, my mind went back to the image I had of Sully that day before I went to work, the day I was arrested at MBP.



The day:

Sully out in the yard, taking his car apart and putting it back together again, and me, leaning over a hand mirror in the bathroom, chopping it up, lining it into two uniform ridges, one always a little longer, a little wider than the other. Starting over again. It's never perfect and it's getting ridiculous and I have to go to work. There's this burn after, searing white hot; a blackness inking over Sully outside the bathroom window, over him and the car and the ground and everything else, the grabbing at the side of the head and maybe even crying out for a second, the introduction of light and the color, perforated lines of focus cutting landscapes into my vision. It's way too bright outside. It smarts like too much horseradish or something too sour only much stronger than that and directly on the brain. I haven't slept and I'm still exhausted but now I'm exhausted and startled like someone has scared me from a deep sleep. My heart has the beat of a small animal, a frightened rabbit. I put my hand over it and try to count them but there's no time for that. I don't want to go to work but I have to. Someone could get hurt and nobody else seems to give a shit. Kids, running around all over the place like they're fucking immortals, like nothing can stop them, and I need to be alert, super alert so I can save them from their stupid selves. The burning travels to my ears and pulses there loudly. I go outside. I scream goodbye at Sully so I can hear myself over the noise in my head and a greasy arm emerges from beneath the car and waves. That's Sully. He's always like that, partly beneath some car, his dirty blue jeans sticking out, trying to figure out what goes where, how to make it work again. He can do

this for hours and it still makes him happy.

Carla had technically checked herself into Sunnyside, so when my time was up, she decided to check out. There were ten of us leaving that day and there was a lot of luggage and people and hugging going on in the lobby. Carla didn't want to go back to her boyfriend, and she hadn't called to tell him she'd checked out. I told her that she could stay with Sully and me for a week or two until she figured out where she wanted to go.

Sully was pissed when he saw me standing on the curb with Carla. I loaded some of our luggage in the front seat next to Sully for an excuse to sit alone with her in the back. I could tell that his first impression of her still hadn't worn off yet. He kept asking her, as we were driving home, if she was sure she didn't want to be dropped off at her place. It was no trouble, he kept saying, really. Carla wouldn't look him in the eye, even in the rearview mirror. She leaned her head against the window and spoke softly. She answered the first few times he asked; she said no, she didn't want to go back there right now, and after that she closed her eyes.

I told Sully I didn't think it was a good idea for Carla to go home yet, and neither did she. Carla needed someone who could keep an eye on her, and personally, I didn't have a whole lot of confidence in her boyfriend. I mean, how great of a boyfriend could he really be if he couldn't even stop her from trying to off herself? He practically slept through her whole suicide, for Christ's sake. I thought I could explain all this to Sully later and then he'd understand and not be so down about her crashing with us.

Carla nodded off twenty minutes into the drive. I could tell by the change in her breathing. It was slower and deeper and she wasn't holding her breath like she did sometimes when she was awake. Sully was dead silent. Once in a while, I would catch him giving me a look through the rearview mirror. Carla was wearing a blue dress with short sleeves, arms splayed out. Her boyfriend's dad had given her boyfriend the set of X-acto knives for wood carving but Carla had

used it for something else. Sully made a point of looking at the scars and then at me.

"Nice."

Every time I caught him looking, I'd look away and act interested in some natural wonder we were passing by. A blackberry bramble. A pile of dirt. Carla's head shifted at a turn and leaned toward my shoulder. Her mouth was slightly open, relaxed. We were barely touching, but I could feel all the hairs on my arm standing up and stretching out to touch hers.

I helped Carla with her bags when we got home and took them to my room. I told her I'd make up the couch for her when she was ready to go to bed. It was starting to grow dim outside and something about that kind of light makes me not know what to do with myself. She looked beat. I went to the bathroom. When I came back, she was out cold, lying on my bed with her shoes still on. I slipped them off and went into the kitchen to talk to Sully. He was sitting at the table playing solitaire and drinking a beer. I sat down across from him and asked if he wanted to play some poker. He looked up from his cards and shook his head at me, frowning.

"Didn't they teach you not to gamble in rehab?"

I ignored him and changed the subject. I asked him about his car. No response. I commented on how clean he'd kept the place, but he just kept shuffling his cards, not saying anything. He slammed the deck on the table and told me to cut. I did.

"What's up with this Carla chick?"

Sully snatched up the deck again and started shuffling. I drew invisible hatch marks on the tabletop with my thumbnail. Sully was red-faced and he had sweat stains on his chest and under his arms. I could tell something was really eating him because his nostrils were flaring every time he'd exhale.

"She just needs a place to crash for a while," I said. "She's not moving in or anything." I peeled my arms from the table. It was hot out. "Shit. I thought you'd be cool with that."

Sully tucked a grimy strand of blond hair behind his ear and laid into the cards.

"Straight poker," he said. He slapped down a hand for each of us and then slapped the rest of the deck between us. I picked up my hand. I had nothing.

"Hey Sully. What's that game called where you win with the worst hand?"

Sully fanned his cards out in front of his face.

"Lowball." He looked over his cards at me and I thought I might get a glimpse of his brain. The insides of his nostrils were pink, that awful pink I hate. Like the insides of seashells.

"Let's play that."

Sully's jawbone flexed and all I got was the sound of his teeth gnashing.

The air felt thin and taut, like something shitty was about to happen. My stomach tumbled to the floor.

"Come on," I said.

Sully glared from across the table. "Look asshole, that's not how it works. You can't just choose a new game after you get dealt a crappy hand. We're playing straight poker."

I threw my cards down, partly because he'd pissed me off and also partly because I was going to lose anyway.

"What's your problem? I just got out of fucking *rehab* and you're being a complete asshole." I got up and started for my room. "This is bullshit."

Before I could get very far, Sully latched onto my wrist. He stood a head taller than me. Sully was a big guy.

"Yeah, walk away. Good plan. That works pretty well for you, doesn't it?" Sully constricted his grip. "You know what's sad? This is the only way I can make you listen. That's fucking sad."

I tried twisting away. His fingers dug deeper into my wrist. I could smell his breath. It smelled of beer and cigarettes and grape Sweet Tarts.

"What the fuck, Sully? What's your problem?" I tried wrenching myself loose from him, but I was getting nowhere. Sully held tight.

"What's my problem? I've got all sorts of problems, Steve. Want to hear them?"

I didn't, but I could see that wasn't going to stop him.

"Here's one. Remember your sketch-ball friend Harold? He lifted my fucking tools while you were in rehab. You know how much those tools cost me, Steve?"

I swallowed.

"Three grand," he said. "You got that kind of money?"

He knew I didn't. It was a question I wasn't supposed to answer. A rhetorical question. A scolding.

"How do you know it was Harold?" I asked him. "It could have been anyone."

"But it wasn't anyone. It was your speed freak drug dealer friend."

I didn't argue Harold's integrity. I couldn't. I knew it was probably true. The last time Harold had come by, I'd seen him sliding his hand across the red Mac toolbox, openly admiring the contents the same way he'd admire the underside of girls' skirts hanging upside down in the hammerhead ride. It had made me briefly uneasy even, but I'd forgotten. I looked away.

"Look. If it was Harold who stole your shit, I'm sorry. I'll track him down. I'll get them back for you."

"Oh! You're sorry. Well, that makes it all better then."

I told him to let go of me, but he wouldn't. Sully asked how long we'd known each other. His nostrils were getting bigger and bigger. It was all I could think about. It's like they had a whole life apart from him.

"A long time," I said. "Are you going to let go now?" I stopped struggling. Sully was stronger than I was.

"That's right, a long time. I've put up with a lot of shit, you know? And I think I've been pretty patient and understanding, but I'm really sick of you fucking everything up. It's depressing. And it screws with *my* life; did that ever occur to you? You think I like calling your folks and telling them their son's in jail and I need to bail him out? You think I like getting my tools lifted because you bring shitty crankheads to our place? Shit, I'm a mechanic. What do you figure a

mechanic does without his fucking tools?"

Pink nostrils. Worm pink. Newborn hamster pink.

"I never asked you to call them." I tried yanking my arm away from him one last time. He was oblivious. It was like I was there just so he could yell at me, like he was my dad or something. I could have been a life-sized cutout Steve. I could have been a wall or a chair.

"You know for most friends, that would be enough bullshit. But no," he said. "You have to go and drag some suicidal chick you met in fucking *rehab* to our house to live with us without even asking me. How do you think I like that?"

Sully's nostrils looked like a manta ray swimming through the ocean. His breath quickened and I thought for a second that he was going to hit me. Sully had never hit anyone before.

"What was all that *for*? Shit, Steve. What did you *do* in there for three months?"

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I opened my mouth to speak, but he cut me off.

"You threw it away, that's what you did. Just like every other fucking thing. Three months you could have used to straighten shit out, make good use of your folks' money, get some help. But you just don't care, do you? You don't care about anything."

"That's not true." I couldn't believe what a hypocrite he was being. "I brought Carla here, didn't I? I brought her here because she needs someone to look out for her. You're the one who doesn't care. She's just some suicidal chick to you, invading your space. That's cold."

Sully's nostrils, hovering above me like some freakish, ghostly sea creature.

"That's the thing, Steve. What makes you think babysitting some girl is any good for you right now? What makes you think you even can? You can't take care of yourself. You can't even take care of a bunch of kids riding *kiddie* rides."

My eyes were stinging and it was me who punched him. Blood gushed out of his nose. He let go of me and his hands flew to his face. Blood ran down his fingers and down his arms. He didn't look like a manta ray anymore. The sight of him made me sick and dizzy. Blood dripped down his sweaty tee shirt and made perfectly round drops on the white linoleum. I started to gag. Sully was screaming at me, saying *fuck this* over and over again and I was so out of it I hardly noticed him walking past me a few minutes later with a duffel bag, out the door and into his car. His wheels squealed. They kicked dust all over his taken-apart car in the front yard, his permanent project, all over the already dusty screen door still swaying from the slam of his exit.

Carla walked out of my room and asked what was going on. Her hair was messed up, her eye makeup smeared a little around her eyes.

"Nothing," I said. She didn't look convinced, so I told her I didn't feel like talking about it and that I'd tell her in the morning. She went back into my room. I went outside and watched the bats fly in lopsided circles in the sky as if there

wasn't any blood on the floor, as if the hand I hit Sully with wasn't still burning from the impact of his face.

Sully didn't come back. He sent his friend Rob over to pick up some more of his things and to give me the message to find another roommate. Rob handed me an envelope with a month's rent inside.

"I heard you hit him, man. That's fucked up."

I took the envelope and counted the money.

"Sully says he'll be back to get the rest of his stuff after he cools off. He's pretty steamed, though. It could be a while," he said.

I didn't say anything. I just turned around and walked back into the house, the tumbling feeling back in my stomach. Rob stood there for a minute and then he left, shaking his head and muttering something under his breath.

Sully and I had band practice together in the sixth grade. Neither of us liked band and neither of us ever learned how to read the music. We both played horns, Sully the trombone and me the trumpet, and together we sounded terrible, like large game in heat or in the throes of violent death. We screwed off and drew dirty pictures on our sheet music, blew spitballs at the clarinet players in the front row. The day we got our report cards, we'd high-fived each other because both of us had flunked the class.

After Rob had rounded the corner, I counted the money again and again and focused very hard to keep my eyes from burning. In sixth grade it was cool to fuck up. I folded the envelope and stuck it in my back pocket. Fucking up wasn't cool now, I thought. Not anymore. *

Name: Denise Miller

Age: 32

Hometown: Portland, Oregon

What this program did for me: The MFA program has been a challenging, dwarfing, and amazing experience for me. Much like an earthquake or maybe winning the lottery, I don't think I will truly understand the significance of its impact on my writing until I have had adequate time to recover.

My plans after graduation: I plan on finishing a novel in the works, sending my stories out, and applying for writing fellowships. Other than that, I guess more than anything, I want to unwind, move out of Madison, and see as much of the world as I can.

What MFA peer Luana Monteiro says about Denise:

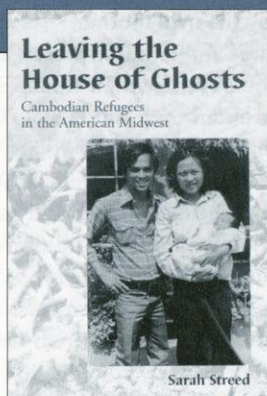
"Her work is distinguished by a wry, sometimes savage prose, which dissects the surreal and ridiculous landscape of American society, from the rarefied halls of academia to the stagnation of suburbia, with the glee of a freshman vivisectionist. In the tradition of Don DeLillo and T. C. Boyle, Denise explores the spiritual and physical isolation of our consumer culture and the pathetic, heartbreaking tactics its members will occasionally resort to just to take the tiniest sip from the milk of human kindness.

Although her characters are often social misfits, plagued by insecurities and strange pécadillos, disaffected by their role as outcasts, the reader is never afforded the luxury of feeling smug or superior to them, because above all, they serve as mirrors to the psyche of every modern American. More than anything, Denise's characters, their predicaments, their desires, are hilariously human."



From the Killing Fields to Cornfields

A Wisconsin author gathered life stories of people who fled the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia to find sanctuary in the American Midwest.



Sarah Streed grew up in Minnesota in a family that included foster brothers from Cambodia, an experience that led her to document their stories and those of other Cambodian refugees in her book, *Leaving the House of Ghosts: Cambodian Refugees in the Midwest* (McFarland & Company, 2002). The Cambodian people continue to be at the heart of her life. Streed now lives in Stoughton, Wisconsin, with her husband and five children, two of whom are Cambodian. Here we present Streed's account of why she came to write about "Khmer Americans"—refugees from the Khmer Rouge's brutal regime under dictator Pol Pot in the 1970s—as well as book excerpts about refugee Sophea Mouth, whose extraordinary journey took him from the killing fields of Cambodia to a Lake Geneva dairy farm and life as a professional in Wisconsin's capital city.

Excerpt from *Leaving the House of Ghosts: Cambodian Refugees in the American Midwest*, by Sarah Streed (McFarland & Co., Inc.) © 2002. Available from local bookstores, libraries, and amazon.com, as well as from the publisher at www.mcfarlandpub.com.

BY SARAH STREED

WHEN MY CAMBODIA-BORN FOSTER BROTHERS arrived at our house in Excelsior, Minnesota, in the early 1980s and faced me, my siblings, and our parents as their new family, they were teenagers, but ancient in the ways of the world, having survived the autogenocide, escaped to refugee camps in Thailand, and emigrated to America as refugees.

Some eight years later I became interested in writing down their amazing stories. Ruminating upon my foster brothers' undesired roles in that horrifying portion of history prompted me to think that perhaps I could put together some sort of literary record of their lives and that time.

I began to interview survivors: my foster brothers, one brother's wife, another's friends. The project grew. I wanted to do more than record the stories that chance had placed near me; I wanted stories that together would paint a complete picture of Pol Pot's brutal experiment in Communism from 1975 to 1979.

The book could have been written in a much shorter period of time, but I was able only to work on it for so long before my emotions overwhelmed me. I vividly remember writing about how Sinn and Noeun were wrenched from their families and put into labor camps around the age of five, then shutting down my computer and grabbing the car keys to pick up my own still-innocent five-year-old son from child care. Or encouraging my

ectomorphic daughter to eat more breakfast and then working on the paragraph in Prum's story where her mother gives her the last grains of rice. Or writing about Sokhary You giving birth on the mountain without doctor or hospital and only a rusty pair of scissors to cut the umbilical cord, then recalling the difficult delivery of our third child and realizing that we would not have made it without hospitals and modern medicine. At times like these, I had to stop writing.

Around the time I was finishing the book, I was driving home one evening and, as I made a rather sharp turn onto our street, one of the children's history books slid into my line of vision. I glanced down at the title, "American History," and it struck me that our two adopted children of Cambodian ethnicity probably wouldn't be able to find their history in it. Our three birth children can look in a history book and read about how, 200 years ago, their ancestors came over on a boat from Sweden, but the American history of our two adopted children starts 20 years ago

with refugee camps springing up in Thailand in response to the huge numbers of refugees fleeing Cambodia. I realized that, in a sense, I was writing a book of history for Khmer Americans.

And so to reach the beginning of our story, we must leap across continents and back in years to a small southeast Asian country in 1960. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had achieved independence from the French in 1953, had just been named head of state under a constitutional monarchy. He ruled his kingdom like a gentle father, benignly smiling at the prosperity and plenty. The ruling classes lived in the capital city of Phnom Penh or in the big city of Battambang in the north, while farmers grew rice in the countryside. People had enough to eat, and—just as importantly—they lived in peace.

AGAINST ALL ODDS: THE STORY OF SOPHEA MOUTH

In 1963, the Year of the Rabbit, a baby boy named Sophea was born to Mouth (pronounced “moot”) and Savorn Ouk, a young couple living in the city of Battambang near the western border of Cambodia. Savorn had already borne two children: a girl, Sophal, and a boy named Sameth. Mouth was serving in the Royalist Army, so the family lived in the military compound. Cambodia was at peace under the direction of Prince Sihanouk, although with each passing year the Vietnam War increased in scope and moved ever closer to this small neutral country in southeast Asia.

As was the custom, Savorn took the children with her every morning to the community basin in the middle of the compound, where she met the other women at the army base to wash clothes, draw the water for daily use, and gossip. One morning Savorn put six-month-old Sophea on the cement wall of the basin so her hands could be free to wash the family’s laundry. While she was washing and talking with the other mothers, the baby somehow managed to maneuver himself to the edge of the

basin and fall in. Finally Savorn noticed and pulled him out.

Shortly after, the baby became sick and ran a high fever. Savorn didn’t know what to do. Mouth, her husband, wasn’t around; he was often absent for long periods because of his work in the army. In desperation, Savorn got hold of a doctor who gave the baby an injection of antibiotic in the thigh. Either in reaction to the antibiotic or because he had caught polio when he had fallen into the water, both of Sophea’s legs were paralyzed.

When Mouth returned, the worried parents took Sophea to a “krou,” or folk healer, who made a paste of betel juice, areca nut, lime, and tobacco and massaged it on the baby’s legs. The krou gave a jar of his saliva to Savorn and told her to rub the baby’s legs with it every morning. After some time one of Sophea’s legs got better, and Mouth and Savorn attributed this to the healing power of the krou. However, Sophea was left with one partially paralyzed leg. He couldn’t walk, so Mouth bought a tricycle that the boy learned to pedal to get around.

When Sophea was six years old his tricycle broke, forcing him to learn to walk: he held his hand against his right leg—because his knee was weak—and took a step, thus causing the left leg to catch up. In this way he walked, although it was with a halting, limping gait.

Mouth was still gone much of the time because of his job. Savorn gave birth to a boy who died. She became pregnant again, had another boy who got sick shortly after birth and also died. After this last death, Savorn lost all interest in cooking and household chores. Sophal, the older sister, took over the cooking. Mouth began leaving Sophal sums of money before he went off so that she could buy rice and food for the family.

The older children began to notice that their mother was acting in peculiar ways. Sometimes she put on lots of makeup—including many fake moles on her face—and walked around visiting people. Other times she got completely made up and went to a fancy hotel to swim in the pool. When Mouth arrived home on his infrequent visits, he asked

a spiritual healer to do exorcisms on his wife, none of which succeeded. Always, Mouth had to go off on another assignment for the military and leave the children with their mentally ill mother.

The relatives and neighbors were aware of Savorn’s condition; they knew she wasn’t “quite right in the head” and simply let her be. Nonetheless, it was very embarrassing for the children. Sophea felt embarrassed—and then angry with himself for being embarrassed by his own mother.

One time the children were gathered below the porch of their house, talking together about their mother.

“I wonder if she knows we are talking about her,” Sophea said, “and if she does, I wonder if she can understand us?”

They heard maniacal laughter and looked up: their mother’s lipsticked mouth was open wide in an insane smile as she looked down at them from the porch. Sophea grew cold inside.

In 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution permitted President Johnson to wage war against North Vietnam without a formal declaration of war from Congress. In the years that followed, U.S. military action in the region increased dramatically, and it was only a matter of time before Cambodia was drawn into the war. In 1969, the United States began secret bombings of “sanctuaries” in Cambodia. In 1970, Cambodian defense minister Lon Nol staged a coup, seizing control from Prince Sihanouk, who despite all his faults was desperately trying to maintain Cambodian neutrality. With that, the United States and South Vietnam jointly invaded Cambodia. Protests at the invasion broke out nationwide at colleges and universities in the United States, including Kent State, resulting in the deaths of four students.

During the ensuing years in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge (literally, “red Cambodians”)—a group of Communist guerrilla fighters in the countryside—gained power and stature, helped by heavy and intense U.S. bombing in 1973 and the ineffectual rule of Lon Nol’s U.S.-supported regime.

On April 17, 1975, word flew around the compound that there was peace! The Khmer Rouge had won the war—now Cambodia would return to its prewar existence. On the base, the feeling was euphoric: It's the end of the war; we will have peace at last; Prince Sihanouk will return and rule again.

The Khmer Rouge marched into the compound and began to loot. They declared: "We are here to liberate you." Sophea had heard stories about them; he and the other boys called them "black crows" because of the loose pajama-like black cotton uniforms they wore.

Sophea, deciding he would check out the new rulers, went up to a soldier, pointed to an AK-47 part and innocently asked, "Does this belong to an M-16?" (Like all boys, he knew the different guns and their parts.)

"No," the soldier said. "That's part of an Aka." (This was the slang word for AK-47.) Sophea was satisfied that the Khmer Rouge knew their stuff. And they had seemed to be nice enough to him, a little boy.

The next morning a jeep came around the compound with a Khmer Rouge soldier announcing into a bullhorn that everyone had to leave the city within 24 hours. "Don't take anything with you," he ordered. "Everything will be provided for you. Just go."

The compound became frantic with activity. Sophea and his brothers and sisters didn't know what to do—as usual, Mouth was away and Savorn was wandering somewhere. Relatives and neighbors were busy with their own families and packing. The children began packing their few possessions into a wheelbarrow that their father had made when a neighbor came to the door and asked, "Can I borrow that wheelbarrow? I'll bring it right back."

The children said yes—and never saw the wheelbarrow again. They still had a motor scooter so they decided Sameth would drive the laden scooter and the rest of the children would carry rice, clothing, and a few pots and pans. They asked Savorn to go with them, but she replied that she wouldn't leave her property.

The following afternoon the children joined thousands of others leaving Battambang by the main road, heading west toward Thailand. Sophal recognized where they were and recalled distant relatives who lived in the west. The crowd of evacuees walked until dusk but only reached a crossroad outside of Battambang. The children huddled under a tree and unpacked some pots and cooked some rice.

The next morning, Sophea was playing with his cousins and said that he felt like walking back into Battambang and looking around. His cousins agreed, so the three children set off.

They were stopped at a military checkpoint right before entering Battambang. Two female Khmer Rouge soldiers asked where they were going. Sophea said, "I'm going to see my mother."

The soldiers said, "Oh, no one is left in the city." However, they must have felt sorry for Sophea because they put the children on a truck and drove them to the main road in the center of the city and dropped them off.

Sophea looked around him in shock. The city had been completely emptied and looted; there was trash everywhere. It struck Sophea like a blow that he was the first one back in the city. The children left the main road and wandered toward Sophea's house, cutting through a neighbor's yard and approaching the house from the back. The backyard was enclosed with huge sugarcane, papaya, and guava plants, but Sophea knew of an opening that he had always used as a shortcut.

The first of the three children, Sophea parted the sugarcane leaves and looked through—and saw his mother on the back balcony of their house brandishing a chopping knife at two Khmer Rouge soldiers down below.

"If you come in and take my property," she was screaming, waving the knife, "I will chop you to pieces."

The soldiers were bantering with Savorn, amused by the crazy woman. But after a few minutes one of the soldiers got angry and cocked his AK-47 and shot her four or five times in the chest. She crashed onto the balcony

railing, her blood dripping onto the ground below.

Even today, Sophea still thinks about that moment. For years afterward he had nightmares. Ten years later he was still having the nightmare where his mother wanted him to go along with her into death. Eventually, he came to the conclusion that her spirit had called to him at that time and that's why he had happened to be there at the exact moment of her death.

Under the Khmer Rouge, conditions rapidly deteriorated. Officers from Lon Nol's army, teachers, students, artists, anybody with light skin or glasses (anyone who didn't look like a peasant, in short) all "disappeared" and no one dared to ask where or why. Mouth, however, managed to escape a prison camp and reunite with his family. All over the country, the children were divided into groups; Sophal and Sameth were put into a group of children over twelve, then taken away. Sophea was left behind with the younger children because of his disability.

Angka—the Organization—ordered that everyone be given only two cups of rice gruel a day. Everyone, old and young, was put to work in the rice fields. The weak and the young were the first to die of starvation.

In 1976 Sophea was allowed to go into the jungle with a group of older people in order to grow vegetables. They had to live on wild animals and plants, but were not starving like the rest of the population.

In 1977 some Khmer Rouge leaders and their families came to live with Sophea's group in the jungle. Sophea pretended he was a peasant boy who had always lived there. A school was started. Sophea attended and excelled. In the rest of the country, people were dying of starvation and overwork.

The Vietnamese invaded early in 1979, captured Phnom Penh, and installed a new government. Shortly after the invasion, Mouth managed to gather all his children, whereupon they escaped to Thailand, stepping carefully over landmines and evading soldiers at the border.

While at the Surin refugee camp, Mouth decided he wanted to go to America, based on his experience in the Lon Nol army (which had been supplied and funded by the U.S.). The family waited for a sponsor, and one day were told one had been found.

Next the family met with an interpreter who had been instructed to tell them about their sponsor and the place where they were going.

"You are going to a place in the United States called Wis-ching-kong-sun," the interpreter said.

Ever since the Khmer Rouge had marched into Battambang in 1975, Sophea had felt asphyxiated by a burden on his chest, as if he couldn't breathe. This feeling continued throughout the ensuing years and was still there when Sophea prepared for departure with his family. They boarded the plane and lifted off into the sky. During the flight the family was served meals of packaged chicken.

The plane landed in Los Angeles and the family disembarked—barefoot, since none of them had worn shoes since the Khmer Rouge takeover. While walking on the airport carpet, Sophea felt guilty, thinking his dirty bare feet would soil the carpet.

The emigration officer looked at Mouth's I-94 Initial Entry permit where his name appeared in the Khmer/Cambodian style of last name first, followed by the first name: Ouk Mouth. So the officer labeled their papers as members of the Mouth family, with Ouk as the head. From this moment on, the family had their father's first name as their last name, akin to arriving in another country and having one's last name changed to John or Fred.

The family boarded a plane to Chicago where their sponsors, Will and Martha Smith [Editor's note: pseudonyms] from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, were there to meet them. The Smiths ran a dairy farm outside of Lake Geneva and had told the sponsoring committee that they had an extra house on the farm where the Mouths could live. The Mouths were loaded into a station wagon and driven to the farm.

Will and Martha explained to the Mouths that everyone would begin work on the farm the next day. The family could stay in the house free for the first month, and after that, rent, electricity, and heat would be garnished from Mouth's monthly wages. (Mouth never saw any money after that first month; the entire paycheck was gone by the time he had earned it.)

It was early evening when the Smiths left. Sophea went out to the porch of the rental farmhouse and gazed out at the fields. The setting sun was hitting the tops of the cornstalks and turning the fields a golden brown. At that moment the pressure that had been building up in his chest since 1975 simply disappeared. For the first time in years he felt safe and happy.

Mouth and all the children began work on the dairy farm the following day. Mouth and Sopha and Sameth milked the cows. Sophea also started out milking but couldn't lift or carry the milk cans because of his leg, so the Smiths put him to work in the lawnmower repair shop. Initially he stood around not knowing what to do, but after a couple months he had learned to take apart engines and clean and fix machines. (After working for four months, he got an engine running for the first time and was given \$20, the first money Sophea had ever had in his life. He promptly went to Kentucky Fried Chicken with Sameth and spent every cent.)

Sophea and the other Mouth children started school. Sopha and Sameth went to an ESL program for a couple hours a day. Sophea was put into the fifth grade because no one believed that he was sixteen on account of his small stature.

The Smiths introduced the family to American food: spaghetti, macaroni and cheese, and so on. Martha taught Sophea how to make a tuna fish sandwich to take to school. Used clothes arrived in huge bags from the people in the Smiths' church; the Mouths didn't know the difference and thought it incredible to get so many clothes at once. Sophea had no idea of how to adapt his clothing to the seasons. He wore only a T-shirt in the dead of winter

until someone gave him a jacket, then he began to wear that.

One morning Sophea packed a tuna fish sandwich and a can of soda in a bag to take to school. At lunchtime in the cafeteria he opened his soda and took a sip. It tasted terrible. Then he noticed that the other students were looking at him and whispering. He had taken a can of beer—Pabst Blue Ribbon—out of the fridge, mistaking it for soda.

Soon everyone knew of the incident. Martha Smith heard about it, the pastor of the church heard about it; everyone was talking about the boy who drank beer in the lunchroom. The Smiths told Mouth but Mouth didn't understand English, so Sophea was spared punishment from his father.

Mouth became sick from drinking milk, so Martha and Will got a translator to come from Madison, who told them, "These people eat rice." Will and Martha went out and bought rice; unfortunately, they bought brown rice instead of the white rice Cambodians eat. The translator had to come back a month later and say, "They eat white rice." Eventually the family was able to find a kind of white rice they liked—jasmine white rice—in Madison and buy it in bulk. Sameth bought a Ford Fairmont from a Cambodian who lived in Madison. He got his driver's license and the family was free to go places on their own and not depend upon the Smiths for transportation.



After fifth grade, Sophea's teachers took him aside: "Are you prepared to go to high school?"

"Sure," Sophea said. "I'll go."

He began ninth grade the following year. He had no idea of what high school was about, didn't even know what a homeroom was. He was seventeen and everyone else was fourteen or fifteen. No one had been through anything like what he had been through, so there was no one to talk to. There were no other Asians at the school.

He went to ESL class, English class, machine shop class, woodworking class day after day without talking to or con-

necting with anyone. He became very lonely. The old feeling of being asphyxiated began building up and he had nightmares over and over about his mother being killed by the Khmer Rouge.

He worked at the lawnmower shop a great deal and watched a lot of television. He stopped going to church, which caused some consternation because the Smiths were a strong churchgoing family. He bought Bruce Lee magazines and videos, then ordered nunchaku—two sticks connected by a chain—a star, throwing knives, and other king fu materials from the backs of the magazines. He got Sameth involved with the martial arts, causing Martha to worry that Sophea was going to do something violent.

Sophea knew deep down that he wasn't a violent person, that the Bruce Lee stuff was just his way of coping; however, he couldn't articulate that to Martha.

One day Sophea arbitrarily sat down at a table in the high school cafeteria, which turned out to be the table where all the rich kids sat.

One of the guys—a big football player—said, "You stupid Cambodian!"

When Sophea didn't respond, he said, "Meet me behind the building after school."

"OK," Sophea said. "Sure."

Sophea knew they were going to fight him. After school he put his nunchaku in his waist and went out to meet them. The football player brought his friends. When the row of big guys approached him, Sophea took out his nunchaku and spun them in front of his neck and waist a few times. Sophea was good—and looked even better—and the football players backed off. Later, they called the principal and said that Sophea had threatened them.

Sophea was called in and he said, "No, they called me stupid."

The minister of the Smiths' church heard about the incident and came over to talk to Sophea. He told Sophea that the football players had small minds.

"Yeah," said Sophea, "they do."

But Sophea was somewhat comforted by the minister's visit. After that, whenever any of the football players saw

Sophea in the halls at school, they would make a gesture like they were shooting him with a gun. This happened routinely until the principal saw it one day and called them all in. After that, it stopped.

Sophea made friends with the other high school boy who was working at the lawnmower repair shop. They began doing some stuff together, working on dirtbikes, sitting at the same table in the cafeteria at school.



After two years of working on the farm, Mouth physically broke down. He had worked four years for the Khmer Rouge, which had completely exhausted his strength, and then had immediately begun working on the farm so that his body never had a chance to heal. Fortunately, he qualified for Social Security income on account of the mental and physical injuries he had suffered during the Pol Pot regime, and so financially was able to move to Madison with the three youngest children. There, the family lived on his SSI paycheck and Mouth organized and started the Cambodian Association of Madison.

Martha grew so worried about what she saw as Sophea's violent tendencies that she took away the nunchaku, star, throwing knives, punching bag—even his Bruce Lee uniform. Sophea begged and begged to get these things back until she finally relented, but said he had to keep them in the car; he couldn't keep them in the house.

After Mouth and the younger children left, Sophea stayed on at the farm. Relations between Martha and Sophea became even more strained. One time she told Sophea that she and Will didn't think he was going to "make it"; they thought he was going to be a mechanic all his life.

As high school graduation day approached, the local paper listed the seniors graduating with honors. Martha saw his name in the newspaper and came to show him: "Look, you're in the paper for honor roll!"

Mrs. Thompson, the ESL teacher, threw her students a party. Sophea

cooked some egg rolls for Sophea to bring. During the party Mrs. Thompson took Sophea aside and told him something that meant a lot. She said he was the smartest in the class because he asked so many questions, and she encouraged him to pursue more schooling.

Everyone handed around their yearbooks on the last day of school. Many students, as they signed Sophea's, said, "Geez, I wish I had known you all this time—you're a cool guy."

Well, Sophea thought, too late now.

Sophea eventually moved to Madison and is now finishing his doctorate in Buddhist studies at UW-Madison. He is co-owner of Aurora PC, a business that custom builds and repairs computers. Sophea has been involved in local government, and also has spent much time mentoring other Cambodians, translating at hospitals and courts.

He has decided that working hard is the key to his success—something he has learned from practicing Buddhism. Karma really means action: the Buddhist exerts effort and channels it in the right way. Sophea looks at other people who aren't succeeding and thinks they haven't exerted enough effort.

There is a Cambodian saying: "As a four-legged elephant will fall, so a learned scholar will forget." It means that nothing is perfect, there is always a problem, everyone has a weakness. Sophea knows this is true. He has always worked from certain weaknesses: his leg, the language barrier, his skin color. But he kept going, using his hands and his mind. He understands where he is working from and thus, where he is heading. *

*Writer and lecturer Sarah Streed has a BA from Wheaton College and an MFA from the University of Arizona. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco and has published memoirs about that experience. Her short stories have appeared in **Breakfast All Day**, **Iowa Woman International Issue**, **American Writing**, **Palo Alto Review**, **Timber Creek Review**, and **Madison Review**.*

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DAVID HAZELTINE QUARTET

AUGUST 25
PAUL SILBERGLEIT QUINTET
BAD BABES & BOYS • SALLY DeBROUX • GERRI DiMAGGIO • JOY DRAGLAND • JEANNE WOODALL

SEPTEMBER 1
BOB WESTFALL QUARTET
BEN SIDRAN & SPECIAL GUEST

SEPTEMBER 8
DOUG BROWN & MICHELLE DUVALL QUINTET
TONY CASTANEDA SEXTET

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS AT 5PM

RESERVED TABLES FOR THE 2004 SEASON ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$600 FOR THE ENTIRE SERIES OR \$150 PER CONCERT EVENING. FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT CATHY SULLIVAN AT 231-0729 OR EMAIL TO [JAZZAT5@TDS.NET](mailto:jazzat5@tds.net). VISIT US ON THE WEB AT JAZZAT5.ORG. THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED BY THE DANE COUNTY CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDS FROM THE MADISON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION AND THE OVERTURE FOUNDATION.

2004 SEASON

jazz
at
five

HONORABLE MENTION

Grape Jam

I was helping Grandma make grape jam
 mostly I was helping her remember
 what we'd done and what came next
 sitting at the kitchen table
 popping wild dark grapes
 out of their slippery skins
 adding sugar and Sure-Jell
 cooking them so many minutes until
 we poured the sticky darkness into jars
 sitting on a breadboard

I'd take each batch into the living room
 so Grandma'd have more room to work
 setting the jars on a card table
 by the TV to cool
 the TV kept showing a tape loop
 of two airplanes crashing into
 buildings in New York
 the bodies falling endlessly
 the way we do in dreams
 everything repeating
 every time she heard the popping
 of a metal lid announcing
 that another jar had been sealed
 Grandma'd say
 the Japs are bombing us again
 her brother's death in World War Two
 somewhere in the future
 Normandy a funny word
 nobody in Milwaukee knew

pouring the next to last batch
 I told her this was different
 but she said the dead
 are just as dead
 no matter what the TV says
 then she turned the TV off
 like God commanding darkness by remote
 knocking a jar off the table by accident
 both of us just sitting there a moment
 watching darkness seep across the old linoleum

by Michael Kriesel

The *Wisconsin Academy Review* Poetry Contest brought in finely written, distinctive poems from all around the state. The work of the three top winners appeared in the spring issue. We are pleased to share now the wonderful work submitted by our honorable mention and our runners-up.

And attention poets: we begin accepting entries for our next poetry contest on September 1, with a deadline of Monday, December 6. This year our lead judge will be Jean Feraca. Guidelines and prize information are posted on the Wisconsin Academy's website, www.wisconsinacademy.org

Yard Sale, Plainfield, Wisconsin

She was someone's mother
sitting at the kitchen table
with an old cigar box full
of change and dollar bills

the owner didn't care that she'd
been renting there for years
the house was sold
she'd have to find some other
place to finish getting old

she complained a couple times
about the gloomy sky before
I found something to buy
giving her two quarters
for a book about Ed Gein

she said her cousin used to
clean the barn for 50 cents
on Ed's farm
that she went along a few times
a girl of 13

but they never went inside
the house that only survives
in a few memories and a couple
of black & white photos
in crime paperbacks

coughing up words
as if they were pins
she told me the rest
like someone possessed

how after Ed was caught
no one ever talked about
the roast he always brought
whenever some family invited
the neighborhood bachelor to dinner

I didn't ask if she ever had some
I was too busy watching
the gray wafers of confession
slipping from her tongue

wondering how many years they'd rained
and still she wasn't done
thinking how lucky she was at 13
though it cost her the rest of her life

by Michael Kriesel

*Michael Kriesel lives near Wausau, where he says he "fools around" with Zen and kabbala. He is a winner of the Lorine Niedecker Poetry Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers for a group of five poems, including the two featured here. His reviews appear each issue in **Small Press Review**, and his poems have been in numerous small press and college journals, including **Chiron Review**, **Plainsongs**, **Free Lunch**, and **Nerve Cowboy**. His poems try to combine the blue-collar themes of small press writing with the craftsmanship more often found in the academic community.*

The Best Man Wins

With the wedding still a few hours away,
the groomsmen play croquet in the best man's
backyard. They enjoy beer from cold bottles,
eat monstrous hoagies filled with fresh cold cuts,
nestle their bare feet in the summer's grass—
yet the best man is annoyed. As the one guy
under twenty-seven pounds overweight,
and playing with home-field advantage,
he thought he'd easily earn bragging rights.
Yet he lost last game, far back in the pack,
and the second match is almost over
with the groom leading by a stroke or so.
A crowd cramps his own ball, unique only
for the yellow hue of its dimpled surface.
He sips his beer and sadly concedes
that the contest is as good as over.
Soon he will change into his rent-a-tux,
becoming a black-and-white assistant
as unremarkable as this light beer's taste.
Cheating was the only way to win now,
and he'd matured beyond dishonesty.
Besides, he would only be cheating (no,
not himself) the groom, a good man who was
entrusting him with a ring and a toast...
who probably has too much on his mind
to care about losing a lame lawn game;
who has plenty to celebrate already;
who chose the rental place that mismeasured
the best man's pant and jacket sizes.
As the others watch the groom prepare
the next shot, the best man casually
places his foot atop his yellow ball,
nudges it a shade beyond the others,
just in line with the wicket. At his turn
no one notices his new position
because nobody cared enough to note
where it had been before. Serves them right, then.
The rest is easy: in two turns he ties
the groom. In the next, he taps the striped stake.
Accolades all around for the comeback,
which is mostly forgotten in the chapel,
where everyone notices that the best man
is so happy with the wedding's match
that his grin is as wide as a wicket.

by Christopher Scalia

Christopher Scalia is an English doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he studies British Romantic literature. His fiction and poetry have been published in Potomac Review and Crisis Magazine.

Father Writes to Mother From California

I remember Grandmother's voice
and crickets clicking behind the radiator,
feasting on dust from fresh baked bread

while I lay on the window seat
watching her polish the mound of dough
pushing and turning it on its powdery board.

Looking over at me, she dropped
a small plastic doll into the mix
folded and smoothed it into a ball

while she told me of earthquakes
in San Francisco

and how the ground would open
like cut dough,
then fold over a small girl and her mother

rolling, kneading and sealing them
into the bread of the earth, sent to the oven to bake,
disappearing beneath the cooling crust.

by Jackie Langetieg

Jackie Langetieg lives in Madison and recently retired from 33 years at the Department of Health and Family Services. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in such publications as 100 Words, Midland Review, Wisconsin Academy Review, and Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' yearly calendars. A chapbook of prose poetry conversations, White Shoulders, was published by Cross+Roads Press in 2000. Langetieg has received the Jade Ring for Poetry and first place in the Wisconsin Academy's 1999 poetry contest, and was a runner-up in 2003. She enjoys reading with her two black cats, Simon and Jake, curled up on her lap—and writing at her bedroom computer with the cats on the other side of the door.

Listening to the Radio: Tuesday Morning

When she hears about the slaughter
of the horses, a perfect egg slips
from her fingers, the joints unhinging
soundlessly. Her cat dances
in from nowhere, anywhere, to lap
at the sticky whites, his tongue
imagining what to do before he does.
Thirty-five wild horses poisoned,
tortured, shot at close range, hooves
trembling with the weight of death.
What happens to a man the moment
the hammer cocks in his brain?
What caliber bruised the cortex
of his heart when he first thought,
Motherfuckers, you're dead, all
of you? Or did a sweating cloud
clutch the sun in that Nevada sky
and he thought nothing?

She thinks about her lover and last night
and how sure he is she loves him.
The moon had shimmied behind winter fog,
and she saw a dark smudge hiding
beneath his collarbone, wanted
to lick it, to learn the dusty taste
of shadow, but she didn't want
his awakesness, not when her hands
were blue and lovely, like the hands
of a fairy or spirit, something
not tethered to the rough-hewn bed.

Back in the morning kitchen, she rubs
the cat's cranium, the frontal ridge
around the eye she could crack
with one snap of the frying pan.
Her thumb runs under his throat,
to the pulse of the purr born
there, and she reins in thirty-five wild
horses in her mind's corral. As she croons
there, there, the horses nose her chin,
her belly, their eyes wet as yolks, sides
warm as lullabies, lungs pumping
with the breath of stars.

by Julie King

*Julie King lives in Racine. She has an MA in creative writing and teaches creative writing and film studies at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Her work appears in the Iowa Press anthologies **Boomer Girls** and **Are you Experienced?** In addition, she has had fiction and poetry published in **Fiction International**, **Primavera**, **Puerto del Sol**, **Quarterly West**, **Gulf Coast**, and other journals. She wrote, directed, and produced the short film **Worlds**, and stars in B- horror movies.*

Small Craft

We moored our ark on wheels
next to the garage, a sixteen-foot
Penn Yan, a vessel of wood,
forty horses' worth of Evinrude.

Warm weekends we'd haul it to
the shore, slide it ceremoniously
off the trailer into the salty river.
Knee-deep, I held the bow

until my father fish-flopped in
and the oily engine snorted life.
Then I pushed and leaped
onto the varnished deck, over the

bow light half-red, half-green
which was the way it seemed as we
thumped into the Sound keen
for fishing, afraid to drown

in all that wilderness without a tree
or sidewalk or lawn, fleeing
from job and school and church
to try our luck with God.

by John Kaufman

John Kaufman lives in Wauwatosa.

Reduction

I listen to the hiss of slice, the crack of snap-in-half
as I split the scar where once it had held the stem.
Cutting red pepper looks like breaking a heart,
it trickles pale, thin blood.

I spread diced pepper all over slivers of onion
that have leeches themselves to mushrooms
in the broth I brew.

The whirl of spoon is hypnotic,

And wine cooks down slowly;
I have plenty of time to wander back to summer
and think of peaches, round and rosy
before frost.

They were so ripe I held a napkin under your chin
and wiped away pale juice after every bite.
"That was a good peach," you said, and later you said,
"That was a good peach!"

The wooden spoon is silent; I think conversation,
how last night you told me *again* that you need
a light bulb even though you know
they supply them at the Home.

In some dark, unwanted dream I see that bulb,
its round, pale skin moving toward your mouth.
A horrible crunch of slivered glass slits your lips,
slices down your throat. But you smile as

thin blood streams from the sides of your mouth.
I stop ... being afraid and roll the light bulb gently
from your hand to mine, then take a generous bite.
Blood rushes warm, mulled wine, full-bodied,

Fragrant as the scent
of cardamom that floats through this room.
I keep stirring, reduce the liquid,
follow this simple recipe word for word.

by Joan Wiese Johannes

Joan Wiese Johannes lives in Port Edwards with her poet/artist husband, and has been publishing poetry for more than 20 years. She has won numerous contests run by the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and *Free Verse*. Her poetry has been published in anthologies and in numerous journals including *Rattle*, *Moving Out*, *Jam Today*, *Rhino*, and the *Wisconsin Academy Review*. She has published two chapbooks, one of poetry and one of original mythology, and also publishes articles, creative nonfiction, and Native American flute music. She has won many awards for her work as a high school teacher and hopes to retire someday to a career as an artist in residence.

Unfair

for William Matthews

All fall I waited for the maple to let go
and all that fall it stood stubborn,

its crown glowing with green and yellow glory.
You would have said, *Come at the poem*

another way. The day your face leaped
from the *New York Times* obituary page

I saw the lawn dazzled with gold at last,
as if the maple had slipped off its gown

after a long, delicious night
and tossed it, crumpled, to the ground.

Years ago I would have written
a lovely sonnet about leaves

transformed to next spring's flowers,
about mulch and its cedary sweetness.

About hope. That day I charged
into the newly bitter air. I grabbed

the rake and scraped until the dying
leaves were heaped beside the curb.

And when I went inside, red-faced and raw,
I let the front door slam behind me, felt

the rush of blood and rage and doom.
I was alive and you were dead.

I wrote a different poem.

by Harriet Brown

Harriet Brown's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry East*, and other literary magazines and have earned numerous awards and honors, including grand prize in the *Atlanta Review's* International Poetry Competition, several fellowships to Yaddo, and a New York state CAPS grant. Her chapbook, *The Promised Land*, was published in January by Parallel Press. Brown is also the author of *The Good-bye Window: A Year in the Life of a Day-Care Center*, *Madison Walks*, and several nonfiction books for children. She lives in Madison with her husband and two daughters, and she is the editor of *Wisconsin Trails* magazine.

Inheritance

The kitchen overwhelmed him,
her stove with its dials marked *simmer*
and *broil*, her recipe cards lumpy
with sugar and milk stains, the peaches
mush puddles, blurry with fruit flies.
Then all the condolences in laborious script
stacked up and falling off the settee
with school slips regarding textbooks, violins,
field trip submissions plus the pink box
of napkins that in-laws declared
were for his stepdaughter
when she met heavy flow days, a satin pouch
for transport, special garters to hold them.
And the girl's hair —

a thick river that streamed down past her skinny
sixth-grader hips with a beauty that stunned
wedding guests last year.
But like an octopus it now twisted around elbows
and wrists catching his belt buckle the mornings
he struggled to tame it into plaits, strands
sliding free from his slow thumbs.
She didn't lean and sway
with the rhythm of his comb

for his touch was timid and alien,
his breath ragged and snagging
on every snarl.
Dawn awakened his dread of the mesh
and its knots, its odor of sorrow,
of helplessness

till he saw her in the rain
outside Sayleen's Salon,
twin braids neatly laced
wrapped with tissue
in her arms.

by Shoshauna Shy

Shoshauna Shy works for the Wisconsin Humanities Council and is the creator of BookThatPoet.com, a listing service for poets, and of the Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf program. She is a member of the Prairie Fire Poetry Quartet, and her work has recently appeared in print courtesy of Billy Collins' Poetry 180 project published by Random House. She has also been in Rosebud, Rattle, and Cimarron Review. She lives in Madison with her husband and two teenagers.

Something I Have to Tell You

*In my house we were raised to take
bad news standing up
—Monique Gagnon*

In our elm-embroidered town
bad news became ours only
as a possibility gently presented—
Grandma Pearl's dizzy spells,
a teacher leaving at semester,
an elopement by a best friend's
favorite brother.
Debts, cancelled vacations,
uncles' hospitalizations
were hush-hush and tucked
in tight rooms under stairs.
I never learned to rise tall

when a police officer appears
stern and sharp as a headline;
my son calls from inside
a crushed kaleidoscope;
the detective asks do I know
where my daughter is.
At the mercy of misfortune
I ricochet like a wasp
caught between the *no*
of a pair of windows,
any pause dampened
by the quease of dread.
I will never learn how

to take bad news standing up
as if it were a given
and should be expected,
the guest for whom a bed
with fresh sheets is made,
the coat rack left empty,
a fifth of port saved

although now I accept
that it knows where I live,
will make a beeline for me
without warning.

by Shoshauna Shy

To my daughter on the other side of the world

All night you were in my dreams again,
dreams that hurt. No mail delivery was possible
and your hair was falling out in thick bright tufts.
Rebels were fighting in the wet streets, over
frayed velvet jeans and cans of synthetic food,
near-protein with the hideous sticky texture
of rice pudding. It was manufactured in huge
underground chambers where squirming
invertebrates powered the electrical generators,
heaving against the darkness. The luminosity,
while variable as weather, was still a comfort.
Anyone with proper identification was given
crackling packets of vitamins, as well as orange
umbrellas to ward off fog, radiation sickness,
and roving flocks of noisy, violent germs.

Everyone asks after you and wonders if
you are wistful in wartime for news of America
and the black monolith of its politics. Let me
remind you that the little ones missed you,
given the chance. No matter that you were
marred so often, depressed and vulnerable.
At least you bypassed the endless underwater
corridors of religion, where, while sleepwalking,
I so frequently lose my temper or my way.
Stars still prickle in the night sky, quivering in
the ethereal wake of a concave moon. The family
extends its greetings like an embroidered napkin
offered to a starving body in lieu of sustenance.

In winter there are moments when I
feel a pending change, something liquid and
absolutely romantic on the verge of the midwest.
Susceptible under a mountain of snow, I hanker
for more stormy passions, erotic afternoons
as seen on television late at night. Imagine that
I have no immunity to the glowing movement
that holds the heart's full-blown fantasies, half
a bottle of bourbon and a cat in my lap. But by
two o'clock in the morning I usually remember
I am married. Your father says hello.

by F. J. Bergmann

*F. J. Bergmann (Jeannie) is a web designer, editor, illustrator, and rural mail carrier and created madpoetry.org, a local poetry website. In 2003, she received the Rinehart National Poetry Award and her chapbook **Sauce Robert** was a co-winner in the Pavement Saw competition. She was a finalist for the 2003 Joy Bale Boone and James Hearst poetry prizes and the 2004 Violet Reed Haas Book Prize.*

Along Back Roads

Sunday afternoons we pile in the car,
leave behind the Birmingham highway,
traffic and malls and neon signs,
head for the back roads, dirt roads

that mark our route with a cloud
of dust, pursued by a moving cloud
of red, as though we've turned
our backs on the promised land.

But our dad knows
where the wild grapes grow,
sprinkled like dew among vines
from time out of mind.

He stops the car by the side of the road,
doors fly open, we spill out,
plunge among tendrils, plucking,
popping muscadines into our mouths,

sucking the honeyed fruit whole from the skins,
spitting remnants onto the ground.
Plucking, popping, swallowing till
lips and fingers are painted purple. Later

we find a deserted pasture
where a lone tree stands.
Dad climbs it, shakes the limbs,
and pecans rain down like manna.

We gather them in our palms,
shells smooth, full of promise.
Then—crack, against each other,
extract the sweetmeat, the milky

sweet meat, eat our fill. Later
we come to a creek, roll up our pants,
wade in the pebble-strewn shallows,
laughing, splashing. We dry off in the sun,

clamber in the back seat
and watch out the window
as the car ploughs through the ford,
parting the waters, labors up the bank.

We never ask, on these Sunday rides,
are we there yet? Somehow we know.

by Kay N. Sanders

Kay N. Sanders lives in Oshkosh and works as a lay ministry coordinator. She has won Jade Ring awards for poetry and essays. Her work has appeared in several small publications.

excerpt

Beyond Pat and Chris

A young woman confounds her family when she decides to raise her baby gender-neutral. A passage from Tenaya Darlington's first novel, *Maybe Baby*, which hits bookstores in August.

BY TENAYA DARLINGTON

IN THE MORNING, GRETCHEN AWOKE FROM AN INTENSE KICK. She touched her belly and drew her knees inward. No luck. The baby thumped, like something caught in a trap. Gretchen sat up on her elbow and put her hand on Ray's sleeping chest, letting her fingers wander through the dark forest that had seeded itself across his sternum and down his midriff. *What if*, she thought to herself, *this baby comes out like a little hairy Ray?* She laughed to herself, then realized it was the first time she had ever pictured the child as a particular sex. Until now, it had always been just that:

an itty bitty it-child. She had prepared the black onesies, even readied the second bedroom with a fresh coat of muted loden and a changing table made of pickled birch with a gray changing pad, but she had never given any thought to the fact that this child really would be male or female, even if its identity would be shielded from others during its early childhood years.

That seemed weird, newly and oddly. For a fleeting moment, she wondered if she could hold onto such a big secret for such a long time. What if she let it slip? Then what? Hael, her upstairs neighbor, had assured Gretchen that once she got into the rhythm of it, she'd forget—change the diapers, pat the back with no real consideration of its sex one way or another.

Of course, there would be inherent challenges. You couldn't really ask someone to baby-sit for long periods of time or depend on someone outside of the community to change a diaper, not without swearing them to secrecy. And even then, you put all of your trust in their hands. Outside of the community, it was a no man's land. You were an anomaly, you and your mystery child.

And later on—what then? How might this child adapt to society? When it realized it had been raised differently from

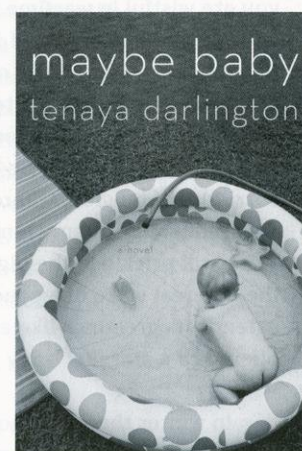
other kids, would it turn on her? Would it develop some bizarre scar, a repressed sensibility? Would it function normally? How might it rebel?

The ceiling above Gretchen seemed too bright, the thin bed sheet too heavy. She pushed it back and closed her eyes—this was just anxiety. Hael had warned her of this. Hael's own parents had been relentless with their questions until she simply cut them off, leaving their phone calls unreturned, their letters unopened.

Gretchen drew strength from these stories. It was possible to start anew, possible to divorce yourself from such scrutiny with the help of an accepting community. She felt lucky, so lucky now to be living here in this place, according to her will. She felt sure that she was doing the right thing and secure that no one and nothing could undermine it.

There was a knock at the front door. Ray stirred but did not open his eyes. Gretchen grabbed onto the edge of the bedside table and hoisted herself up off the futon. She lumbered through the living room where the shades were still drawn and opened the door. *

Excerpt from *Maybe Baby* (Little, Brown & Co., August 2004), chapter 11, "The Party." Reprinted with permission.



Tenaya Darlington is features editor at *Isthmus*, an alternative weekly newspaper based in Madison. Her collection of poetry, *Madame Deluxe* (Coffeeshouse Press, 2000), won the National Poetry Series and other awards. Her fiction has appeared in *Scribner's Best of the Fiction Workshops 1998*, *Mid-American Review*, and *BOMB*. Darlington holds an MFA from Indiana University.

Mark Your Calendars

Darlington will discuss her work at a special Wisconsin Academy event in the new Overture Center in Madison on **Sunday, September 19, 2–5 p.m.** See inside front cover of this magazine for details.

Painting detail from the
Saint-Cécile Cathedral in
Albi, France

Summertime

BY MAX HARRIS



WISCONSIN ACADEMY
REVIEW/HARRY W.
SCHWARTZ BOOKSHOPS
SHORT STORY
CONTEST WINNER

FIRST
PLACE

SALINAS BILLY WOKE THAT MORNING to the sound of chickens. By the time he'd dressed and slouched downstairs, the yard was stained with blood and feathers. Momma said she had to feed a crowd, but Billy felt the prickle of her sadness. Neighbors started coming by with salads, casseroles, and pies. He fixed himself a bowl of cereal.

The Texas sun was sweaty hot already. Momma's frying didn't help. He tried to cuddle Scat for comfort, but the tabby fled beneath the house. She'd had her fill of heat and folks and giblets.

Grandma asked him how he felt.

He said, "OK, I guess."

He went outside to take a shower in chicken feathers that he scooped and flung above his head to float down slower than the snow he'd seen that one time out in California. They'd

driven from his name place, where the lettuce grew, to mountains where the roads were closed. He'd stood outside with Daddy, trying to catch a snowflake on his tongue. The feathers didn't taste so good.

At ten, they left the house. He wore his best long pants despite the heat. He sat in back with Momma. Grandpa drove. Salinas Billy stared ahead. He didn't count the shaved white hairs on Grandpa's neck. He didn't check up on

the dying armadillo that he'd spotted by the roadside yesterday. There might be crows. He wanted to be good.

The church was full already. Anyone could figure, just by looking, who'd known Momma growing up and who were friends from Austin. If your hair were permed, your hands were callused, or your belly hung below your buckle, you were relatives or church folks. If you'd grown a mustache, wore no make-up, or were skinny as a fishbone, you were friends. In Austin, there was smoke and music. Here, they talked of discipline and fed him well. For Momma's sake, the two sides sat together.

Daddy's casket rested by the door. He'd had a shave since Billy saw him last. He wore a suit and tie. He might be clean but he was dead.

The preacher spoke of Daddy's struggles with his demons. Billy thought the preacher didn't know a damn and Momma cried. The music sounded like a dose of cough syrup.

A woman with a head of frizzy hair slid in the pew by Momma.

"This is fucking shit!" she whispered.

Momma smiled, surprised. She hugged her hard. She said, "My God, I never reckoned you'd show up."

"I drove here."

"All the way from San Francisco?"

"Hell, no! Flew to Austin."

Momma whispered, "Janis."

Janis said, "You want some music your old man would like?"

"You wouldn't!"

"Sure I would."

The piano dribbled to a pious halt. Before the preacher started up again to reading from the Bible, Momma stood.

"A friend of mine's come all the way from California," she said, "to sing for Danny."

Grandpa squirmed but Grandma hushed him. Heat breathed through the open windows like a sleepy dragon.

Janis faced the congregation. She was wearing cotton, loose enough to let the air flow through and cool the sweat. No bra. She said, "I started out my singing in a Texas choir."

Two men with hair as long as Daddy's used to be had joined her. One was holding a guitar. The other sat down at the

piano. Janis waited while they tuned the strings.

The next four minutes changed Salinas Billy's life.

The first sweet notes, he later learned, were Bach played slowly, grafted from clavier to steel-string. Twelve notes rising like apostles up to heaven. Birds in the sky. Spreading their wings. Learning to fly. Succeeding, tumbling, swooping, soaring, gliding, free. The piano joined the song, a mockingbird in lower register. It flung its notes up, liquid, high.

And then, she sang.

She drew the words out like an echo, scraped from silence by a knife edge sharp with pain and raw with promise:

Summertime, time, time,

Child, the living's easy.

Fish are jumping out,

And the cotton, Lord,

Cotton's high, Lord, so high.

She closed her eyes. She didn't need a microphone. Her voice was plenty loud without. He thought, if he could touch it, it'd rub against his fingers like the rasp his grandpa used to fashion wood. She seemed possessed. He saw her nipples swell beneath the cotton dress. He couldn't help but stare. Her eyes were open now. She looked at him.

Your Daddy's gone

And your Ma is so good-looking, baby.

She's looking good now,

Hush, baby, baby, baby, baby, baby,

No, no, no, no, don't you cry.

Don't you cry!

He'd wanted to all day. The tears stabbed hard behind his eyes. He wouldn't let them out. He wanted to be brave. He screwed his eyelids shut and thought of ice cream by the beach in Monterey with Daddy.

Janis wasn't singing now. The piano and guitar were on their own. They'd gotten louder, rumbling like the thunder over Texas, screaming like those eagles that he'd seen on television one time flapping wings and clawing at each other while they flew. Or worse, like Daddy screaming in the basement when he

went cold turkey. Billy didn't like the music any more. He figured Grandpa didn't either.

Everything seemed set to fly apart or burn. The music sounded like it came from where the preacher, warned by Grandma, couldn't name but wanted them to know, without him quite announcing it, that Daddy's soul had gone.

He practiced saying in his head the words he'd later say out loud to Janis: "Fucking preacher."

Suddenly, as if the armadillo hadn't died and men were kind, the screaming stopped. The piano and guitar went back to playing what he later learned was Bach. He opened up his eyes. It wasn't darkness huddled high against the ceiling; it was angels.

Janis sang again. Her voice was almost sweet like cold spring water. Billy watched her sway and sweat. Her hair stuck out like angels' hair. She smiled straight at him.

One of these mornings

You're gonna rise, rise up singing,

You're gonna spread your wings,

Child, and take, take to the sky,

Lord, the sky.

He checked the angels. Every one of them was grinning. Some were tapping toes. A few had plain white wings, but most had bright blue, red, and yellow feathers, like the birds he'd seen from Mexico or maybe Africa in *National Geographic*. Some wore cotton robes whose patterns matched the fabric Janis sang in. Some were naked. Billy looked at Grandma. No one in the church but him had seen a thing. An angel put her finger to her lips. She winked: they shared a secret.

Then, she flew. She skimmed the congregation's heads. She did a belly roll. She looped the loop. It looked like fun. She didn't have to flap her wings too often. Billy watched her. When she plucked a feather from an Austin woman's braided hair, he giggled. Grandma squeezed his hand. He faced the front again. But when the angel launched her flight the full length of the church and landed, upright, at the side of Daddy's casket, Billy couldn't help

but look. Another angel, blond hair streaming, wings unfurled, and slender body trailing sunlight, followed her and stood on the other side of Daddy. Folding back their wings like butterflies, they smiled at Billy.

Janis promised,

But until that morning

Honey, n-n-nothing's going to harm you now

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,
no, no, no, no, no,
no, no.

A cloud of multicolored feathers drifted down from angels in the rafters, dancing on their long way down like dust in some humongous sunbeam. Billy stretched his hand out. Grandma pulled it back. He smiled. He stuck his tongue out, melting angel feathers as they landed on its tip. Each prohibition Janis sang, each feather falling, promised him protection.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,
no, no, no, no, no,
no, no.

He looked around. The angels in the back were lifting Daddy from his casket. Stretched out easily between them, feet up, hands behind his head, the same way Billy'd often seen him stretched out on the couch, he floated slowly upward through the rafters to the ceiling. Daddy wasn't wearing any more that dumb gray suit and tie. They'd given him his bluejeans and his T-shirt back and let him go barefoot.

The feathers kept on falling, filling aisles and piling up beneath the pews like ticklish snowdrifts. Billy stirred them with his feet. He couldn't figure where they all were coming from. The angels—swooping, soaring, tumbling, diving just as easily as ever—sure as heck weren't molting. Maybe angels carry spares.

A bunch of little angels, wearing nothing but their wings, were darting to and fro between the funeral wreaths like hummingbirds. A fat old Momma angel, breasts the size of watermelons loose beneath her robe, sat by and watched them.

She felt secure between them, like a pinioned bird.

She couldn't fly away. She understands the painting better now. She's studied it. It tells her how to cope with loss of faith.

Janis closed her song:

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,
Don't you cry,
Cry.

Guitar and piano quieted. She squeezed the last note out like half a teardrop lapsing into joy or sleep. She shuddered, drenched in sweat.

The church was silent for a moment. Billy held his breath till Momma stood and clapped. Her friends from Austin joined her. Even church folks, strangely moved to see a famous crazy woman sing a lullaby to Billy, joined in the applause. The preacher knew enough to keep his mouth shut. Billy looked back just in time to catch a glimpse of Daddy disappearing in the light along with all the angels.

Billy read of Janis two months later, when she died like Daddy from an overdose. Though Momma cried, Salinas Billy knew his friend was singing with the angels. Daddy, maybe, was on drums. That sweaty afternoon, while everyone ate chicken, Billy'd taken Janis out behind the barn, where Grandma couldn't hear them, and he'd told her all about the angels.

Drinking Southern Comfort from the bottle while he talked, she'd offered him a sip, and said, "Far fucking out!"

In bed at night he listened to the music. Twelve notes rising like apostles up to heaven. Birds in the sky. Spreading their wings. Learning to fly. Succeeding, tumbling, swooping, soaring, gliding, free.



Josette likes best the devils' breasts. They make her brave. Her father was a greengrocer; her mother was a wife. They raised her to behave. They raised

her proper. Someone has to tidy up the shop. She hasn't known a lot of powerful women in her life. The devils bow to nobody.

Their breasts are spotted, striped, the shape of marrows, watermelons, aubergines, and cucumbers, the shade of pumpkins, eggplants, and courgettes. They're not the dainty little *têtons* of a model in the ads for lingerie in Sunday's paper, nothing more than two blanc-manges molded in a cup. They're weighty, full-blown, dangling, like the bosoms of a matriarch. She wishes hers were bigger.

Seated in the nave of Albi's Saint-Cécile cathedral, meditating on the durability of hell, Josette's dressed soberly in black and white. The only touch of color's in her scarf. Her handbag's black. Around her, tourists come and go. They gawk at paintings, startled; then they buy their postcards. Plainsong, piped through unseen speakers, soothes them. When she can, Josette ignores the visitors. She'd rather look at devils working hard.

The Final Judgment fills the western wall. It doesn't faze Josette. It used to, when she'd come here as a girl. Papa would tell her not to worry, she was good. Mama would hold her hand. She felt secure between them, like a pinioned bird. She couldn't fly away. She understands the painting better now. She's studied it. It tells her how to cope with loss of faith.

She doesn't like the angels drifting through the upper echelons. They're like a choir of fresh-faced schoolteachers. They couldn't frighten Balaam's donkey, never mind keep order in a world gone daft. The twelve apostles sit beneath them like a scruffy football team in nighties. All of them need haircuts. Further down, the guardians of

power—a pope, a cardinal, a bishop, some forgotten emperor, a king, a row of clergy, monks, and nuns—pose, passive, pious, uniform, subordinate to God. What good is that? She used to think she'd like to be a nun, but then she married. Now she's widowed and she dusts her flat.

A tourist stands beneath the mural, carrying a camera and a baseball cap. He gazes upward, awed or bored, who knows? He must be in his forties. Balding. Nondescript. American. A brown-eyed woman stands nearby. She might be Mexican. They have two children. One's a blond; she's maybe seventeen. The other's dark-skinned like his mother, but his eyes are blue. Josette's papa could not abide mixed marriages.

The boy asks, "Who're the naked dudes?"

His father tells him.

Popping from their graves like corks, the resurrected dead are pale: the good ones dull, the bad ones open-mouthed in horror. Angels, rulers, and apostles clasp their hands in prayer above the good, while steel-gray storm clouds roll through empty space above the damned. Josette dismisses equally the angels and the dead. Elect or damned, well-dressed or naked, high or low, they all stare stupidly toward the center. Silly fools.

The focal point is missing.

Christ the Judge was taken out three centuries ago. Some bishop thought an archway through the middle of the mural to the chapel of Saint-Clair improved the view. The archway changed the painting from a medieval consolation to a modern nightmare. Now there's nobody in charge. But that's the way the world goes. No one bothers any more. Except the devils. They do.

Demons, reptiles, birds, and monsters of the deep subject their pallid, wide-eyed victims to the rack, the cauldron, and the pit. Although she wouldn't want them in her living room, Josette applauds their efforts. Someone has to stem the tide and stop the rot.

From left to right, she reads the legend of the seven deadly sins.

The proud are chained to scarlet wheels set high, like windmills on a hill-

side, spinning. Naked, grimacing, they're pierced by spikes, they're bleeding like the crucified Messiah. All the proud are men. She wonders why. A devil with a head shaped like a pineapple swings, grinning, from his victim's hair. He twists his neck to face the nave. He challenges his audience, "I dare you! Try to stop me! This is fun!" He drools. He's probably a teenager. Papa would not have let him play like that. It's dangerous. Another devil, bastard of a lizard and a

WINNING WORDS

*Comments by contest judge
Dwight Allen*

"Summertime" is full of imaginative leaps and bounds. It's a story about visions, about how individuals beset by visions find their way in the world, about the heresies of seeing too clearly. Plump, chesty mama angels and drooling boy devils with heads like pineapples and a boozy-voiced rock and roll singer populate the story, which begins in the dust of Texas and ends in the dilapidated but not unsunny Old World. The language is by turns lush and sensuous, dry and humorous. "Summertime" is a fresh, adventurous, entirely satisfying piece of writing.

locust, sticks its long pink tongue inside its victim's mouth. Her husband used to do that. Sometimes she enjoyed it. Jealously, a female devil scratches with a four-pronged rake the victim's chest. Her breasts hang down like giant gooseberries. She's black. Josette holds back.

The envious stand naked in an icy river, filled with serpents, toads, and snapping turtles. Bats fly. Bitter winds blow. Men and women shiver side by side. They're white. With being underground so long, they haven't seen the sun in years. A flock of birds with dragon's tails and beady eyes claw arms, peck heads, and straddle bleeding hips. A man who's choking on a scaly bird's tail slips beneath the surface. Only full immersion (like a Baptist!)

brings relief from birds and wind. Josette does not approve of Baptists. Not in France. She glares at the Americans. They sound like Texans. She's watched *Dallas*. She's heard Bush.

The girl says, "Holy shit! I like your angels better, Daddy."

"Thank you, honey. Mine are real."

The boy asks, "What's with all the devils?"

"Propaganda." It's the only word the mother speaks. She's tired, perhaps.

Josette's annoyed. They just don't understand. She contemplates the wall again. The angry suffer in a cave. It's like a slaughterhouse. They're strapped to boards. A grinning devil grips a pale man's head and slits his throat. Josette has knives like that at home. She has a small one in her handbag. In the back, a female devil, breasts like aubergines outlined in lemon, butchers two at once. A man's laid, screaming, crosswise, on a woman. Arms raised high above her whiskered head, the demon sinks her sword blade in his naked back. The woman's belly-up beneath; she's winded by the pressure of the sword thrust. You can see her breath. It's yellow.

Sloth's gone missing, taken out with Christ. The lazy get away with it again. Josette's not lazy. She's reliable.

The avaricious boil in cauldrons full of metal. Once they hoarded gold and silver; now they simmer in a surfeit of the stuff. She thinks of them as chunks of bread in red hot fondue. One old man seems puzzled. What did I do? This is most unfair! He takes no notice of the naked redhead baring all in front of him. (The slut!) He tells the watching congregation, Someone call my lawyer, damn it! Two clawed devils stir the pot. The female—green-eyed, feathered, marrow-breasted—curls her long pink tongue around a flame. She's happy in her work. She wonders how she landed such a lovely job!

The gluttons crowd the valley of a stinking river. On the bank Josette sees tables spread with greasy cloths. They've not been washed for aeons. They're as bad as old men's raincoats. Blacksnakes slither on the tabletops. The devils feed the living dead with snakes and toads. They make them

drink the river water, pouring it through funnels, squeezing it from wineskins. One poor soul throws up.

Her favorite breasts are in this section of the mural. They're the shape of watermelons and the shade of pumpkins, striped and nipples, milky glory of a red-furred fiend. Papa sold fruit as good as that. He might have been a grocer, but he had a reputation to uphold.

The Texans start to move away. She hears the woman call her husband Billy. It's a silly name. Guillaume has dignity. But Billy? Parents ought to name their children after saints, not bandits. Now the woman links her arm through Billy's, reaching up to kiss his cheek. He calls her Lupe. *Bête!*

Josette enjoys her favorite panel. It's the one where all the lechers writhe together, flesh to flesh and skin to skin, all modesty resigned forever, bumping naked tits and arses like they always wanted to in life, but, here, it's hellfire getting them all heated up, not passion. Stuffed in big round holes, they look like pale spaghetti noodles dropped inside a pot to boil, their lower halves submerged and limp, their upper halves still stiff. The holes are deep and wide, brimful of fire and sulphur.

There's a spotted devil with a scarlet pitchfork that she rather likes. The devil has a hairdo just like hers. It's short and practical, with trim gray curls and flecks of white. It's dignified. The other devils in the panel, with their lime-green ruffs and avocado faces or their cross-eyed wooden masks, are showing off a little. This one's concentrating, doing its duty. You could take a face like that to church.

Josette's decided long ago she wouldn't mind a coffee and a pastry in the small *patisserie* beneath her flat with this one. It'd have to wear a bra, of course. And clothes. Those spotted breasts look bruised, like damaged fruit, poor thing.

They'd start with chitchat.

"Would you like a cup of coffee, dear?" she'd ask.

"Why, thank you."

"Sugar?"

"Two."

"A pastry?"

"Ooh, yes, please. I'll try a *tarte aux fraises*. You can't grow strawberries in hell. It's far too hot. You like my hairdo?"

"Oh, I do."

"I cut it short. Like yours. It's so much easier."

The devil'd inquire about her son. "So, tell me all about your boy."

"Oh, he's a good one, Louis. Yes. You'll not be seeing him in hell."

"Of course not."

hole and prod a bunch of lechers with a pitchfork. She imagines it's quite satisfying.

But the devil might be self-effacing. "Someone has to do it, don't they?" she might say. She'd change the subject. "Can I have another tart?"

"Of course. I'll treat myself as well."

Josette would buy another plate of pastries, wishing she could tell the girl behind the counter who her friend was.



"He's in Paris now, you know. He works there. Something quite important."

"Really?"

"Yes. He's very busy."

"Is he married?"

"No."

"You see him often?"

"Well, not really, no. He phones, though."

When they'd talked enough about her son and families and aches and pains and things like that, Josette would ask the devil how it feels to stand behind a

But she couldn't, could she? People might get frightened. No, she'd keep the secret to herself. She'd be discreet.

They'd sit and chat about declining morals.

"God just gave up, didn't he?" the devil might complain. "He did a bunk. He left the world to go to hell in handbaskets. Those existentialists, like Jean-Paul Sartre, were right: no God, no rules. At least, it looks that way to fools. But, you and I know better." Then, she'd wag her finger and she'd look Josette intently in

For a moment Lupe saw a grayness by the woman's side. It wasn't solid and it didn't really have a shape. But somehow Lupe saw it as a wounded soldier, forehead bandaged, one sleeve flapping empty, and a trouser leg pinned high above the knee. It frightened her.

the eye. "It's up to you and me to make sure everyone behaves."

Josette believes.

The Texans are behind her now. They're laughing. She can hear them, so she turns to glare. It isn't proper. Not in church. Her husband used to take her to Jacques Tati films. They laughed until their sides ached. That was different. That was in a cinema.

She checks her handbag for the knife. It's there.

She says, "I've got my knife."

The devil says, "Good girl. I'll tell you when to use it, dear."

She's ready. Someone has to stand for decency and morals. Someone has to do the devils' work.

She'd like to get Papa's approval.



Lupe loves her family, but she needs to be alone. Her feet ache and she wants to think about the woman in the church. The *pobrecita* never took her eyes off judgment. She was scared. A grayness sat beside her.

First, though, Lupe has to let herself unwind. She's glad to be outdoors, despite the heat. She's sent her family off to find *recuerdos*: T-shirts, knicknacks, all that kind of stuff. She kicks her shoes off, stretches legs, and waggles toes. She really should lose weight. She's not obese or anything. She just gets tired of standing. Billy doesn't mind. He says he likes her round as well as skinny.

There's a breeze. It feels good. Lupe's resting on a cool stone bench. Ahead of her, a shaded walkway overlooks the gardens of the Bishop's Palace. Hanging

vines and roses screen the path. Behind her flows the river.

Lupe grew up by a river in Chihuahua. Not a big one, but enough for shade trees and a little orchard. When her family moved to Texas, Lupe missed the river. Rivers change a little all the time, but concrete never does. She turns and watches swallows skim the surface of the water. Lupe marvels that she's sitting in the garden of a European bishop's palace, she who grew up in Chihuahua.

Sunlight and the river calm her. They're not dead. They're playing with each other like a pair of children. They've been doing it forever.

Bueno, now she'll think about that woman. Every inch of stone inside the church was painted, but the *pobrecita* had to stare at judgment. Why not heaven? On the ceiling, bands of angels made a lot of music. Eight-year-olds with wings played trumpets, tambourines, lutes, flutes, recorders, violins, and crazy twisted horns. Around the coronation of the Virgin, they were having a fiesta! Other *angelitos* had no bodies. They were only wings and faces, like a flock of little sparrows blessed with rosy cheeks and golden feathers. Blue and gold, the colors of the sky and glory, filled the ceiling. *Era muy alegre*, it was joyous.

Billy showed her Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music. First, he showed her details in a book he'd bought and then he pointed to the ceiling. Lupe had to crane her neck and squint.

Cecilia had golden hair, blue eyes, and rosy cheeks. She knelt before the *Virgen*, with a scarlet, royal blue, and golden aureole behind her like a sun. A little angel flew toward her with a crown of

flowers. She'd maybe left it somewhere. Wouldn't that be nice, to have an *angelito* pick up after you!

The angel Gabriel was there as well, announcing Jesus' birth to Mary. You could tell, from looking at the picture in the *libro*, that the angel had a woman's hips and waist and breasts beneath her gown. She held a long-stemmed lily. At her back, the colored sunburst matched her red and blue and yellow feathers.

"That's more like an angel," Billy said. "It takes a little light and color if you want to dazzle demons."

God was busy. He was sitting high up there between the Virgin and the angel Gabriel, surrounded by a flock of sparrow-angels.

"Seraphim," said Billy.

Lupe said, "That's what I meant."

A haloed dove flew down to Mary. Rays of light spread out from God. They broke apart and swam away like wriggling golden worms across a deep blue sea.

"They look like sperm cells," Lupe said.

The children heard. They laughed. The woman glared at them. She seemed so sad and angry. Lupe wished she could have shared the joke with her.

She couldn't. For a moment Lupe saw a grayness by the woman's side. It wasn't solid and it didn't really have a shape. But somehow Lupe saw it as a wounded soldier, forehead bandaged, one sleeve flapping empty, and a trouser leg pinned high above the knee. It frightened her.

She stares across the river. Swallows swoop for bugs. The sky is only blue.

She sits there for an hour. She can't forget the grayness but her feet no longer ache. Her hunger says it's time to find her family, so she walks back round the wall and climbs the zigzag cobbled carriageway toward the square. A little boy plays soccer by himself against a wall. The round, white football bounces oddly on the cobbles.

Lupe sits down at an outdoor café. When her family's done, they'll see her there. She orders an aperitif: a Pernod. Lupe likes the taste of anise and she likes to watch the drink go cloudy when she adds the water. It's a game you

Lupe rests. She sips her Pernod. Sunshine bathes her skin. The nervous growl of traffic seems to fade away. She

A flock of sparrows circles round the woman and her fading grayness. Sunlight turns their brown wings golden. ☀

Photo by Bill Blankenburg

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

READERS WRITE ABOUT THINGS
THEY COULDN'T GET OR KEEP.

YOU'RE FIRED!

Candy, Rosa, and I were a tight three-some when Preddie was hired. Candy, a tall, older beauty, was engaged to a man who loved Clint Eastwood movies and stock car racing as much as she did. Rosa dated an airline pilot and loved Richard Pryor albums. And I played classical guitar.

Our boss's name was Mary. She had red hair and white skin. Mary was from a small town up north and had worked her way up the chain of command to become a manager. She smoked tiny cigars, wore tight-fitting clothes, and traded flirtations with the male attorneys, but they were wary of her; Mary seemed needy in ways that weren't healthy.

Preddie wore platform shoes that seemed to double her height. She had a number of wigs, one more outrageous than the next, and we never saw her without one. She wore short little dresses to show off slim shapely legs.

"With the money I make on this job," she told us on our first break together, "I'm going to redo my whole apartment. Paint it black, and my furniture will be soft, red, and fuzzy. My little boy will love that."

Sitting in our row of desks, the drudgery of typing policies and answering phones filled our working hours, but in the cafeteria and at the various restaurants the four of us frequented, we'd bare our souls and laugh our asses off, oblivious to our differences, as if we'd exchanged electrons and holes and chemically bonded.

Meanwhile, Preddie wasn't producing enough accurately typed policies. The first time Mary lost her temper with Preddie one of the attorneys had to step in, and Mary retreated into her office and slammed the door.

Mary used to wait for me to walk home. She lived on the lake, six blocks closer to work than I did. She seemed normal on those walks. I don't remember what we talked about. I was young and idealistic, and I differentiated between the Mary who was an agreeable walking partner and the Mary who, day by day, seemed more and more determined to terrorize Preddie.

I don't know how long Preddie lasted. One day she came in late, Mary called her into the office, and she came out crying, mascara running. She'd been fired.

When I remember Preddie, I remember laughing until tears ran down my face, and I remember her short legs that looked so long in those short skirts and high shoes, and I remember her face when she'd tell us about what she was going to buy with the money she earned from her first job.

Mary Rodriguez
Madison

LOST FOR A REASON

It was midday when I pulled up to my new obstetrician's office for my first prenatal appointment. My only child, 17-month-old Kyra, was still asleep. By the time my visibly pregnant doctor was ready to see me, the baby had calmed down, but I had turned edgy. The doc said all my blood work from the intake visit looked good. She asked if I wanted another C-section and if I'd decided on amniocentesis; I hadn't thought about any of these things yet. Soon she gently began the ultrasound procedure.

At first, everything seemed normal. She showed me the gestational sac and measured the fetal pole. The length suggested a pregnancy a little less advanced than we had assumed, but we agreed to date the pregnancy based on the measurements instead of my poorly remembered menstrual cycle dates. But a few minutes later she changed her mind and said we would use my original dates.

Right then I knew the vague sense of dread that had been building since she'd entered the room wasn't just nerves. "At seven weeks, a heartbeat should be easily detectable," she said. "A reddish color should come up on the screen where there is blood flow." Her tone got more somber. "I'm sorry, Amy. I don't show any blood flow at all in the gestational sac. I think we should schedule you for another ultrasound at the hospital tomorrow. They have more sensitive equipment. But I want to prepare you for

the worst. At seven or eight weeks I would really expect to see a heartbeat."

I spent the evening scouring the Internet to see if other women had received similar ultrasounds that had turned out to be wrong. None had. The ultrasound at the hospital the next morning confirmed the bad news. A week later, I had a D&C under general anesthesia. The hardest part of the experience was leaving the hospital with my husband. I peeked through the windows of the gift shop as we walked down the last corridor and noticed a plaque with a picture of a teddy and a rattle inscribed with a lullaby. As the electric door swung open and we walked into the August sunshine, I could feel my eyes sting as I thought, "This isn't right. It should be cold. I'm supposed to be carrying a baby." I tripped over the curb and blinked away the tears. I wondered how long I'd be unsteady.

As it turned out, fate was just sparring with me a little before goading me into the ring for the real knock-down extravaganza. Not two months later, after discovering that my father had been diagnosed with metastatic cancer, I took Kyra to Massachusetts with me for nearly a month to help my elderly parents through the maze of chemotherapy appointments, meds and feeding schedules, and bouts with nausea and constipation—a very demanding undertaking that my husband would clearly have forbidden if I'd been pregnant. One morning over breakfast I told my mom that I thought I now knew why I had lost that baby: so I would be able to give my father the gift of myself and his baby granddaughter for a few precious weeks at the end of his life.

Amy Janczy
Lake Mills

THE PHANTOM MUSKIE

"I haven't been in a boat for ages. This would be a perfect day," pleaded my mother. Dad objected; he thought the three-dollar-an-hour rental fee was outrageous (this was 1949). But mother

insisted, and dad relented. We were at Round Lake near Bruce, Wisconsin, for a Fourth of July family reunion.

"Wait a moment." Mother ran to the car for the fishing pole and the angle worms. "I'll dangle a line behind the boat, maybe I can catch a fish for supper."

Dad grumbled about the waiting but agreed that fresh fish sounded good.

Dad had the middle seat because he was rowing. Big sis Shirley was assigned the short seat in the bow while Mother sat in the rear seat with my brothers, Gary, 6, and David, 2.

"I want to go, too," I whimpered.

"Me, too," echoed cousin Winnie, who was 12 like me.

"How many more cousins can we invite?" Dad sighed as he pointed to the two open spaces on the bottom of the boat. With seven people in the boat, I agreed that there wasn't room for any more.

Rowing was hard work for Dad with that much weight, but we enjoyed the ride. Mother put a worm on the hook, set the bobber, and let the line sink slowly into the water.

"What's that sound?" asked Winnie a few minutes later. The line whirled as it unwound rapidly. Mother passed David to Winnie so she could hold the rod with both hands. Regardless of how hard she pulled, the line kept going out.

"Give me that pole!" Dad yelled. "It looks like a big one!"

There was a huge splash some distance from our boat as a very large fish jumped clear out of the water. We could see a line, too. "Is that your fish, Mama?" I asked. We wanted to stand up and look, but we were commanded to sit. None of us could swim and no one had a life jacket.

The battle between man and fish began. The fish would get close to the boat, then suddenly reverse direction and take out more line. It would jump out of the water and try to shake the hook loose. It would dive for the bottom and change direction again. Fifteen minutes turned into 30 as the two battled. Finally the fish got tired.

"We don't have a net, Jack. When I lift him into the boat, you hold him down until we get to shore."

Suddenly the fish landed right in my lap, and I knew I didn't want to hold it. The hook came loose and he looked like he was ready to eat me.

"It's a muskie! I bet it weighs 30 pounds!" Dad yelled. I didn't care what it was, I just wanted it off my lap. I didn't like all those sharp teeth in my face and I couldn't get my arms around it.

Then in one big twist, the muskie snapped into the air and fell back into the lake. Mother's fish was gone. "That was fun, Mama, catch another one," Gary pleaded.

Dad was exhausted. "No, Gary, that was enough fishing for one day. Let's get back and tell everybody about Mother's muskie."

On shore, they laughed, saying things like, "There are no muskies in this lake," and, "You can't catch a muskie with angle worms."

"It was a muskie and it had at least a hundred teeth," I insisted.

"It was bigger than me," chimed in Gary.

"Next time I'll have a net. Then you'll know it was a muskie," Dad snapped at his relatives as he walked to our car.

We never did go back to find Mother's muskie.

Jack Frohn
Oshkosh

EYES ON THE PRIZE

I leisurely meandered with my sister through the open-air Racine art fair one Saturday in early summer. At a jewelry display case I considered a pair of glass-beaded earrings and held them up in the sunlight to reveal their true colors. I focused my gaze beyond the earrings and realized that I, too, was being regarded, through a camera lens. A photographer was on assignment, covering the art fair for the local newspaper. The candid photo op over, he lowered the camera and grinned. Intrigued, I returned his smile, and Diane and I moseyed on. In the next aisle, the photographer approached us, notebook in hand, to garner personal information for the photo. I gave him my

phone number, and we began a long-distance relationship as he moved around the country for his photography internships.

When Mark came to town to visit, he toted his camera with us everywhere—on vacations and at family gatherings (understandable), to grocery stores (vegetable oil spill in aisle 7) and into fast-food restaurants (huh?). He'd single out characters to photograph and interview, whom I would abruptly ignore. On the interstate heading up to Door County we pulled over for someone else's minor fender-bender and I facetiously thought, "Now there's a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo op." I accepted the ever-present camera at the beginning of our relationship but became frustrated by his devoted passion to it. I simply wanted more of his attention during our infrequent visits, and soon after that trip up north, he called it quits when I changed my mind about accompanying him to an out-of-state photography exhibition.

Years later, I thought of Mark and Googled him on the Internet. Among the search results was a wedding photo of him and his new wife. The avant-garde picture was out of focus, shot on an angle, and didn't include their heads. I wondered if it was him at all, but then recognized the name of the photographer as a friend of his. Momentarily I felt regret that I was not the woman dressed in white as I recalled the joyful times we'd shared. Scrolling further, I discovered that Mark is now a newspaper photo editor in Denver—and, most incredibly, I learned that he had done it. He had actually won a Pulitzer Prize as part of staff coverage of the Colorado fires in 2002. I sat back in my chair, smiled widely, and said out loud, "Good for him."

Mark had sent me a copy of the photo he'd taken of me and my sister that day at the art fair. I had it framed, and every time I look at it, I easily slip back to that warm day in June more than 10 years ago. In the print, Diane and I are looking skeptically at an artist and laughing, our expressions set so similarly that it is easy to recognize our twinship. The black-and-white brings to mind sweet memories and stirs my now-cooled feelings for Mark. I recall the interaction

with the artist, the cherished thought of meeting Mark shortly after that moment, my ardent hopes for a future with him, the cross-country love letters we exchanged, and the adventure of our romance. Rod Stewart sings, "Every picture tells a story, don't it," and I now agree, wholeheartedly.

Deb DeDecker
Madison

MOONWALK

Nineteen-fifties science fiction and von Braun/Bonestell space books filled me with dreams of being the first human to walk on another planet. Space exploration came more rapidly than I had expected, however, and in July 1969, while my wife and I were crossing the continent in our Econoline van, three astronauts were crossing empty space in a capsule not much bigger, entering lunar orbit and preparing to set the first boot prints on an alien world.

We had passed through the earthly wonders of Glacier, Waterton, and Banff national parks and were heading north through British Columbia, reading in the newspaper the time when the landing capsule would split from the orbiter. I looked at my wife and she looked at me. If I couldn't be the first person to land on another planet, I could at least see another person do it. We had to find a TV!

It took a while to find a motel with a TV sign. We paid for a night, but told the owner we wanted the room primarily to watch the moon landing. He said it was a good idea to stop over anyway, because a big storm was coming.

In the room was a large black-and-white TV that produced a suitable enough picture. Storm clouds roiled above our roof as we watched the lunar module *Eagle* arcing in utter silence toward a weatherless moon. Astronaut Neil Armstrong said, "Picking up some dust..." Then lightning exploded with a wrath that shook the building and blew out our lights and our TV.

Frantically I raced out into the rain to the van to bring the portable shortwave

radio in. By flashlight I managed to tune in to a very crackling Voice of America, which I could hold onto only by laboriously twiddling the tuning dial. The module had already landed. The astronauts were safe, and they described the powder surface outside. We had missed the moment! I had never expected to see it in my lifetime but once it was imminent, I desperately wanted it. The heroic touchdown on a new world was lost forever to me.

However, there was the first walk on the surface to look forward to—after several more hours of preparation. Deciding that the power wasn't going to come back on for some time, we left the motel and drove on, heading to a campground in Jasper National Park.

The shortwave radio was useless inside the van, so we did some speeding to get there a bit before the scheduled egress. We set up the radio on a picnic bench and tuned in. I still had to keep twisting the dial.

Soon we had attracted a crowd, most of whom were surprised to hear that the moonwalk was about to occur. They hovered around as I dutifully kept the radio in tune. Armstrong described his descent on the ladder in painful detail, one baby step at a time. Then we heard the words: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." (Didn't he mean "for a man?")

More people came. "They're on the ground, walking around." A dozen times I repeated those first words from the surface. Then one person raced toward his camper. Soon others followed because he had tuned in the event on his TV. I dogged on, twiddling the radio dial, scrounging for every detail.

Later, of course, we saw the Eagle landing on TV news. But it wasn't live, and we already knew the ending.

Robert Persons
Madison

THE APARTMENT

I am a journalist earning enough to live in a second-story apartment in a historic

brown brick building in a moderately sized, cosmopolitan Midwestern city. This abode is my "figment" apartment, the one that never was, because, on May 26, 1983, at the age of 20, I stowed the contents of my young life into the back of my fiancé's Plymouth Horizon, waved goodbye to the green '60s central Wisconsin ranch that had been my home since the sixth grade, and never looked back.

I moved into my fiancé's Madison apartment, the place we would call home until our wedding that August. As cute as his place was, it wasn't mine, and I came to regret that I had never segued my two lives with an apartment of my own.

So over the years, I fashioned in my head the apartment that had eluded me. In the soft focus of my mind's eye the fairy-tale flat takes shape, and I retreat to it at will: It is twilight in summer, and a breeze heavy with city sounds saunters in through the open double-hung window. The light from an authentic garage sale lamp warms the beginning of evening as James Taylor softly serenades with "Carolina In My Mind."

The curtains billow out and subside. They are thin and faded, sieves for sunlight by day, a gauzy protective film by night. I snuggle in, cocooned in my independence, romanced by the air, courted by solitude. This is my Carolina.

In the kitchen is a stove, small and white, a porcelain sink, and a window with trim fattened by layers of thick paint. The fridge is filled with milk and cheese and the freezer with ice cream—a true Wisconsin girl's fare. Bananas rest in a pink depression glass bowl on the counter of cracked, quasar-patterned laminate, and a pot of planted basil, a remnant from my attempt at holistic living, sits on the windowsill. The dining room is hardly there, just an aside that easily accommodates my penchant for eating popcorn for dinner.

Rag rugs litter the creaky wood floors of the main living room, attended by radiators that act as catchalls in summer and hiss and clank in the winter. Newspapers and rough drafts of stories compete for coffee table space, while stacks of books bide their time in the far reaches of the room. At one time, an electric typewriter sat on a desk in front of this room's

window (over the years I've had to upgrade to a PC. Even our imaginations must keep up with the times.)

My fade-to-black from the fantasy comes in the form of conversations I've had with women who've said I'm lucky to have never had to live alone, that it isn't all that it's cracked up to be. And perhaps they're right. Perhaps I would not now have this imaginary friend of a place if I'd actually had it in real life. And then, on days when I wonder, "What if?"—where, oh where, would I go?

Barb Harwood
Oostburg

Share Your Stories

We welcome your contribution to "In My Words." Stories should be no longer than 600 words. The next topics are:

ROOMMATES, deadline July 15 (extended deadline for the fall issue). They shared your secrets, stayed up all night talking, and left crumbs in the peanut butter jar. Which roommate/s do you remember and why?

RESOLUTIONS, deadline September 1 (for the winter issue). Has a resolution ever changed your life?

FIRST CONCERT (or Best Concert), deadline December 1 (for the spring issue). Was it hearing Bach with your parents, seeing the Grateful Dead without them, or something much more shameful? (A Captain and Tennille world tour!) We want to hear about the music that moved you and the surrounding experience, live.

E-mail submissions are greatly preferred. Please send yours to:

jfischer@wisconsinacademy.org with the subject heading "In My Words," or mail it to In My Words, Wisconsin Academy Review, 1922 University Avenue, Madison WI 53726.

We will contact selected authors; names may be withheld from publication on request. We regret that we cannot take phone inquiries or return submitted material.

Meet the Fellows

BY MICHAEL STRIGEL,
Executive Director



An exciting event each year—and one that highlights the value of the Wisconsin Academy—is the selection of new Fellows, men and women of extraordinary accomplishment in their fields. It's an experience that is inspiring and humbling at the same time. Inspiring because they represent the pinnacle of human achievement. In their work they demonstrate what we are at our best. Humbling because—well, look at them. All we ordinary people can do is recognize their achievements, honor them appropriately—and then put them to work, which the Wisconsin Academy does most ably! Fellows serve as mentors and guides in our programs, most notably as presenters in the new Academy Evenings forum series that we are debuting around the state this fall (you'll be hearing more about that this summer).

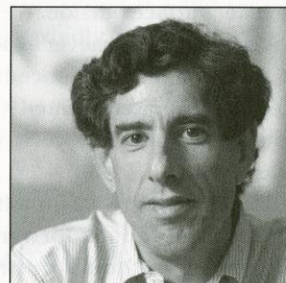
In formal terms, Wisconsin Academy Fellows must "be highly esteemed for qualities of judgment, perceptiveness, and breadth of knowledge of how literature, art, and science contribute to the cultural life and welfare of the state." They should "have a career marked by an unusually high order of discovery; technological accomplishments; creative productivity in literature, poetry, or the fine or practical arts; historical analysis; legal or judicial interpretation; or philosophical thinking."

Our Fellows Class of 2004 exemplifies these criteria. It is my honor and pleasure to present the highlights of their work on these pages.

RICHARD DAVIDSON

News flash: we can harness our emotions to improve our physical and mental well-being. For that powerful message we can thank Richard Davidson, a professor of psychology and psychiatry who was one of the first Western scientists to recognize the value of Eastern spiritual practices in physical and mental health. His research on brain function and the impact of meditation on emotional health has taken him to the highest peaks of the Himalayas to study the brain waves of Buddhist monks to the cubicles of ordinary Wisconsin employees to alleviate the damage of stress in their lives. His work has earned him the respect and friendship of the Dalai Lama, who has visited Davidson's Madison laboratory along with a number of monks who participated in studies there.

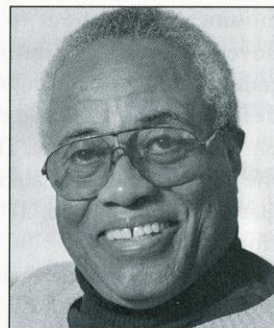
Davidson was the youngest person ever to receive the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association, one of the highest awards one can receive in psychology. His groundbreaking findings and prolific writings have won him numerous honors and placed him at the top of his field, and he has been profiled and widely quoted in such popular publications as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *The New York Times*.



RICHARD DAVIS

Richard Davis, a professor of music and director of the jazz program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, is recognized as one of the world's best bass players. Among many courses, he teaches bass, black music history, and improvisation, and as a musician he is equally at home in jazz and classical music. Davis has performed and recorded with classical and jazz orchestras literally around the world and has recorded with more than 200 jazz and classical musicians, including such notable artists as Ben Webster, Frank Sinatra, John Lennon, Gabor Szabo, Lena Horne, and Sarah Vaughn.

Davis' devotion to teaching and to mentoring young people through music is enormous. He performs at schools and at community events around the state, has received numerous honors and awards, and has served on countless committees inside and outside of the university despite a heavy teaching load. He founded the university's Retention Action Project, an initiative to improve the campus climate for minority students. "Richard lives and breathes diversity," said Paul Barrows, UW–Madison vice chancellor of student affairs, regarding Davis' efforts in that program. "It is at the core of his life."



COME TO THE CEREMONY

Wisconsin Academy members and the public are warmly invited to a ceremony honoring both the new Fellows and the Wisconsin Academy's most generous supporters on Sunday, July 11, 2–5 p.m., at Monona Terrace in Madison.

Our Minerva Laureate is Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Maraniss, who will give a talk about truth-telling and the

literature of fact. Each of our new Fellows will receive recognition and speak about their work.

Admission is \$25 for Wisconsin Academy members and \$35 for nonmembers (includes appetizers). To reserve a space, please contact Gail Kohl of the Wisconsin Academy at 608/263-1692 ext. 14, gkohl@wisconsinacademy.org

MICHAEL FIORE

"When I think about the challenge to health we face in Wisconsin, nothing threatens the health of the residents of our state and the nation to the degree that tobacco does," says Dr. Michael Fiore, a UW-Madison Medical School professor and founder and director of the university's Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention. A little-discussed fact: nearly 20 percent of all U.S. deaths are caused by diseases triggered or accelerated by smoking.



Fiore has dedicated his career to eliminating tobacco as a risk to human health, primarily through smoking cessation, a topic on which he is considered to be the foremost expert worldwide. He conveyed to the medical profession the simple precept that smoking be considered another "vital sign" in primary care, and the significant decline over the past decade of the proportion of the U.S. adult population that smokes can be attributed in great measure to Fiore's research and leadership. "Hundreds of millions of healthy and productive life years have been added to the population and billions of dollars in health-care costs that would have otherwise been lost to smoking-related diseases have been saved as a consequence" of Fiore's work, notes his UW Medical School colleague and fellow Fellow, Dr. Dennis Maki.

ELLEN KORT

When making the case for Ellen Kort to be named a Fellow, it is not surprising that her advocate resorted to poetry—namely, Kort's own, from a work in progress intended to grace a soothing patient care area at a new heart clinic in Appleton:



"The heart hums like a river/its soft cadence moving/like wet-silk words over stone/the heart's fluent music/rich and full and wide/spills what we already know/*We have loved/we love/we shall love*"

"Such are the words and work of Ellen Kort," notes John Mielke, a physician and Wisconsin Academy board member who nominated her. "Words and ideas that come from the common, speak to the common and compel all to reach for previously unknown heights."

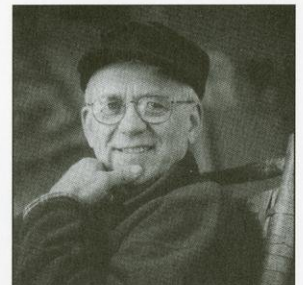
Wisconsin residents over the past four years have been touched and enriched by Kort in her work as our first-ever state poet laureate, a position she served with tireless devotion. But even before that tenure, she served the statewide community in countless ways. Her poems have been architecturally incorporated into Milwaukee's Midwest Express Center, Appleton's Fox River Mall, and the Green Bay Botanical

Garden. She runs writing workshops for at-risk teens, for women in prison, and for survivors of cancer, AIDS, and domestic abuse.

Her social activism enhances rather than detracts from the quality of her poetry. Kort's numerous prizes include the Pablo Neruda Literary Prize for Poetry, the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Prize for Poetry, and the Dr. Hanns Kretschmer "Excellence in the Arts" Award. She is the author of 11 books, including seven books of poetry.

TOM UTTECH

To appreciate Tom Uttech, you have to experience his oil paintings—primeval, luminous renderings of the forests, lakes, and wild animals of the North. "Charged with myth and mystery, Tom Uttech's landscape paintings reflect our deep yearning to be at one with the forces of nature," wrote *Milwaukee Magazine* in a recent profile of the artist and his work.



Uttech pursues his singular vision in a remodeled barn on his farmhouse grounds in Saukville, where he retreats to paint after his many visits north. A place he has called his spiritual home—one often reflected in his paintings—is Quetico Provincial Park, an expansive wilderness in Ontario.

Although landscape painting is hardly the art world's flavor of the month, Uttech's moody fusion of traditional and expressionist styles resonates with a wide critical and popular audience. Galleries represent him in Milwaukee, Door County, and New York. Nearly every painting Uttech creates sells, and he commands up to \$20,000 per piece.

Uttech was an inspiration to the many students he taught during 30 years as an art professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions around the world, including more than 30 solo exhibitions, and his work has been celebrated in many distinguished publications.

"Tom Uttech is not only one of the most significant landscape painters Wisconsin has ever produced but also one of the most important in the United States today," says Ruth Kohler, director of the John Michael Kohler Center for the Arts in Sheboygan. Kohler is vice president of arts for the Wisconsin Academy and is also a Wisconsin Academy Fellow.

Nominate a Fellow

If you know of someone whom you wish to nominate as a Fellow, our next call for submissions comes out in January 2005. Stay tuned to our website, www.wisconsinacademy.org or call Gail Kohl at 608/263-1692 ext. 14 for further information.

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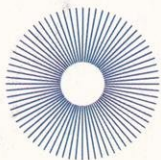


Atchikina (2004), by Tom Uttech, an acclaimed painter from Saukville who has just been named a Wisconsin Academy Fellow. Uttech's work will be featured in the Wisconsin Academy's first exhibit in its new home in the Overture Center for the Arts in Madison. See inside front cover for more information about that show, and page 71 for more on Uttech, who has a major exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Museum from July 10 to October 3.

Image courtesy of the Tory Folliard Gallery in Milwaukee

Price: \$5

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