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great lake review

Front and Back Covers by Patti Burgmeier

GREAT LAKE REVIEW
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Ramblings

Beneath my thumbnail rests a black and red
blood blister;
A monument to dead erythrocytes, leukocytes,
and platelets.

This dome of dry blood marks cessation
of existence;
Like the granite stone above my
grand-parents' head.

Blood cells die, as do men, as
do women;
Life: built of death like walls
built of bricks.

I stand above my grand-parents' grave
and gaze
Out over the granite quarry from which
stones are cut.

Walter Plaisted
Panacea

I hold few things seriously. A good meal, a good book, and a good screw rank among them. Life in general is not to be taken seriously, I know; those who give it priority end up terminally skeptical. I ceased taking my wife seriously after our third child; she demanded it, and I acquiesced. So it came that on my thirty-seventh birthday I thought I recognized a trend towards a whirlpool of quickening apathy, a "complete indifference," if you will. Pessimism, I thought. Not what Aristotle meant when he warned that the more we learn, the less we realize we know. Knowledge breeds curiosity, I told myself. I am safe. Nevertheless, it nagged at the back of my mind, and probably was the deciding factor in my decision to spend a summer month at my brother-in-law’s farm in Pennsylvania.

Ray and Angela had lived on the farm for almost 10 years. It was a small dairy farm, with no more than 50 herfords being milked at any time of the year. They used to have chickens, about a dozen which used to run free and lay a few small brown eggs in return for the opportunity to shit on anything on ground level. They were sold when the milk inspector said it was unsanitary. Three goats did much the same thing for a few months; the milk inspector objected to them, and they were sold also. I don’t know why it never occurred to Ray to pen the things up.

At any rate, I arrived in the middle of June, sans wife, kids, and preconceptions. I thought of it as a vacation, if I thought of it at all. Angela, a little curious of my motives, gave me a warm greeting, its sincerity tainted by the suspicion that I had some disease which cleaner air and harder work would alleviate. I found out later that she called my wife behind my back, asking her about it. Jean said she knew nothing about a disease, but that if I did have one, (and it would be just like me not to say anything about it, she added) it was probably not communicable. Ray was no doubt more than a little pleased for the extra help, and Neil, my 9-year-old nephew, couldn’t decide if I was a guest or a hired man, and he ignored me.

Dinner that night (two pizzas picked up to celebrate my arrival) was at the dinner table, but after a week I had become part of the immediate family, and we all ate in front of the TV from then on. To my relief, my younger sister’s cooking predilections had standardized with time. She had taken a fancy to oriental food when in high school, serving up colorful, pungent, steaming vegetable concoctions to us on those nights my mother didn’t cook. Almost without exception, they had been noxiously sour, or completely tasteless. Ray’s bucolic tastes had evidently brought her around though, and she served up roast beef and venison steaks, garden green beans and swiss chard and our mother’s apple upside-down cake with just as much enthusiasm.

Farm coffee, particularly morning farm coffee, after one has worked in the barn or the field for an hour or two, is remarkable delicious, drawing that fine line between heartiness and bitterness which I had been used to ignoring. Unpasteurized milk, however, was not the treat I expected it might be. While I had never been a lover of skim milk, the cream on the top of the pitcher was always such a sickening shade of yellow, with not infrequently a fly or two in it if it had just come in from the barn, that I drank the farm’s sulphur water much more often.

On the first whole day of my stay, Ray woke me up at 4:07 a.m. I got dressed and out to the barn quickly, for I thought that something terrible had happened, and he needed another pair of hands. I followed his instructions promptly, realizing as we went along that he was preparing to milk and that nothing was wrong at all. A four a.m. wake up call would probably be part of the daily routine, and I grew irritable. Ray apparently expected this, though, and joked and talked at me until I was grinning with him.
The morning milking, from 4:30 a.m. to 6:30 a.m., was something I never did figure out, much less justify to myself. It was the first of two daily milkings, the other starting at 4:30 in the afternoon. Why not just have one big milking in the middle of the day, I argued. Ray would only smile over his cereal, and tell me that a cow produced more milk if milked twice a day.

I began to dread that 4:07 wake up call; it was always imminent. I would wake up at 3:30 and just lay in bed until I heard Ray’s voice calling up the stairs. Further, the refined part of me refused to relent its old habit of reading until midnight or so, and that first week I lived between naps stolen after lunch.

One thing about the morning milkings, though; they prepared one for the highest quality naps. And I am a lover of naps--late afternoon naps, post-dinner naps, Saturday morning naps while cartoons are blasting away on the TV (courtesy my two youngest), and early Friday evening naps before going out. Of course, nothing compares to that king of naps, the Sunday nap. I make no distinction between a Sunday morning nap and Sunday afternoon nap; as some connoisseurs are apt to do; I have always maintained, with not a little support from my colleagues in this field, that Sunday itself is one dawn to dusk napping opportunity, and that every moment spent out of bed is a transgression against the spirit of the relaxing weekend.

And the farm on the seventh day seemed devoted to paying homage to the great institution, as if it were a second, more sincere kind of prayer. The house would ooze that serenity characteristic of that time of the week, from both the shadows of the stairwell and the weak light that slipped around the window shades. Ray and I would eat a silent breakfast and then head for our beds like monks to a devotional.

In such moments, it was easy to forget that farming is the third most dangerous profession in America (behind mining and something else.) Cow number 39 might have looked no different to my unpracticed eye, except that she might have been a little older and heavier than the more nervous, newly-freshened heifers. The first sign I received that she might be less cooperative came when I noticed that her head did not move in my direction when I slipped in beside her to wash the teats, prior to putting the milker on. Her eye was already locked onto my every move, as if she had been watching me, anticipating my arrival, and conniving, plotting. I could not have guessed it then, but my instincts were correct.

Time for cows, as well as for humans it seems, is never consistent. Fear or anger makes them hyperactively aware of each detail around them in the smallest division of time. Prod them in the morning, when they are dozing standing up, or when they are slow after feeding in the afternoon, and they move in minutes to our seconds. But those two emotional reactions, combined with a supernatural, vicious cunning like the one I now faced, can galvanize a fearsome berserker gang on any cow. As Ray would tell me later, the first thing a cow does when she is about to kick you is shift her weight away from you to leave the striking leg comparatively free. This cow shifted and struck, like a veteran boxer, all in one swift, jerking motion. In that next consecutive instant, my shin began to hurt, and her hoof was swinging back up for another kick. I moved my leg, but not quick enough. She clipped me right below the knee.

I stumbled backwards. The pain became subordinate to my indignation. My only thought was of blind revenge. Her eye never left me, and she shifted her weight from one side to the other, unsure of which direction I would come at her. Remembering General Lee's old battle proverb, “Always keep them guessing,” I moved in directly behind her. Taking my time, I channeled all that furious, indignant energy into one awful kick at the offending hoof, and by some freak chance she sortied a kick at that same moment. The result--her hoof met my foot and returned it from whence it came. My foot, then my leg was spun around, and the rest of me followed into the manure and sawdust on the floor. Ray, who had been at the other end of the barn, had the good sense not to smile as I got up.

But the suppers barbequed on the porch while watching the sunset, the hours of coffee in the kitchen on the afternoons that it rained, and the soothing silence that pervaded the farm gave such incidents more attention than they deserved in my memories. The peacefulness was a private recollection, the cow anecdote came forward when I was asked about my visit.

I have been back to the farm four times since that visit, never taking the family with me when I wished to stay for more than a few days. For I found that the indifference I perceived creeping up on me was flexibility, acceptance, and then contentedness in the farm's panacead routine, that apathy conquered itself, devoured itself. I returned to Pennsylvania as often as I did, not of self obligation or even gratitude, but out of fear; a fear which I have yet to take the time to understand.

Chris Williams
Variations on a Theme by
William Carlos Williams

About the plums; 
the ones you left in the crisper 
with the potatoes that are 
ready to bloom: 
one was soft and furry with mold, 
the other, although it felt 
quite firm and was of the 
brightest violet, was 
violetsipper bitter. The other 
had a pit like a rock. 
I broke my tooth. What are you 
keeping anyway, 
a refrigerator or a museum? 
Don't you know that old fools 
like me run around trying to find 
some sweetness, even if it does 
belong to someone else, 
and then, with cute phrases 
and practiced wit, try to turn 
it into a poem, even while 
the taste of their theiveries 
is still fresh upon their tongues?

Nathan Holt
Timepiece

Night Hour

Pale light leaps through the sash
To swim in the pond
Just back of
The diner.
The kitchen walls stare at
Those who wash chipped plates
In scalding
Sinks. The damp
Room hints of the evening
Menu; sharp odors
Spinning threads
Among the
Workers' spicy talk while
Flogging frayed curtains
And nestling
Beneath the
Cupboards with onion sacks
And sweaty kitchen
Pipes. At the
Corner grill.
Regulars watch the game
With pitchers of warm
Ale; no one
Heeds the score
Or the announcer's trite
Exclaims that thunder
From the set.
Streetlights guide
The nightwalkers along
Their shadowy ways.
A nameless
Soul is watched
By tired eyes through a
Tattered third floor screen.
A dry wind
Stirs as the
Radio crackles string
Of thin notes.

Sunset

The lacy black tangled branches enclose
A crimson sun which bathes in a purple haze.
The peaks of houses cobble the horizon,
Their chimneys' wispy smoke tattles of warmth.
As graying twilight descends on pink and mauve
The birds are silhouettes flying swiftly
Past pencil lines of poles standing sentinel.
Antenna arms form crosses against the sky.
Bells toll the hour, the lights begin to wake,
And geese in V-formation traverse the moon.

Carole Shiffer

Poetic Dialogue

Whatever is, is whatever
You say it is.
Is it? Say you.
Carefully think then will you - you will think then carefully
Before you speak? Speak you before
All of magic words?

Words, magic of all
Kinds make poets. Poets make kinds
Of images from thoughts they have.

Have they thoughts from images of
All they see? See they all?
Saying: in seeing, in knowing. Knowing in seeing. In saying
Create they what they know?

Know they what they create?

Whatever is, is whatever
You say it is.

Carole Shiffer
Street Musicians

Snow swirled silently around Onofrio as he struggled with his organ cart. Street lamps began flickering as the sky darkened. With his body bent over the organ, Onofrio pushed hard onto the cart in order to get it through the snow. He breathed heavily. Shops were closing down and the warm lights in their windows were being turned out by their keepers. Shivering, Onofrio pulled at his collar and shielded his eyes from the snow blanketing his world, and continued following the path of the street lights down the road. A group of young boys stood on the corner throwing snow at one another.

"Entertain us, musicman," one of the boys yelled.

Onofrio stopped and straightened himself slowly. The thin layer of snow on his back casually fluttered to the ground. He brushed his bare hand slowly over the surface of his organ to clear away the snow. He began playing an old folk song, but the snow seemed to mute the sadness in his song.

"Sing, old man," another ordered.

Onofrio stopped playing and looked at the boys. "I cannot sing, but I will play more for a small price. I need money. My daughter Maria is sick," he mumbled.

"How about a snow catch, musicman?" Several snowballs were thrown; Onofrio bent down over his organ and covered his head as the boys aimed for his cap.

"We want to hear singing, musicman, not just your organ."

"Maria is sick; she sings. You can help. I will play again if you give me a little," Onofrio begged.

"How about a little snow, musicman?" The boys tittered, threw snow at him, and ran down a dark alley. Onofrio shivered and wiped the melting snow from the back of his neck. Again, he strained to get the wheels of his cart turning through the snow.

He headed towards the center of town as the evening crowd began parading the streets. Several well-to-do gentlemen passed by him talking of their respective businesses. Onofrio tipped his cap and placed his fingers on the organ keys. The gentlemen continued their conversation and walked into a tavern across the road.

"The tavern," thought Onofrio, "surely some of the tavern goers will part with some of their money."

Onofrio struggled to get his organ up over the street curb. He wiped the snow from his eyebrows, and began playing a lively tune. His fingers, although quite numb from the snow, still seemed dexterous as they danced up and down the keyboard. His black cap was tilted on his head as he jerked from side to side in time with the music. His grey beard was white as the heavy snowfall clung to the hair on his face like dust. Occasionally, he would brush the snow off from behind his neck and straighten the collar on his suit jacket. Under his jacket he wore a vest, but because of his stomach, which rested gently on the belt of his trousers, he was unable to button it fully. Tapping his boots helped him to keep time with his music and, more importantly, his feet from becoming stiff with frostbite.

The tavern was small, but alive. Although the snow fell heavily, the light outside the doorway was bright, and acted as a beacon to persons on the street. Through the steamed window you could make out two bartenders busily filling orders while patrons crowded the fireplace and laughed aloud. Women sat prim and proper, drinking, as their men stood over them waiting for them to get drunk. One woman stood in the corner playing a guitar and singing. She was dressed fancily and acted flirtatious; several men stood around her offering her drinks, money, and bets.

Onofrio watched through the window and thought of Maria home in bed.

"My Maria will sing proper. She will go to school and someday people will stand in line with money to hear her sing."

A young man stood in the shadows of the tavern listening intently to Onofrios' song. He was dressed in a long wooly coat with a high collar around his head so that only his eyes could be seen. His hands disappeared deep inside his pockets. On his feet he wore unbuckled galoshes. Onofrio noticed him.
"Please, come and enjoy. Maria is sick so she could not be with me tonight. A small donation would be greatly appreciated."

The gentleman stepped forward. "Good evening; I heard your playing. You sound quite professional. My name is Benaja and I am a student-of-music. I cannot afford a donation, but I would like to give you some advice. You must audition a singer. The two of you could do very well for yourselves."

"But sir, did you not hear? Maria...

"When I was young, I enjoyed listening to street musicians. Interested in artistry, but deep down this was their life. They had to keep playing to put food on the table. Would do most anything, too. You could make money, musicman, but you need a singer.

"I have a singer. She is home, sick. Maria sings lovely and one day she will go to the conservatory. Together we perform, and the money we save is for the conservatory."

"You have artistry, but no money," the man noted.

"I will play for you," Onofrio said, "perhaps you could spare something for Maria and myself?"

"Spare time, but not much else," the man answered. "Thank you, musicman, you have inspired me to go home and compose." The man turned and walked away. Onofrio stared as the man's footprints slowly filled with falling snow and were soon gone.

A couple emerged from the tavern and stood staring into the dark sky, watching the snow as it seemed to fall from nowhere.

"Perhaps you would like to hear a song?" Onofrio asked.

"Oh, that would be lovely," the woman replied. "You do sing?"

"Maria, my daughter, she sings with me. She is twelve, but with a woman's voice. We perform on these streets, maybe you have seen us?"

"I'm afraid we haven't," said the husband. "This weather will make us ill if we keep standing here, my dear."

"Oh, but please. Maria is sick. I will play you a ballad," Onofrio insisted.

Onofrio blew into his hands and massaged his fingers. He stood, slightly bent, and began playing another tune. He concentrated on each note and pressed the keys gently. The snowfall was still heavy, but the melody seemed to avoid the flakes and dance away into the night sky. Onofrio played harder, striving to be heard above the passing wail of an ambulance siren. The woman watched intently, blanketeted by snow and song.

"You play beautifully; have you played long?" the woman asked.

"I've always wanted to."

"Years, and thank you," Onofrio politely spoke. "Could you spare some money for Maria?"

The woman looked at her husband.

"Step into the tavern where it's warm, musicman," her husband spoke. "I have a proposition." He looked over at his wife, "Wait here a moment."

Onofrio followed him into the tavern, and noticed the gold watch chain sparkling on his vest. The warm air rushed into his face and made his head swirl as he stepped through the door.

Minutes later both men exited. The wind was picking up and the snow began blowing.

"Can we go home now? I'm very cold," the wife said.

"Yes, I want to get this home before the snow damages it. I'm sure we can find space in the living room."

Onofrio watched the snowflakes falling obliquely against the street lamps as the couple wheeled the organ cart home. Shivering, he pulled at his collar and wiped the snow off his face. He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and felt the warm roll of paper money. He turned slowly and tramped away from the town. The snow was falling harder. Onofrio glanced back. The roof tops were all covered in layers of white and only the brick chimneys could be seen sticking up into the sky. Onofrio watched their black smoke rise, slowly fade, and eventually disappear into the sky.

"Musicman, where is your Music?"

The group of young boys emerged from an alleyway. Onofrio squinted through the snow at them.

"How can you play music without an organ?"

"I wanted to play before, but you offered me nothing," Onofrio said, "I had to sell my organ."

"You are no musician now, old man." The boys reached for some snow on the ground.

"I will play again," Onofrio insisted.

"Would you like to play catch now?" The boys laughed, threw snow at him and ran back down the alley.

Onofrio wiped the snow from his face, turned, and walked home to Maria.
Women In Autumn

Some walk briskly past and smile, others, with heads lowered towards the pavement, pass without so much as an upward glance, and others still, with eyes fixed on a small point in the distance, pass. Those who are coming or going, carrying books, stopping to talk with friends by the wayside, or taking angling paths towards the lake, are women whose voices do not fall on my ear, whose looks and graces are only shadowed memories dredged up from time to time when the walls of my room seem stark, when I find myself muttering to the faceless dark. Some, with faces like cold moons, others, with smiles and long tresses, whisper by in slacks, or swish past like small winds as their skirts rustle. In Autumn, I am tempted to compare them to leaves, to think of them as being launched on endless waves of air, travelling for miles before they dip down and fall to earth as soft as the rush of butterflies that light upon withered stems. All of them, thick browed or thin, long or short of chin, elegant, plain, beautiful, are wisps of light that turn corners, grow small on long sidewalks, or sometimes, turning back suddenly, they give an unexpected smile and wave before they disappear.

Jonathan Hazelton
Training

Two well-dressed women board the second streetcar at the last station on Sanderstrasse. The first has a boy of five or six, the second a girl about the same age. The women sit together, their children on the seats in front of them, the boy under the window and the girl on the aisle. They are hardly seated before the little girl begins to pinch and prod the boy in a tentative but deliberate way. The mothers, chatting, pay no attention.

In a moment the linked tram cars snap around the corner to the right and roll past the park, where concrete ping-pong tables replace the medieval fortifications that stood until World War Two. Mist weaves through the lindens and oaks above the walking paths and benches. The tram crosses the Lion Bridge, with its "Catholic" stone lions at one end facing the cathedral, "Protestant" lions at the other with their backs to it, and turns sharply left along the river toward Steinbachtal and Heidingsfeld, past boating and tennis clubs, soccer fields and running tracks. The society is devoted to training. An old mansion across from the next stop has a stone arch above its entrance with the inscription in Latin, "For Faith and Homeland."

The girl jabs with elbow and knuckles, stamps the boy's feet, pinches him and digs him with her nails. Hitting girls is absolutely verboten; he can only try to protect himself. He looks more often and more unhappily at his mother as the attack intensifies, the girl emboldened by easy, unopposed success. His mother has taught him his duty. She ignores him. He cannot interrupt her conversation with the serene, oblivious mother of the girl. His looks grow more beseeching, desperate for relief that won't come.

At last the boy tries to get up from his seat, to get past his tormentor to an unoccupied seat across the aisle. His mother promptly halts him by the shoulder, only glancing at him in annoyance as she barks "Setz dich hin!" Sit down there! And you behave yourself, Young Man!" He obeys instantly, returning to his punishment. His mother smiles apologetically at the girl's mother. The girl's face glows. She has beautiful eyes. Certain that she attacks with impunity, she attacks without restraint.

By silent looks the boy still implores his mother to rescue him. He continues feebly the hopeless effort to defend himself without retaliating. He is helpless. The girl, tacitly supported by his mother and by the aloof complicity of her mother, soon brings him to tears. Two attentive women across the aisle from the mothers exchange little nods, content that the world works as it should, "There, you see."

When the cars stop before the Neubert department store in Heidingsfeld, the little girl demurely rises and smiles happily at her mother, who takes her hand. The miserable boy slumps exhausted under the window, head turned away, trying to compose himself. His mother jerks him from the seat and tells him he has been "such an embarrassment." She purses her lips and shakes her head as she looks at the girl's mother. "What a trial they are! But we do manage to train them somehow."

On the platform she insists that the children shake hands. They do, and as the mothers assure each other that they must get together to talk more often, the girl quickly kicks the boy in the shin, one last shot. Utterly defeated, he lunges to his mother and buries his face in her big abdomen, seeking the pathetic relief that comes with unconditional surrender. She shakes him, bends over him scowling, tells him to behave himself or she won't take him shopping anymore. When she stands erect she looks satisfied. His eyes, quickly dry, have turned cold and hard as chips of glass.

Paul Thomas
Woodworking I

The woodworker decides which of His ideas to bring into Existence. Then he picks from his Pile of stock only those pieces Of board that will best produce the End product. If at first he sees The boards are all gnarled and knotted And rough-edged, by sanding Out the Nicks, rasping roughness, and filing Down the burrs, he can bring out The beauty of the grain. You see, His perfection is his Earmark.

FITTING
G
THE
T
H
PIECES
R
Carefully,
And then gluing the Rails and rabbets and clamping the Pieces, he checks that all edges are Even, and that no roughness is Noticeable. Then he applies The finish, the stain that can make Even willow seem like walnut, Rock maple like cherry. And this Was part of his plan from the start, Of course. Like all artists, he will Regulate his work. So he can Keep his original idea-

A in mind, like some poets, or Like some painters, reality Is warped to suit his purpose. The Keynote is: Grain is real, a pleasing pattern, Even though the stain carries connotations.

Steven P. Cornish
Summer Wedding

The frog-hopping swamp
band of drunk crickets fiddled
dusk into morning.

_Nanette L. Crandall_

The Lost Christmas

From behind torn curtains, I remember watching
snow falling soft as an angel's touch
and streetlights making halo circles on the ground.

Every Christmas Eve, the city would still be up,
cars always making their dirty slush,
and souls scurrying to find the stores are all closed.

Although I hoped for a red sleigh and suited man
there was something in my mother's eyes
that made me not ask for more than love—that she gave.

Still, I watch—knowing no one can ever help them
search for special gifts—they can't be wrapped.

What is expected of cities with false halos?

_Nanette L. Crandall_

She Had No Right

When David woke up, Sheila was sitting on her feet next to him on
the water bed, wearing nothing, her hands tucked palm to palm
between her knees. He couldn't see her face, because the light that came
through the door that was partly opened onto the kitchen was behind
her, but he could tell that she was staring at him. When she leaned over
and kissed his forehead, he smelled pot.

"Been home long?" he said.

"A while," she said. "You must be tired. I've been watching you. I
smoked the rest of the joint that was on the table. You were snoring."

"I'm all right," he said, propping himself against the headboard and
rubbing his eyes. "How was work?"

"It sucked," she said. "You can't believe how many assholes there are.
But," she said, kissing him on the chest, "I don't care. I'm home. You're
home. I'm horny!"

"Let me up a minute," he said. "Gotta take a leak."

Sheila smiled when she heard the splashing in the toilet and the flush
through the thin wall. She turned on a lamp, and stretched out on the
water bed, which took up most of the room and was the first newly
bought piece of furniture in the trailer. The weight of David climbing
back on the bed sent waves bouncing back and forth underneath her,
and she felt his strong hands rubbing her behind the shoulders, where
she always got a sharp pain from carrying trays of bottles. She said ooh,
and in a while, after he stopped, and the waves stopped, she said, "So
how was your day?"

"Tolerable," he said.

"Meaning?" she said.

"Meaning the propeller came in."

"And you're going to be leaving me, on my first three nights off in a
row in a month."

"I'll be going, no doubt," he said. "Sorry. The way flounders are
running though, I might be home in a day."

"And off to catch another boatload for the next three." She turned
over and sat up, causing a new set of waves, and they both expertly
squirmed to where their backs were against the headboard.

She spoke first. "I'm sorry David. I don't mean to be a bitch. I think
it's all that the drunk fucking tourists are getting me depressed. They're
really obnoxious. It's a full moon too."

"Must be people aren't getting laid often enough," David said.
I'm sure most aren't," she said. "I don't even think it's mostly that
tough. Most of them probably haven't had anything decent in so long,
they'd rather just keep getting drunk and being assholes. At least they're
sure of how to do that. It's like a carnival."
"It is a carnival," David said.
Ignoring the comment, she said, "Do you remember Sarah Lermans,
that woman I teach with?"
"Speaking of drunks?"
"David--"
"How can I forget a woman who drops in--a complete stranger--at
four in the morning, shit-faced, and proceeds to make a pass at me while
you're in the kitchen making coffee for her?"
"A stranger to you," Sheila said. "And she was out of her mind."
"In more ways than one," David said, and laughed. "What about
her?"
"I don't know. I shouldn't bother, I guess. She can be a decent person,
when she's not degrading herself with the first loser who's willing to
drag her out into his fucking car." David saw that Sheila was growing
tense. "Tonight it was some creep who never even took off his sun­
glasses the whole time she talked to him." Sheila paused. "She used to be
a dedicated teacher. The way she's been, I really doubt if she'll be
making it back at all."
"Her husband's out of the picture altogether, I take it?"
"That scumbag was never in the picture," Sheila said. "The only way
you know he's been around is by the bruises on her."
"He hits her?"
"I don't know. She gets bruises."
"How could she let him?"
"I don't know. She talks about leaving him all the time, when he's not
there. It--I--it gets so depressing after a while, David. I used to think I
did her some good, like when we went shopping, and we went to the
Hair Shack and she stopped wearing her hair in that horrible bun. And
always asking how you and me were getting along. When I came to the
school, she made me think I was the first friend she'd been able to
confide in for a long time, but now I'm beginning to see why no one else
on the faculty will have anything to do with her."
Sheila sighed, and took David's hand in hers. She noticed that his
expression was blank, his mouth slightly open. "I'm sorry, babe," she
said. "I shouldn't have brought all this up."
"I'm beginning to think so," David said. "Don't you at least know
any good dead baby jokes?"
"I'm sorry," she said. "It's just that she said something tonight that
really pisses me off, the more I think of it."
"So don't. How do you load a pile of dead babies onto a truck?"
"It's not funny, David. She really upset me." She took her hand away
and crossed arms on her chest. He put his fingers on her arm, but she
said, "Let me go."
They both stared straight ahead for a while, saying nothing, until
David said, quietly, "With a snowblower."
"You're fucking gross," she said. She put her hand on his thigh. She
leaned her head back, sighed, and said, "That bitch had no right. She
called us 'kids', for one. 'You kids don't know how lucky you are,' she
said before she left with that creep. 'You kids sure got it right about not
making any commitments,' she said. 'Because you're only going to find
it falling apart someday anyway.' David, I--"
David gently pushed her hand, because her nails had gradually dug
into his thigh as she spoke. He coughed. He said, "I would have told her
to shut the fuck up."
"She had no right, David. I never wanted to be home with you so
badly."
David gasped, as if he was going to say something. Sheila wept
quietly. They sat and listened to each other breathe, his hand on hers on
his thigh.
Quietly, he said, "Why don't you quit? You work enough during the
year. Substitute for summer school if you get bored."
I'll survive. I'd lose my unemployment if I subbed, and you know we
need the money. And if we didn't, pal," she said, rubbing the inside of
his leg, "you know I'd be laying on the beach all day, every day; and
every night, I'd be laying you--all night."
"Except when I'd be fishing," David said.
"Then I'd masturbate," she said.
"Whooo," he said. "Could I watch?"
"Silly, if you were here, then I wouldn't have to jerk off."
You can't 'jerk off,'" he said. "When you're a woman, it's called
masturbating."
"I think you're jerking me off," she said, reaching with her hand until
it found his penis.
"Whooo," he said. "Now I think--""
"Now I think Shut Up and kiss me, you fool," she said.
"I'd be a . . . mmmm," he said, as she leaned over him to shut the light,
her long hair brushing his face. In the bluish glow that came through
the kitchen door, the two of them slid to the center of the bed together,
he on his back, she on her knees, and the choppy waves made by the
movement eventually gave over to the tender, swelling rhythm of two

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bodies loving that have loved each other many times before.

David stared at the millions of startled yellow-tail flounder that lay glistening in the bright light of a new world, making obscene sucking noises as they flopped around in the hold of the pitching boat. The salt and sweat he tasted when he wiped his mouth with the back of his arm, brought back the taste of Sheila the night before.

Captain Munder, standing next to David, looked disusted. "Cunt covers," he said. "Half a these ain't even legal and what's left of em ain't even big enough ta cover a cunt apiece. Ya think we'll even see a nickel for the whole slew?" Looking at David, who hadn't moved or responded, he said, "Ain't you still the mate of this boat? Or do yo think you're going to stand around all day just because you gotcher rocks rolled last night?"

David was helping the new deck hand, who had been talking all day about the woman he had picked up the night before. "My goodness," he was saying, "Did she have a tight little hole, for a married woman. I damn near fucked it right off in it! Y'all got some wild women up here--likeable, likeable." He had reeked of beer in the wheelhouse that morning, and at about noon, the mirrored sun glasses he'd been trying to keep on his face while he worked fell off and got stepped on by David--an accident which gave David more satisfaction than he would later admit to Sheila. David hadn't spoken a word to the deck hand all day except to give instructions, but still the other talked incessantly. Had it been Sarah Lermans that the hand was talking about, David might have been driven to something more severe, but instead, finally, he just told him: "Listen, man, I don't even know your name, but if you want to stay on this boat, just learn to keep your mouth shut."

Sheila, awakened by the noisy children playing near the trailer next door, stayed in bed until the daylight had creeped brightly into the trailer through every possible crack in every curtain. She thought that if she stayed where she was, remembering the sweetness of late last night, it would not get dark again until David was back home.

After some time, she got up and went to the kitchen and rinsed out her coffee cup and a glass that was in the sink. The smell of the stale beer she poured from the glass reminded her of where she'd have to be again in a few days; and it made her feel guilty about not being on the beach, lying in the sun; and she thought, as she sometimes did, that if she ever had to carry one more beer to one more fucking drunk, she would die.

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Autumn Leaves:
canvas specks in orange and rust
on glamorless
abused sidewalk seams--
wisp wind lifts their broken bodies into the air to gyrate twist and twirl;
spirits of spring, shattered skins from trees--once opulent with green and life.
cracked and dry flakes scattering to the wind, weather, will of kickers passing by--
age is so,
the parching of skin, scarring of life.

Maxine S. Petry
I was fifteen when I met Todd. It was a summer day, and I was walking through the woods behind my house when I found him. From the looks of him, I knew he couldn’t have been more than seven. He wore a safari hat that covered half his face and held a stick in his hand. He swung the stick angrily, jumping backwards and forwards, mimicking a sword fight.

"Hello," I said.

He ignored me, continuing his battle. I sat on a large rock and waited patiently.

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked when I realized this might take all day.

"No." He started breathing heavily and dragging his feet. I knew we were reaching the climax of the scene. It was either him or his opponent. Suddenly, he bent over as though he had taken a stab.

"Don't give up!" I yelled. "Get him."

With a sudden urge of power, he stood straight up and raised his sword. Then, he thrust it forward and his eyes followed his victim to the ground.

"Alright!" I applauded, as he stood proudly, taking in his victory. He turned to me, out of breath with his hand on his stomach. He winced in pain and fell.

"Should I get a doctor?"

He sat up examining his stomach.

"I'm okay," he said. "It's just a small cut."

"That was some fight. Who were you fighting?"

His eyes opened wide. "The dragonkeeper."

"Dragonkeeper? Are there dragons around here?"

"Big dragons with one eye and they breathe fire and smoke and they eat people."
"No!" I protested.
"Yes! I think they ate P.J."
"Who's P.J.?"
"My brother. They ate him."
"When?"
I don't know. I just know they ate him."
"Maybe they're hiding him," I suggested. His eyes lit up at the idea. "Yeah, they got him locked up in a cage and he's trapped. I gotta save him." He ran over and picked up another stick.
"What's that?"
He frowned, "It's a gun," he said as if I should have known.
"Oh yeah. Can I go with you?"
He hesitated. "Okay, but be careful. There's monsters in there." He pointed through the woods.
"Monsters?"
"And lions and bears. Big bears with one eye."
I laughed. "Do they eat people too?"
"Yeah. And they eat the crocodiles."
"There's crocodiles in there?"
"Uh-huh."
I sat back down on the rock. "Will you protect me?"
He nodded and took a deep breath, sticking out his chest. I grabbed a stick and followed him through the woods.
We spent the rest of that day running from the monsters. I was at a disadvantage since Todd had to tell me where they were. I usually ended up trapped, calling for him to help me. By the end of the day we had killed four dragons, two dragonkeepers, six lions and a countless number of bears, but we still had no sign of P.J.. We sat on the rock, breathless and defeated.
"They ate him," Todd said finally. "They ate P.J.."
I shrugged and put my arm on his shoulder. "Maybe they'll burp him back up again."
His face contorted as he struggled with the idea. Then, he laughed. "You're funny."
"Todd!" a tiny voice sounded from the distance. "Todd! Thupper!"
I looked up to see a smaller image of Todd standing at the edge of the woods.
"P.J.!" Todd yelled. He looked at me and smiled. "The dragons burped!"
"Thupper, Todd!"
"I gotta go. It's dinner time."
Red Light

The backwash
slides
to the bottom of his glass.
"Someday soon I'll drink top shelf,"
Jon says to the glass,
to the barmaid,
to the man in the 'god damned moon.'

From his bar stool
he watches patrons
walk in and stumble out.
Dried up hookers in saggy fishnet--
scoreless jocks
with stomachs hiding belt buckles,
searching for the same peace.

Kurt Knight

Gasoline

A lighter fluid
than its cruder cousins,
evaporating with a
peculiar coolness on the skin.
this liquid source of power and force,
this liquid fire, has traits many desire.
It is a most resourceful resource.
It drives the family car, mows
the lawn, or lets off its bott-
led-up energy, smash-
ing against a wall.

Alex Lecerda