Editorial Message

If I ever get my three wishes, I only want one. You can give the other two to somebody who's got something really big to wish for. I've got a pretty good wish for the one I'm keeping, though. I want to meet the first writer.

I want to meet the first guy who heard of something that happened, or saw something happen, or thought up something that could happen, and said: "Hey, you know, that's pretty cool. I'm gonna write that down." I want to meet this guy because I can only imagine that he must have been considered one weird cave-man.

I can almost hear the conversation as the hunting party got ready to set off: "Hey, where's Grok? Isn't he comin'?"

"Who, Grok? Nah, he's busy writing. You know how that guy is."

"Really? What is it this time?"

"I don't know. Something about a hunt or something—like that guy would know about a hunt."

"Hoo! What a freak he is."

I just know that this guy got some funny looks from the other cave-men.

I also want to know if he knew what he was doing or if he just felt like doing it and it was an accident. There are a lot of reasons to write these days, you can make a lot of money doing it, and it's not such a freakish thing anymore. This guy didn't have it that way. Nobody was about to give this guy free brontosaurus steaks because he was a writer. The only reason I can figure he had for writing was that he had something to say to someone.

The main reason, though, that I want to meet this guy is just to say: "Yo Pal, you had the right idea. I don't know how you thought of it, but it was a great idea." Then I want to hand him a copy of this magazine because I think he'd really like it. He'd like it because every word in it was written for a reason that he would understand: because the writer had something to say. I think he'd like that. I think he'd be happy. I also want to tell him that we're still getting funny looks from the other cave-men.

—Bill VanNess
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In the beginning, god created the heavens and the earth; and
the earth was waste and void; and no one could prove citizenship,
nor residency, nor gainful employment; so god created the C-1109,
and the W-4, and the IT-201-P; and god saw that this was good. But
god saw that there was no one to fill out these forms, so god created
woman and man in his own likeness, and said unto them, "Fill these
out and be fruitful and multiply," and god showed them a just and
proper way to govern themselves, and they were happy, and
enlightened, and democratic, and were fruitful, and multiplied.

And so it came to pass, after many years, that Adam and Eve
passed away. And their descendants duly filled out their death
certificates, and voted on what to do with the bodies, and the
motion to bury them passed 22-3; and another motion to do so with
all who would die passed unanimously. So Adam's son, Cain,
suggested that a memorial service be given for the dead ancestors,
and the motion passed 20-5; and so he submitted form A519, and
received a permit for peaceful assembly, and paid unto Seth a large
premium to insure it; and moved unto the people that god should
speak at the service, and Seth suggested that an honorarium be
offered unto god, "to sweeten the pot." And so the proper forms DD-9
and CPL 100.15 were filled out and submitted.

And so god spake of Adam and Eve in the best fashion, using
adjectives so wonderful that god alone knew what they meant. And
when he finished, god granted unto Cain the floor, and Cain said,
"Lord, we have an enlightened, free, and democratic society in all
things but one. You have fashioned a religion for us without our
consent, and, frankly, we want some say in it." And the people
agreed, and the proper forms were filled out and permits issued, and
the motion to kill the fatted calf failed, 11-14, but the motion to kill
the fatted watercress passed, 24-0, with one abstention, and there
was much rejoicing, and watercress sandwiches galore.

At the meeting, god moved that they should meet like this once a week, and the motion carried, 18-6. And then god said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and the motion failed, 13-15, but god, in his wisdom, was wise and waited. So one of the dissenting opinioned said, "What of men who love men?" and Eleazar, son of Abel, said, "Kill them," and the crowd clamored their assent. And Abisag, daughter of Cain, said, "And what of women who love women?" and Cain said, "They're all right as long as they shave their armpits." And, in his wisdom, the lord proposed a tradeoff: adulterers and homosexual men would be shunned.

When asked to explain this position, god said, "It's all in the seed," which made sense to the products of three generations of in-breeding, and the motion passed, 22-3.

Then Abel grew angry with the lord, having held a dissenting opinion, and said, "Who made you god, anyway? I didn't vote for you!" And god appeared in all his terrific splendour and said, "Where wast thou when I created the universe? Behold the face of god and despair!! Now what do you have to say for yourself?" And Abel said, "Pretentious," and the people agreed, and Abel moved that god cease to exist, and it was put to a vote.

And it passed, 25-1.
Midnight Moon

When Moon is
fat and round as
a silver dollar
and white like
a plastic pearl in
jewelry-store light
I can count the
fingers of my
hand’s shadow in
the dewy grass
like it was daytime
at midnight

—Jeff Lydon
Vasudeva’s Rivers

White diamonds skate like Jesus over a river racing with a pulse that plays in the clay veins of Earth.

One thundering voice forever sounds through liquid-sun slapping granite in a foaming crystal shoal.

I listen from sunrise to moonrise, I hear it singing to my soul:
``The dead leaves always float downstream.´´

—Jeff Lydon
Alone in St. Paul's

The scent of stale wine
and the sapphire smoke of incense
sinks into my mind
until it is as water—
a mirror, an echo.

Pale rainbows of light
dance from the painted glass
onto the organ's brass pipes;
it is silent here except
for the mice munching on
the sacred sesame rolls.

I kneel before a naked
mannequin that dangles
by rusty staples
to a bent coat hanger
and I pray for the apple seeds
rotting in the sand.

And I do not know if I
ought to laugh or cry.

—Jeff Lydon
Stevie by Foot
by Scott Cole

Jonathan E. Law actually does exist. His name is behind thick glass, topping the L’s on the directory for this gigantic building. The letters, gold and pointy, confirm that he is a lawyer. This place seems full of lawyers. This one has an office up on the eighth floor, room twenty-six. He’s a close friend of Sarah’s family and goes to the health and fitness center where she used to work part-time. He makes the really big bucks and knows all kinds of people. He’s also the guy whose going to ruin my life if I don’t go with Sarah on Thursday and listen to her screams through the wall.

It’s noon and the lobby is full of hungry people. They arrive by elevator—speedy men with gold necklaces and rolled-up sleeves, perfumed women on heels—and pass between this bench and the color-coded floor-to-ceiling directory. At first I thought I stuck out with my long hair and jeans, these big boots, but nobody seems to notice and I am beginning to feel invisible. They all just hurry by on the shiny floor, not staring at me like I first thought. Outside on the sidewalk they stand around a cart and tear hotdogs apart with their mouths or cross the street to a restaurant that has tables outdoors.

Back at school, where we are fed early, they will have realized I am gone. I can see Sarah sneak out of the noisy cafeteria and up to the pay phone across from the main office. She has had the quarter sweaty for about two hours, since she did not see me in homeroom, and now she drops it in and pushes the buttons with her plastic fingernails. She is not alone. This whole mess is not the sort of thing Jesus would ever get himself into, but Linda wants to help us out anyway. She is Sarah’s best friend and will stand close behind her while the phone in my parent’s house just rings and rings. Linda will squeeze Sarah’s shoulder and tell her not to worry. She knows so much about everything that she will tell Sarah, “Stevie’s long gone, like I knew he would,” and “he’s typical like the rest.”
Probably she planned on it and has something in mind. I don’t doubt it.

The punchline is that I have only come downtown for the afternoon, and that I can’t seem to get more than fifteen feet from this bench. Every few minutes I head into the john to see if my hair is sticking up funny, but then I am right back here watching the people pass. I don’t know where all those guys Linda knows of go to. She says they take off any way they can; by car, by bus, train or even by foot if they have to. She says they drop the girls fast and just run away easy, cut clean from the whole mess with never a second thought. I would like to meet one of those guys. They must run off to New Orleans, San Francisco, Saint Petersburg or maybe up to Canada like draft dodgers. Unless they began at one of those places. Wherever they go, they must run outside of everything I know. What I want to leave this bench for is to go up to the eighth floor and have a talk with Jonathan E. Law.

When Sarah first guessed that she was going to have a baby, I drove us into the city to find out for sure. It was a breezy day, leaves scraping across the road. We skipped school and Linda came along. Most of the way she kept her eyes closed so we knew she was praying for us. Sarah just puffed through cigarettes and stared at her fingernails. When I pulled into a spot at the top of the parking garage and got out, Linda squeezed my hand and pulled me aside. Sarah paid no mind, just pushed her hands deep into her pockets and walked toward the elevators. Linda looked me straight in the eye like she does, oozing concern. She told me that this was a very private matter, a woman-thing, and asked me to wait out there in the garage. She said things would go more smoothly if I did. Sarah was hitting the button for the elevator and didn’t look back.

So I climbed onto the concrete roof over a staircase, wondering where Linda got all her information. I sat up there with my legs dangling and watched the busy street. I saw Sarah and Linda cross over, purses swaying. They marched up the sidewalk and vanish-
ed into a white building at the corner. I thought about things nobody ever really talks about and the silence almost killed me. All voices were far away, mixing down below with the other noises of the city. I stared at the side of the white building and tried to imagine what was going on inside. I thought about how huge the building was and about how if I could walk on air, over to it, I would see that I was not half as tall as the black letters painted on the bricks.

They were gone a long time. When they got back to the car Sarah looked like she had been crying and Linda had her hands all over her, so I knew she was going to have a baby. Neither of them said a word and I was smart enough not to ask. When we got into the car Linda sat up straight and closed her eyes again. As I was fumbling for the key, Sarah reached into her purse and gave me a handful of rubbers and some pamphlets on birth control and sexually-transmitted diseases.

I’m not sure what I would want to talk with Jonathan E. Law about. I mean, maybe I would not start right in about all this. Maybe first we could talk some about when Sarah had the job at the health and fitness center and used to see him there. I could tell him a little about my own job, weekends, dragging tables around at the country club. After we got to know each other it would come around. Then I might like to tell him that sometimes, riding around in my car, Sarah busts up crying and Linda hurries and throws her arms around her. That sometimes when Linda looks over Sarah’s head, holding her like that, she scowls at me. Or that maybe I am imagining it. But that at those times I just wish Linda would offer to drive and let me take her place, or that she would hug me too. What I do, though, is turn the radio up so loud that Sarah puts her hands over her ears and then Linda does scowl.

We were finally alone last night, parked beside that same shack near the canal, when Sarah asked me about going in with her on Thursday and listening to the screams. There is no question we do
not want the baby, that we will do almost anything not to have it. So the big question, I guess, is whether I will hear the screams. Oh, last night Sarah asked me other things too, things like: “You’re holding your breath, huh Stevie, dying for the end of it?” and “Will you love me more, Stevie, after?” But she did not really expect answers to those questions, so I did not have to say, “Sarah, you are the sky and the ground, the beginning and the end and nothing can ever change that.” I did not have to lie and say that I loved her more than the air I breathed. She was serious only about my going with her.

I did not hesitate because of the screams that Linda, that know-it-all, has prepared us for. It would be tough to explain to Sarah, but screams would be real to me. They would be as real as the things nobody talks about. They would be more real than a handful of rubber or some pamphlets, even if they too come from the other side of a wall.

But I waited too long before saying, “Yeah, sure I’ll go along,” so Sarah exploded angry. “Oh, are you lucky you said that!” she shouted, brown eyes bulging. These days sometimes she gets crazy like she can’t say what she wants. She shouted that they had figured I would be looking for a way out of it. That was when she brought up this Jonathan E. Law guy. She let me know he is a big lawyer, a friend of her parents and very rich. She told me about this gigantic building he works at the top of, and about all the things a powerful man like him can use on people like me. Over and over she reminded me: you are part of this.

So, I have known all day that Jonathan E. Law would not want to talk with me. He is not, after all, a friend of my parents. It was a dumb thing to waste time thinking we could talk. The truth is I did not come here to talk. Mostly I came here to see if Jonathan E. Law actually exists, it’s such a ridiculous name for a lawyer. I came here looking for the lie in it all. But those pointy gold letters on the directory spell out his name and now I feel like I don’t have a word to say to anybody.
What I would like to do, if I could pull myself from this bench, is take the stairs up to the eighth floor—march right up to room twenty-six. I'd like to burst in on Jonathan E. Law. I figure I could catch him by surprise, get a few good ones in straight off. I can see him dropping back behind his big desk when I open up. He wouldn't even know what was hitting him. Health and fitness center or no, I could nail him off guard and throw punches like I would never stop. Shove in swinging and I think I could fight much harder than that guy. If not, I could run. Man, I swear I could run so much faster.
Winter

The tree has no leaves
A skeleton's hand
reaching toward heaven
stretching without pulse
held for a season
in cold, stark agony

The cold
smells of death
and with the wind
laughter

—Charles Irving
Hanging in the Sheets

I swallow a severed arm
it goes down hard
no gagging, no air
Fingernails shredding my lips
scraping teeth, sinking hooks
into my tongue
Rubber throat bucking
and chest constricts
I become a locking vise
closing, bearing down
forcing fingered claws
to one bursting throb
I am pried open
a cracking seam at jawline
that I follow in branching
routes through my skull
Slowly, one tear of blood
swells into a pointed sphere
I stare now inside marble eyes

Amy J. Rogers
Saturday was the holy day and every week the ritual was the same. Dave and I would drive our cars to the lake. We’d fill our tanks and drive these cars—these cars that belonged in a junkyard, these cars that were only kept alive at all by a failing life-support system of fiberglass body-filler and replacement parts—we’d drive them out to the park at the lake.

We would get to the park and just start to circle; endless circles around and around the parking lot; looking at the other cars that were there; talking to their owners—boys like us but so much cooler somehow—through open windows about our engines and our stereos, trying to sound like we knew what we were talking about.
We would watch the high-school girls in their cut-off jeans and halter-tops, tell each other what we were going to say and do to all of them but never get up the balls to talk to even one of them. We’d watch the cops patrol the lot in their cars, turn down our stereos when they told us to, then turn them right back up louder than we really even wanted them as soon as they drove off.

We would park the cars and walk across Lake Avenue to get a Coke or a frozen custard, then walk back and sit on the hoods of our cars or lean against the fenders to wait. We waited for the women to come. Waited for them to come and ask us to take them for rides; to do all the things we imagined them wanting guys like us who drove cars like ours to do to them in our sweaty adolescent minds.

We waited a thousand hot and humid summer Saturday nights propped against our fenders, and they never came. We drank a million Cokes and ate a million cones of frozen custard, and still they never came. We stroked our fenders so long and so hard—warriors stroking a charger’s mane—that we should have rubbed all the paint off, and still they never came. Finally we went home and said we’d had a good time.

It was late in the summer when Dave got his job. We were both seventeen. Dave would have to work Saturday nights now; he said it would never be the same. That first Saturday, I drove out to the lake by myself. It was the same. Maybe it sounds mean, but I didn’t hang around with Dave because I really liked being with him. For me it was always just the car. In fact, Dave probably wouldn’t have even talked to me if it wasn’t for my own car. As it was, we never really did talk except to make big, false claims and tell dirty jokes. I never felt very close to Dave. It was always the car, just the car.

It was the power. If you revved the engine sitting still, the whole car would lurch to one side as 400 cubic inches of terrible energy strained against nothing but four bolts; struggling to wrench itself free and destroy. A ferocious bull chained to a rotting fencepost, restrained but just barely. There is an ecstasy in that. The power of pulling away from a light in first and feeling the acceleration like two giant hands on my chest shoving me hard back into the seat.
watching the other cars shrink, fade, and finally disappear in my rearview mirror—that did it for me. The feel of sitting on the hood when I got to the park, feeling the heat rise off the metal and through the seat of my jeans to warm my imagination, listening to the headers pop and snap as they cooled—it made me feel strong and alive, all of it. It gave me faith.

I’m going about seventy-five down a long, light-free, cop-free stretch of Lake Avenue blackness when I see this girl with her thumb out. I’m a long way past her by the time my dying brakes take effect. I put the car in reverse and squeal the tires backing up to where she stands. I stop when I reach her and stretch across the wide seat to open the passenger door. She smiles as she slides into the car, says her name is Ann. I nod and, as soon as the door is closed, launch the car from the curb with a shriek of abraded rubber against the blacktop. I’m going seventy-five again in no time but this girl, Ann, doesn’t say to slow down. “Are you going to the lake?” she asks.

I say I am and look her over. She’s a very pretty girl, dressed in tight jeans and a guy’s flannel shirt. The shirt’s way too big for her. It’s tied in a huge knot just above her navel and only the next two buttons are closed. I don’t think she’s wearing anything under it. She’s got this sort of sandy blonde hair that’s not short but isn’t really long either; straight with bangs in front and pulled tight with a rubber band in the back; pretty ordinary. I try to guess her age but the best I can do is that she’s probably older than me, maybe nineteen or twenty. She’s barefoot and has a bruise, or it looks like a bruise, at the back of her jaw, just under her left ear. “Where d’ya wanna go?” I ask, trying to sound cool.

“This is the right direction,” is all she says.

We drive in silence down Lake Avenue; past the biker bars, the lit-up nightclubs, the hookers, past the tall buildings that house the business of the city during the day but are dark and deserted now, past other hitch-hikers both male and female. When we get to the lake I pull into the parking lot and make a circle. I’m all confused
about what I'm supposed to do but I know it makes me feel strong and alive to finally circle this lot with a girl in my car, even if she's not really my girl. I feel like my faith has been rewarded.

I park the car and open the door. This girl doesn't seem to have any plans of leaving the car. She looks at me and says: "This isn't where I wanted to go."

My brain is spinning. What am I supposed to do? Has she said where she wants to go? Have I missed it? Am I going to "get some" from this girl? God knows, I hope so. What? Am I supposed to just know where she wants to go, what the hell she wants to do? Maybe I should just tell her to get lost. But I can't do that. I need to find out where she wants to go and take her there. I close the door. "Where do you want to go?"

"Let's get a bottle somewhere."

Booze? I haven't told her how old I am. This could be a lot of fun though; me, her, a bottle... God, I hope she doesn't ask me to go in and buy it. I pull out of the parking lot and turn back on to Lake Avenue.

"Take your next right," she says after a while.

I turn down Beach Road and, when we come to a small liquor store, she tells me to stop. I pull over to the curb and she opens the door. She looks for a second at her reflection in the store window and then back at me. She knows I'm too young for the job.

"You got any money?"

I dig out a sweaty five and hand it to her. "Is that enough?"

She gets out of the car without answering and I watch her walk into the store. I wait the five minutes it takes for her to come walking back out with a long, brown paper bag under her arm. She doesn't say anything as she gets back in the car. I don't know what the hell I'm supposed to do next, so I just sit there and look at her.

"I'd rather not sit here all damn night," she says finally. "Drive will you? Straight ahead."

I don't know why, but I feel a little scared of her. I mean, I know it's silly being scared of a girl—man would Dave laugh if he heard that one—but I'm scared anyway. I do as I'm told though and start
to drive down Beach Road, much slower than before. I'm driving and driving, we're starting to get away from the houses and little stores. Finally we pass the last one.

Beach Road runs along the edge of the lake and, at night, it can be a pretty scary road; nothing to the left but a dense forest and nothing to the right but the unending blackness of the lake. I feel like some kind of guard patrolling the edge of the planet; I feel like Columbus was wrong.

We drive for about ten miles and then she points to a small dirt road ahead of us and says: "Turn there." I do as I'm told and find that the road doesn't go anywhere, just about twenty feet into the woods; just enough to get a car out of sight from Beach Road. I quickly come the end of the short road and stop. "Turn the motor off," she says. I shut the car off and we sit in the black silence until she takes the bottle from the bag and offers it to me.

"Take a drink."

I do as she says. I take a small drink from the bottle and hand it back to her without a word. She takes it from me, takes a large swallow from it, and looks over at me.

"I suppose you think you're gonna get something offa me here, don'tcha?" She takes another drink and looks out her window. "I bet you think you're gonna see some of me in this fancy car of yours, huh?" She looks back at me. I don't know whether she expects a response or not, but by now I'm too scared and confused to give her one. She gives me this little kind of half-snort like I'm some bug she just found under her pillow and looks away. After a few minutes, she turns to me again and asks frankly: "You wanna see me?"

I don't say anything. I can't say anything. I couldn't count the hours I've spent fantasizing about this scene, but now it seems like something's gone wrong with it. I'm not sure now if I want to "see her."

"Yeah, well, that's okay," she says, mocking me. "You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. I want you to see me."

She closes the whiskey bottle, puts it on the floor of the car, and starts to untie the knot in her shirt. She doesn't look at me, just stares
straight ahead into the black woods. I watch as she undoes the two buttons that hold her shirt closed and lets it fall open. I was right earlier, she's not wearing anything under it. She doesn't take the shirt off, just lets it hang, limp and open, from her narrow shoulders. Her breasts are small and round and her nipples stand up as she slowly rubs them, staring the whole time, into the dark like she's watching a movie. I don't know what else to do, so I start to remove my T-shirt. She turns and looks at me. "No!" she says sharply. I freeze, and she says: "You stay dressed. I want you to see me, just see me."

She faces forward and stares into the blackness again. Her small hands move down to her waist and she pops the snap on her jeans and slowly runs the zipper down. Slowly, like a calf taking its first step, she raises herself off the car seat by her hands and gracefully slides out of her jeans and then her underwear. They lie on the floor of the car like a slaughtered animal with the neck of the whiskey bottle poking out like a lifeless horn. She takes off the gold disks she wears as earrings and tosses them on the pile. They become staring eyes, peering blankly out from the pile of clothes that has just been sacrificed on the floor of my car—but to who?

She stares out the window and caresses the curve of her thighs with the palms of her hands. "Turn on the light," she says. I do as I'm told. "Now look."

I look at her body in the strange glow cast by the car's dome light; the bulb is weak and it makes her skin appear faintly gold. The light inside the car makes everything outside disappear until there's nothing left in the world but this girl and her frail, naked body. I see how her nipples stand small and erect on her high breasts. I see where her tan ends at the tops of her thighs. She opens her legs and I see her curls, darker than the hair on her head only because they're wet. She runs her hand through them and her fingers come up glistening. She closes her eyes and does it again; lightly at first, then harder. I move my hand.

"Don't touch me!" she snaps, opening her eyes and glaring at me. "You really think you're just entitled, don't you? You think you can just grab whatever you want, huh? Well you're wrong. This is not for
you. I'm not your fucking reward.''

She sits there for half an hour, rubbing herself. Sometimes she stares into the blackness of the forest and other times she shuts her eyes so tightly that all she can see is her own. Finally she lets out a low sigh and her legs tremble just slightly. "I want to leave now," she says. She picks her clothes off the floor and gets dressed in silence.

She doesn't say a word as she makes me drive her back to the spot where I had picked her up. I pull into a side street to let her out and she doesn't say anything as she gets out of the car and walks away. I watch her walk for a long time. I sit in silence and don't turn the radio on. I don't want to think about even the words to some stupid song. Somehow I know it would be dangerous to think right now.

I turn the car around and drive back out to Lake Avenue where I have to wait for a red light. It's one o'clock, the cops have just closed the beach, and all the lights are set for heavy traffic on the avenue. I know it'll be a long wait. I light a cigarette and watch the caravan go by: the leather-skinned bikers on their Harley's; a different breed of the same animal wearing high-tech outfits and riding Japanese deathbikes; young guys in dying muscle-cars like my own; older guys in mega-buck street-rods, early Fords and Chevys, the cars they could never afford when they were young; rich guys in 'Vettes and RX7s, guys with string-backed racing gloves and six-figure egos; college guys in their old man's Volvos. All headed home or wherever they go when the beach closes.

I see a van going by, sliding along through the intersection. It's black and has a mural on the side. Painted in gold is a sleek woman, completely bare. Her face has been made to look like some kind of cat and the artist has given her powerful haunches. She's crouched down like she's about to pounce. But as I stare at this creature, crawling through the heavy traffic, it starts to change. The pointed ears become gold horns, the paws and hands shrink and harden into hooves and I see for an instant what the painter has captured. I watch the idol carried along until the procession swallows it up. The light turns yellow against it and the parade slows and opens up—I wonder if it will let me back in.
Farm chores are few for kids, the milk's too heavy, keep away from the animals, stay out of the barn. Except for weeding the garden, taking out the trash is about it. Running around back with the IGA bags, past the hollyhocks, spinning to see what had dropped, gathering the fallen papers and continuing to the burning barrel—the center of our army camp. Burning the trash was the beginning of war, the three times a week battle. First, provisions had to be brought back to the base camp.

The garden stretching from the pig sty to the wheat-field was open area. So you break from the tall grass, hop a couple of rows of vegetables, hit the dirt, then peek through some wax beans to make sure it's clear. Guns were pear sticks from the hanging tree over the
burning barrel and aimed at any pigs, the enemy walking the sty. Gathering apples from the tree in the middle of the garden, any that didn’t rot or fall made light delights for the hard back swines. Stick-ing the apples out of the tree, two or three apiece, picking up, darting back across the rows, jumping into the green bamboolike wall to the clearing of ashes where sat the waiting burning barrel. The trash was already placed for burning and the eldest set the smoke signals to the skys, while each soldier took apples and slowly pierced them to the bayonets of the pear rifles. After a moment of smoke, flames appear and apples are thrust over the rim of the barrel to sizzle and squeak. Now was the time for hashing out military plans.

Standing around the barrel at the edge of the lawn, the smoke rising above the pear tree, the army scouts looked far past the burdocks and thistles, over the wheatfield while roasting apples for the day’s rations. As the trash burns out, the detail retreats to the bunker, an old cobble-stone smoke house, the door opened and decayed. Here the warm chow could be enjoyed seated on large stones from a hole in the wall. Wild grapes reached half way in the hole and a good lookout could see the field and never be seen. Another could watch the door as soft bites devoured the meal till cores were dropped to the floor and the war came to an end.

The fort was left behind for other days of trash burning. Till then the area behind the garage was left to the view of the pigs.
HOT AIR

Fragile ark of woven rushes
Preens before her flight
Willow leaves tumble
Caught by the stream
Swept on to adventure
Please, a subtle breeze
Southwesterly would be ideal
Windsock finally drooping
Harlequin's colors spill out
Ripple in quieting breezes
Butterfly releases her canvas cocoon
Four steps inside the rainbow
Light filters through stained glass nylon
Four steps through to reality
Light the torch, heat the air
Billowing silk

"Airborne-Have a good flight."
An inch is airborne? Grass

Silently pulls back
Faces diminish
I'm not moving
School roof slides beneath
My feet. Sun rise high
Above distant hills
Intimate distance from
People coming out on their
Driveway waving, calling up
Caravan of cars follow along
Cut cross lots, always there
Waiting for me drifting past
Dogs barking in circles
Frightened by ethereal
Shadows skimming the tree tops

Dusk falls it's over
Champagne corks pop, roll up
The rainbow light another beginning

—Cynthia Adams
Why'd You Do It

I wanted to kill you
and spread your blood on the walls
I wanted you to die slowly
suffering—waiting for death
I wanted pain for you
As if your heart was being
torn out by bare hands
Your mind beaten
And lost somewhere
I wanted your head on a stick
I wanted you to die on
   the floor—blood trickling from
eyes, nose, mouth
   to die alone

—Wendy Lee
Your Brother’s Christmas Card

Your brother sent me a Christmas Card
A picture of a bearded Jesus
bathed in a creamy yellow brilliance
eyes cast homeward
gazing lovingly about my kitchen
as it hung with the rest

That night I sat in my room
lights turned off; my radio playing
an early morning rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus
made me want to hold you in my arms
as you lay on top of me
your long chestnut hair
spread like a quilt from your smooth back
to my shoulders

Now you belong to him
He castrated your father
when he dragged you to Texas
Did he force you to your knees
in the basement of the Bible bookstore?
What were you thinking
as he ripped the dress from your back...
unfurling the black lengths
of his cat o' nines?

—Charles Irving
Fragile...

The cold wind
Breaks his body
into several
Nerves which
when opened
Cry

—Julie L. Perkins
An Assemblage

The rose approached the lily
with most talented ease
daring it to trust
he taunted
The lily weakened
and fell
and tried to grasp
but the rose gained power against
making her whimper
and cry
The rose dove deep
within the lily's throat
until resistance
could no longer protect
The lily screamed
in animation
as the thorns pierced her
and drew from her
blood

—Catherine Cigna
Jazz Drummer

White light wraps
itself around me
traps the smoke-clouds
of seventy cigarettes
and smoldering joints

Sweat running down cheeks
like rain on a window
I set sticks buzzing
on the skins of my drums

And they all sway
hands dancing on
rickety card tables
feet beating old
wood floor to splinters
cigarette butts glowing
like an orange milky-way

Numb rubber muscles
guide sticks gliding
over four pieces
of pig skin
and a cymbal of tin
I just float away
rising like a bubble
through the clouds of smoke
swirling in the light

—Jeff Lydon
I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED

I should have listened
to the sound
of rain whittling
Olympus down to the sea.

I should have listened
to the whisper
of dried leaves in fall
crackling beneath my feet.

I should have listened
to the sizzle
of gnats flying through
candle flame at midnight.

I should have listened
to the verse
echoing in my head
that came from my heart and said:

What is the difference
Between coffin and crib
If by the same Seamstress
Are sewn both shroud and bib?

—Jeff Lydon
Rag Rug

There was
my grandmother's rag rug

That's right boy rags old
clothes that your mother
wore and me and your
grandfather That's history
boy

So I walked all around it
spiralling into the center
and back out, trying to see
someone's old t-shirt
or bermuda shorts
to understand

But it wasn't old clothes
it wasn't rags
it wasn't history

It was a rug.

—Bill VanNess
Replacement Parts

by Scott Cole

First, if he was here, my father would whistle a long sigh. Then he
would chuckle, cursing, baring his stained choppers. My father
would swear and laugh about the shattered window. I see him on
the street, dancing in moonlight with a broom and dustpan, though
I know his bedtime has passed. He shakes his hips ridiculously, blows
kisses off his palms and transfers pieces of glass from the car’s interior
to a wastebasket. I ape his graceful moves. I shuffle behind him,
likewise winking and leering, but secretly afraid I might cut a finger.
His confidence breeds the sense of invincibility I struggle to produce
for Tonya, who’s holding one bare arm with the other and tugging
on her lower lip, shaking her head.

We never heard a thing. We were sitting up burning candles and
complaining about our jobs. Tonya knows she can make better
money if she gets out of the travel agency and goes to work for an
airline. For me the problem is not confined to money. I feel worn out.
That’s what I was telling Tonya. It has gotten to where I hate the hard-
ware supply, but I'm locked to it six days a week and after that too tired to see the way out. I told Tonya I might like to go back to school, finish my degree. What I would like to do is qualify myself for some sort of social work. "Then you should," Tonya told me. "You really should." "I know it," I said, and explained how the hardware supply has me so locked in that only rarely, late at night with the candles burning, do I have the chance to consider change. By then I am too pooped for resolutions that offer more than sleep and sweet dreams of running water. I know that quitting my stagnant position with the hardware supply is the first step, but comfortable routine wakes me every morning. Beyond that, there are financial headaches, tuition and books, and also the threatening shape academic life has taken in my mind. These days, I explained to Tonya, the idea of being tested in a classroom, pens scraping away around me, is enough to send me to bed shivering, content to let the morning alarm pull me into another boring day. We thought about that for a minute and Tonya headed out to the car to round up more smokes. Soon she was rushing back, talking about how she wasn't positive but it looked like the car window had been shattered. She said this was unless she was seeing things. We still have four payments to go.

While I sweep up the glass and Tonya tugs at her lip we talk about who might have done such a thing. For a long time no-one comes to mind and this bothers me as much as the broken window. The Horizon was not even locked and nothing is missing. We try to remember anything we might have done to irritate the neighborhood kids. Tonya points out that we do not even know the neighborhood kids. Thinking about this, it occurs to me that we need not have done a thing to get the window smashed. This idea makes me uneasy, is hard to let go of. Then I wonder what became of Tonya's last lover, the Hulk-a-mania freak, but right off she is waving her hand: forget it.

"You're right," I say. "If it had been him, gobs of chaw in puddles of spittle would mark the scene of the crime."

At this she laughs, not easily. Tonight Tonya cannot see beyond
a broken window. I know she looks at the pieces and thinks of permanent scars. Add now to squealing brakes and moaning horn a mechanical imperfection that is cosmetic as well; our Horizon, four payments to go, is suddenly lying in the street like a person whose teeth have been knocked out. For Tonya, the jagged line of glass remaining in the door stands as if embedded in the concrete top of a prison wall. The gaping space where the window shut grows for her, distorts, like it might for me on another night. This is the magic my lover and I share; that in situations capable of shaking either of us, one becomes obsessed with solutions. Tonight I am able to dance behind the image of that stubborn problem-solver, my father.

"Hey, don't worry about it," I say, slowing the last words to a foolish drawl. I long to show Tonya that this is no big deal, that it does not have to be added to the general disintegration of our unpaid-for jaiopy. We can put it back together. "So maybe glass coverage would have been a good idea. Still, don't worry about it."

In bed now, hot behind thick window shades, it is the anonymity of the act that begins to work on me. I think about how Tonya's last lover could not have been the one, then wonder why not. He was the guy, after all, who promised to bust me up back when Tonya decided he was a loser. It seems like he, at least, would have a reason, until I remember what a huge, boisterous man he is and cannot imagine him creeping in the dark to express anger. Besides, our scenes with that man were long ago, a lifetime behind us, it seems. But some person (people?) brought (swung? pushed? threw?) an unyielding object (baseball bat? fist?) against our car window. Tonya's Hulk-a-mania friend is the only person I can imagine having a reason. Unless the reason was simply to break a window. This is the idea that has me tossing the kittens off the bed again. The at-random sense of this idea makes me feel uncertain, vulnerable, hopeless about putting things back together. Vandals remain anonymous by night and day; faceless in the dark and inclusive of all faces by light. For an instant I hurl myself through the shade and bedroom window, land heavily with broken glass on the wet lawn, rise and sprint toward the street. Hey you! Take what you need,
steal it, make it your own, but please, please don’t just shatter it!

Tonya’s fingertips, surprisingly cool, trace circles on my neck. Wider
circles, she crosses my chest, brushes my nipples. Close to my ear
she repeats one word with her breath alone, my name. When I am
inside her it takes a long time. I let the shade up for some breeze and
the streetlight reflects off us. Before we make love, Tonya never men­
tions babies. Tonight we do not talk after. We move apart, soaked,
and one of the kittens hops back onto the bed. Tonya holds my
fingertips to her mouth, kissing me briefly, lightly, as if I might cave
in to hundreds of sharp little pieces.

My father was pedalling home from the university on the night he
got attacked. This was last autumn; one of those leafy cold nights
when the sky looks so grim. He had taken an odd-jobs position at
the university, part-time, following his retirement from the Postal Ser­
vice. The bicycle, which he insisted on riding back and forth over
the river five nights a week, was a wide-rimmed monster that he had
pushed from someone’s garbage and rebuilt. He sanded the rough
metal and painted it an obnoxious glittery green. With a clothspin
he fixed a playing card to the frame, sticking it through the spokes
so he could race around the neighborhood, my old neighborhood,
thack-thacking. Preaching health benefits, he pulled himself around
on that two-wheeler, his long white hair streaming and a cigar stub
stuck in his smile. He was thought to be very eccentric, especially
by newcomers to the neighborhood, and it is true that he was, but
not in the dangerous way some parents thought.

There was one witness who came forward, a limping old man
named Albert who had not rushed up to get his own head split open.
That guy spent a couple weeks going through photo-files and giv­
ing descriptions at the police station, but pretty soon all the faces
looked the same to him and he started seeing criminals everywhere.
The story the witness gave was that my father had pedalled over
the bridge and was swerving to pass two guys on the sidewalk. The
guys seemed young, the witness said, because of the way they strut-
ted sassy with their shoulders back. They were both Caucasian and wore sweat shirts (gray and yellow, the sleeves cut from both), jeans and engineer boots, but were otherwise nondescript in the dark. One of them turned and swung a baseball bat into my father's face. Then they started laughing. When my father crashed on the concrete they did not go through his pockets or take his bicycle. They just laughed, the one leaning on the bat with his free hand on his hip, one boot crossed over the other. They stood there for a while and had a good laugh, the witness said, as if hitting someone in the face with a baseball bat was a hysterical treat that they had not expected.

In his hospital room my mother paced and prayed until she fainted. Her heavy body bounced off my father's legs and the mattress while I watched from the window sill. She was given her own room. I remained on the sill, breathing antiseptic healing smells and watching my father's face. The blackness started as thin rings around his eyes. It spread to his brow and the sides of his bumpy nose. The doctor, efficient with slim wrists and sensitive hands, told me that this was normal for this sort of injury, but he did not say not to worry. I remember thinking that man was not trying as hard as he could have; that he should have been sweating and swearing, contorting over the bed to replace tiny broken parts of my father. But the doctor remained calm, unrushed, so that I secretly blamed him when the blackness spread over my father's cheeks until his whole face seemed dark, like a tooth gets if the nerve has died.

That night I went to my parent's empty house, the house I grew up in, and waited for the laughing men. I was convinced that they would come to finish what they had started, to take whatever they had been looking for. I was not ready to consider whether they had already found exactly what they were looking for, whether that was what had made them laugh. I went into my father's closet and took a roll of quarters from his 'mad money' and dropped it into one of his socks. Then I sat at the kitchen table, in the dark with my makeshift blackjack. I imagined the vicious things I would do to their flesh when they broke in. I found small relief in this. The fact of their arrival, somehow, was more important to me than what would
happen after. I was listening for the sound, a door being kicked in or a window shattering, that would reveal some sense in everything and offer me a chance to act. What I heard were the soft knocks of Tonya coming to take me home.

Someone must have lied to my father early on, convinced him that sons are easily broken. I am walking through the junkyard alone now, orange toolbox in hand, remembering how my father always handled me with nervous, hesitant care, as if I was the one thing in this world that he did not feel confident about putting back together. In junkyards like this one, even after I entered my teens, he would squeeze my shoulder and steer me around the oil puddles, jagged-edged heaps and million other potential disasters of the place. He would push me across the minefield of wasted automobiles to a wreck that might hold the rusty part we were in search of. He would hop to his knees on the fender of the heap, keeping me still (though unnecessarily, since I never felt tempted to move from the square foot of grimy earth that he had declared safe) with commands of "stand back" and "watch out there" barked from behind his cigar. He would stretch over what remained of the engine and then attack with sockets and screwdrivers, poking his white head up to say, "Paying attention?" or, "Here, stick this in your pocket."

I was a fragile creature in the foreboding atmosphere of the junkyard. I was a respectful acolyte; attentive, motionless behind the handy priest. I remember what I was waiting for, even when I was a teenager hunting for my own parts, even now, I guess: an unexplained explosion. I would try to imagine bottomless nothing; pass away every object that came to mind, out, separate from the emptiness where we would vanish. Then his triumphant laugh would cut through; that roaring cackle as some greasy spring or housing broke free. "See that, catch it all?" And I, having witnessed the magic while transfixed, would step cautiously forward to examine the site of the dismantling. "We'll slip that baby back
together now, damn sure,’’ he would grunt, leering even after jerk­ing his head into the hood of the wreck; my earliest memory of a shit-eating grin. The metallic organ was mine to carry to the car and inspect during the ride home.

As awkward and self-conscious as I have always felt about approaching mechanical objects with my own hands, I love huge junkyards like this one. To me a junkyard is the perfect cemetery. Only here is it possible to truly visit the dead, not some ornate stone or flowery offering. Dead but not gone. You can reach for the things you need, take into your hands fresh troops as small as a wiper-knob (here, stick this in your pocket) or as cumbersome as this filthy win­dow I have just pulled from its track. You return as often as you need, replacing the worn and the pooped, rebuilding the destroyed.

This morning the feeling of hopelessness that had kept me crashing into Tonya through the night was still on me, draining my strength. It was a trembling ache in the hollow of my ribs, a soaked sponge behind my temples and brow. I was unrested, slow to sit up on the wet sheet. From the window I looked up at rolling cloud cover and then down at the mailman’s jeep as it moved along the street in spurts. That was when I realized I was at least three hours late for work. I lurched from bed, dizzy, thinking it strange that the office had not phoned. With my toes I felt the thin spaces between familiar bare floorboards. The kittens hopped down to follow me, new claws scrap­ing into wood. The plastic digital alarm clock was unplugged and read six-forty-five: Tonya’s time to rise. Taped to the clock, over the five-minute-snooze-button, was a piece of paper with the fancy four­color logo of Caravan Travel printed across the top. I saw this message, written in Tonya’s bold handwriting:

You Are Sick Today

I tore the paper off the clock to read from it again, closer. The words told me that I was taking a break. I sat on the bed, stunned by the sense of freedom that accompanies routine broken. The day was
full of possibilities, and not only the day, for who could know how long my recovery might take? A crack over the head, Tonya's brief assessment of my situation made me feel daring, my limbs wired and weightless, easily lifted away. With all those open hours before me, I found myself unlocked, eager to embrace at least a small dose of change. I was liquid, light, thin and dripping away at my fingertips until I ran to the travel agency at lunchtime, Tonya's message folded like a passport in my pocket, and told her about it. She said, "Good." My lover kissed me earlier today and smiled sneaky like she had always known everything, then went back to poking the salad in. "Good."

Leaving the junkyard now, glass under arm and bolts in pocket, I am sturdy, unbreakable and determined; an unfair match for destruction. I feel like I am going to scrub this window spotless and slip it right into our car door easy.
Fantasy

Once, when I was twenty, I nearly got my eyes boiled out in a factory accident. They rushed me to the hospital, sent me away in bandages. I was a blind man for a day.

The things I saw on my ride home! Specks of my eyelids and tears reduced to ashes. Overhead, purple tornados and fleeting storm clouds. Then a door opened, casting breezes I felt like hurricanes. I saw them blow the silver bus I rode, toppling it over and over through fields of crystal wheat.

When I got home, I lay down among soft mosses and sweet smelling grasses. I buried myself under piles of crisp golden leaves. Then I felt a girl with chamois cloth skin and hair that smelled like water squeezed from flowers. She never spoke, but bit my bottom lip softly. As she surrounded me completely I felt deeply her wetness and her breath coming fast, effusive, like honey. She stayed just long enough to wake me up.

When they cut the bandages I winced from the glare and the end to my vision.

—Jon Hockenbury
Moving Out

moving out across the sidewalk
malevolent spirits
form a greasy spread
like a crushed oil can
a film of bereavement for all to see

on the corners the brothers
are waiting for delivery
of sinister soporifics

benches occupied
by tired brownshirted men
rise and fall
on stilts of Budweiser beer cans

cars carry drivers
borne on winds of disgust
away from the past
aching towards uncertainty

the shadows of the day are long
and anchor to this spot
my twitching feet which form
a union with concrete
feeling with vibrational ecstasies
the loss of a world i can't leave

—Jon Hockenbury
I Do Not Write Like Jon Hockenbury

Who tells himself, "I will begin writing at 4:00 exactly & not a moment until then & only for fifteen minutes as fast as I can. Without a single thought or pause like Charlie Parker looking up at himself, young Charlie Parker. Not sad Buddha-Bird asleep with horn in mouth."

—Jim Cohn
PROFESSOR PARODY

Two wired cylinders of glass
hugging his head and nose
Thousands of eyes
staring out of two.
Pointing a hoodoo wand
At shapes on the blackboard
black-magic and equal signs
scribbles and lines,
colorless spaghetti.
He opens his lips, like a fish
bubbles of words come wafting out
popping, popping
falling in soapy drops
to the floor.
He scratches the dander
from his head,
caught in his fingernails.
Watch as he tries
to cleverly liberate it.

—Amy Knorr
The Haunting

Ghosts are drowning
Out in the swamp,
I hear a small dog screaming
So far away.
My window won't close,
The curtains fly frantically
Like the ghosts,
Struggling in the water.
I leave the house.

In the outdoors
Darkness is taking over
All is greying,
Like the threatening clouds
In the tall grass,
Blowing in the field
Like a statue he stands,
My heart in his hands
Dripping blood, on his shirt.
I want to turn
And run away
His heart falls
Out of my pocket
I was unaware
I had it there
It smashed at my feet.
I run to him
He's slowly dying.
The dog in the distance
is slowly dying
Screaming echoes
Through the winds, in the woods.
His head in my hands,
My tears drop
Into his mouth.

The ghosts have drowned,
Like wet lace
Caught in the rocks.
I can barely see
Through the black rain,
In the grey air
I'd run home,
But the air is oil,
And my conscience is lead.
Alone I roam,
The drowning countryside,
Like a ghost, Screaming
Like a wounded dog,
Dying.

—Amy Knorr
A WINTER TALE

1

Years are a kind of tyrant
the old bridge
that connects to nothing.
Old trees wasting the same way.

Each year the snow plow
digs up the driveway borders
muddy furrows, debris
ash and black snow.

2

In the nineteen thirties
her father drove a black car
no heater. They bundled inside
in coats smelling of soup.

She sat in the back seat, squinching
her eyes in the back seat lights streak:
red light, green light.
Winter was long and nameless.

3

Old women are all guilty unless—
they die for their children
throw their bodies in a field
become invisible.

The candidate’s wife is old.
Her white hair makes her look
like his mother. Lucky, she will
be ignored, unless stupid or honest.
A winter wife lies easily
to please her hereos: Daddy, sons
and husband. Freed from dreaming
she is all fried nerve endings.

Winter’s cold endures without limit
a heavenly sign of freezing
mistaken for comforting sleep,
deep and thin as remembered pleasure.

—Harriet Susskind
—Jennifer Gardner
Letchworth Autumn Quickie

Trotting take the woods uphill
huff-puff past slim fitness trails
to unsnapping jeans, zipper rides
Taking turns at prayer
You first
Feasting caress over lime-mossed wood
Bare bellies and open seclusion
on a wet discard carpet of
brittle rust, yellow, brown
where nothing
only stark white underwear
nothing else is perverse

—Scott Cole
The time was nearing dusk but it felt much darker than that. It had been raining for the past two days. I was getting the feeling that this city was forever dark, the streets were so narrow and the many buildings were so tall that even if there had been sun I don't think it would have reached the sidewalks.

At around five o'clock on Friday night the streets were filled with cars and the sidewalks with people wearing raincoats. Everyone was just carrying their umbrellas, the rain seemed to have the same problem as the sun, it never quite made it to the sidewalks.

At the point where the five or six lane—depending on the size of the cars—one way street hurls the cars around a bend there is an open corner. A building had moved aside just enough to allow room for a large, like several stories high, dreary iron colored sculpture that blended right in with the buildings and was nearly passed by.

I allowed myself a couple of seconds, at the risk of being run over by other people, to let my gaze follow up the precariously leaning legs to the top of the sculpture where they caught each other. After my quick glance at the lean legs folding into soft curves caught in a brass spring I realized that I was staring at a huge clothespin. Surprised, I looked again to see if I was mistaken. Upon my own confirmation I asked my companion if she agreed, which she did.

Now why would anyone want to put a huge clothespin in the middle of a city?

The artist is laughing at us. Imagine how many people must pass this everyday and never realize that they're being ridiculed by a giant clothespin.

Satisfied with my explanation, I chuckled everytime the thought re-entered my mind that night.

The next morning, on our way from the hotel to the airport, our bus was hurled around the same corner passing the clothespin. I heard the busdriver comment to any interested ears that the sculpture was of two people embracing.

Startled, I looked back once again to realize that he was right. A plain simple clothespin. I had been correct, the artist is much wiser than the rest of us.