

Purgatory

Susan Allison

It happened for seven years
after choir practice
before church suppers
during Bingo nights
and prayer meetings
beginning with soft
loving words
light touch;
trusting
believing
praying
Hail Mary
not here
Full of
not now
Blessed is
not you
my priest
trusted Father
sweet Confessor.

It happened for seven years
in the church vestry
over the altar rail
in the confessional
hearing heavy robes rustle
a zipper catch and fall
smelling sweat and red wine
feeling manicured nails
on soft hands
and the hot pain of
flesh stretching and tearing;
tears prickle your eyes;
a hairy knuckled hand
stifles sobs.
Still trusting
still believing

still praying
Hail Mary
please don't
Full of
you're hurting me
Blessed is
stop.

It happened for seven years
and now
three decades later
you're still in purgatory
can't step in a church
without bile rising in your throat
heart pounding
stomach churning.
The aisle becomes
Calvary Hill
as you stumble
and nearly fall.
Looking up at Mary
you realize
she's too benign
too forgiving
can't protect you;
it's only Jesus
who understands
with nails puncturing his hands
and blood pouring from
the gash in his side;
only Jesus
you can believe in:
the betrayed
the tortured
the crucified
who carried a cross
he never made
who swallowed sins
that were never
his.

Twelfth Night in Mexico

Joan Safajek

The procession moves slowly
up the street, more women
than men, many old people
and mothers holding babies.
All carry candle lanterns
as they walk to the brightly lit
church. Their singing
fills the warm desert night
with uncommon gentleness,
not the voice of Christian
soldiers marching off to war,
no this is Guadalupe, dark
earth mother of compassion.

I follow them into the old
white washed mission,
my face wet with unexpected
tears, and it doesn't matter
that I can't understand
all the words in Spanish.
I sing the familiar chorus
of Angels O'er The Fields,
the long gloria in praise
of all god's creation,
and with them trace
the sign of the cross
on my body.



Jaimie Strickland

Fifteen Cards

Charles Schubert

For fifteen weeks
we touch across
the small white table
of a postcard
eager to depict
Yellowstone
in black and white
as if the color
leaked through a
bathtub drain.
The cards are tiles
in a mosaic
of communication
pinned to your wall.

You cannot hear,
so I write.
You cannot remember,
so I recall.
You will not answer,
but I ask.
I want to know
the rooms inside
your mind,

are they stacked
with boxes of memory
that you cannot find?
Or has a door
been left open,
and the pages
of your text blown away?
When I visit you ask
why I wear his ring
the one you gave me
after the funeral.
When did family
become strangers
on a wall
surrounded by
fifteen flowers,
moments of clarity
when the curtains lift
from your eyes.

Each card says:
come back
and:
remember,
they say:
leave if you must,
but first, read.



Kelly Woods



Looking Forward To Laos 2002, Pat Jordan

Introduction to Hell

Kathleen Miller Thomas

The preacher's long finger points directly at me as he booms out, "And you sinner, are you ready to repent?" My heart pounds, my eyes widen and my mouth drops open. As he pauses, his piercing, dark eyes stare me down and I look away. Me, a sinner? I drank some of Dad's blackberry brandy last week. I know he can't know, but the oozy-guilt still nags me.

I normally attend the Congregational Church, where the minister calmly gives a pleasant sermon each Sunday. This Tuesday afternoon I am sitting under the canopy of a huge white tent in a vacant lot near my junior high school. The place is packed with sweaty people sitting on folding chairs. The man in the black suit waving his Bible in my direction has me riveted. I watch the veins on his neck grow larger as he shouts out the evils of drinking, of smoking, of dancing. And, I remember that I go to ballroom dance class tomorrow afternoon.

My new friend Patricia has invited me here. She is a Nazarene and this revival is important to her. I read the pamphlets she helped pass around school last week and felt like I was reading a strange fantasy. Hell was introduced to me in living, breathing, color: sinners screaming in agony, falling into fire and brimstone. What are brimstones? I wonder. I don't dare ask my folks because I know they won't want me to hang out with Patricia if they know about the revival.

Patricia became my "savior" after my ninth grade social world came to an abrupt halt a few weeks ago. All of my regular pals stopped speaking to me. I gathered enough information to learn which girl is behind this mutiny, but not enough to know why. Until Patricia and I linked up, I was in misery. I would walk along the concrete outer hallway wearing my new Capizio shoes, the ones I had to baby-sit a bunch of times to pay for, my three crinoline half slips to push out a dress Mom made, and with skirt swaying like a palm tree, I would still feel invisible. I'd say "hi" to one girl after another and not one would respond. I pleaded with my closest friends to tell me what was going on, but they would just walk away. And then one day I stopped trying and started talking with Patricia.

It isn't a convenient friendship for either of us. Patricia lives in Kalihi, a rough neighborhood near downtown Honolulu so far away from where I live in every respect it might as well be on the moon. It takes three buses and nearly an hour to get to her house and then her little brother is always around. Still, her mother treats me special, baking cookies before I come, talking to me about school; and, I really do like her brother. He keeps me laughing with his silly boy-jokes. Most of all, I like Patricia and she likes me so we talk on the telephone, giggle

about boys together, and avoid a myriad of things—especially religion, card games, and parties—that could keep us apart. She can't even wear lipstick.

Now, sitting next to me, Patricia hangs onto every word the preacher says. I am in a daze, still wondering about hell. My Mother, the teacher of religious thought at home, has never spoken of hell, except possibly to say, "Oh hell," when frustrated. She doesn't swear much, though I have on occasion heard her refer to someone as an S.O.B. But here is my new friend enraptured with this guy's mean looks and loud voice. I must admit, it is difficult to understand.

When the money has been collected and the last hymn sung, we file out with the rest of the crowd and make our way to the bus stop. We take the first bus together and then go our opposite ways. Mom isn't home when I get there so I don't even need to dream up an excuse for being late. I call Patricia to tell her about the cute, blue-eyed boy I saw on the bus coming home.

By Christmas time, a few of my closest old friends have begun talking to me again. They're still keeping mum about why they were ignoring me, but even though I feel a little hurt and angry, I've missed them. Gradually, Patricia and I stop spending so much time together as I am gathered back into the fold of familiarity, doing things that her church won't allow. I sink into the comfort of noontime card games of Trumps, return to church choir, plan parties and weekend trips to the beach with the old crowd. I miss Patricia, but am quickly so comforted and absorbed by long time friendship that I forget to call her. Relief sweeps over me when I notice that she has made new friends at school.

One Saturday, I meet several of my old pals at the Queen Theater to see the Swedish film, "Monika." I have managed to get out of the house without Mom asking where I am going. We buy our popcorn, and then sit in the back of the theater scrunched down so no one will see us, even though—other than a few old men—the place is nearly empty. I've been to many foreign films with my brother so am used to following subtitles. The same brother who patiently explained Darwin's Theory of Evolution to me a few months ago, also makes me pay his way so I can stay out later than the 8 o'clock city curfew, and then he won't let me sit next to him. I end up watching movies sitting in the row behind him.

This afternoon, my girlfriends and I sit spellbound waiting for the well-advertised scene that got us here. At last it comes. Monika walks through a break in the sand dunes onto a wide beach. Other than a few seagulls, she is alone. Slowly she unties her robe and it

slides to the sand. We stare at her smooth rounded bare flesh as she walks toward the ocean, and then the scene is over. With jaws dropped, we turn to look at one another, quickly covering our mouths as squeals of laughter pour out. I double up holding my stomach I am laughing so hard. Later, we stagger outside into the warm sun, still giggling. As we pause in front of the theater to look at the advertisement again, I grin as an image of Patricia's preacher flits through my mind. Grateful to be here, I turn to join my girlfriends slinging arms around one another as we head up the street to get a cold soda before going home.



Andrew Barker

The Gravity of the Father

Patricia Zylius

I do not miss you.
You inhabit me
like all the food and air
I've ever taken in.

The leaden weight of you
is too literal to bear, your anger
and criticism heavier
than your unquestioned love.
My face takes on its daily scowl,
its natural expression, the muscles
falling on their own.
Depression's my default mode,
your Baltic gloom, the cold
northern bitterness through which
you viewed the world, my
ponderous inheritance.

I thought your death would be
my escape—my peace among
the grieving family, so admired,
really a vast relief—but I find you
trapped inside me, your habits,
your desperate need to be right,
a mass of worming insects
I must contend with in myself.

And I do. I love you, but
I like you better dead.
I could call myself
heartless, as you would, but instead
gather the tender detritus of our souls,
our sorrow pulled to earth and
fermented into sustenance.
I slowly learn to sweeten vitriol
with compassion for us both,
infuse our misery with care.
I embrace your life in me,
a heavy root anchored in dark loam
that heartens branch and leaf
to fall upward into lightness.

In Praise of Women and Men

Dane Cervine

I love watching men
watch women. Not always the leer,
the taunt, as in the old black & white
Italian photograph: desire flagrant, unrestrained.
Now, the glare is subtler, almost polite:
a glance, secretive, discrete—but
we always look, always. As a wolf, a baby
its mother, a supplicant the goddess,
a patient its doctor. There is more
than meets the eye, what galvanizes
each man on the street, each brave
or shy lesbian, desire following
like a row of ducklings trailing behind
the soft down they seek. There are things
we need that can't be explained, or when
they are, die as a butterfly stapled
inert in the display case.

Even the women straight from any town,
gathered in parlors and department stores,
across the table over tea, chatting
about kids, school—worship each other
secretly, appreciate in that diffuse way,
more eye and skin than groin. A particular
ankle, the way a neck tapers into shoulder,
a curl of hair, a wave of hand.

Men eye each other in different ways,
though we rarely admit, barely notice:
would I be able to take him if I had to,
how large, how strong, how quick.
Mostly we're glad when we're on
the same side: in softball wars, an alley,
the Middle East. But turning to stare
in unguarded moments, we see
the ellipse of arm as it cradles
a rifle, arcs toward a mugger's face,
or the curve of a ball: what beauty!

Walking along the gay, straight streets,
the lovers of women & men eye each other
as worshipers in the Louvre, a nun
prostrate before Michelangelo's *David*,
a cleric gazing at Athena's breast, oh holy
lust, the wafer & the wine, the reason
for being the way we love.



Capitola, Nikki Brooks

Texas

Roxan McDonald

"We're leavin'" Grandma yelled down the hall. "We're leavin'" her tattered voice came ringing into their dark, still bedrooms. "Like a big, deep church bell. Like the kind that call people to a funeral", Mom would say, "Everyone one of us knew to just get up and get on with it," she'd say. "We're leavin'-ya'll git up and git in the car."

"Too many times, too many times my roots almost touched down and they'd rip us up 'cause it was time to pay the land owner. You know the "share" part of sharecropping. We'd be off in the night with a box full of money under Daddy's seat and no where to go."

Mom would tell me this story over and over on the days my brothers went to school and I wasn't old enough yet. She'd sit me down with a bowl of cream of mushroom soup and tell me the story of leaving her babies.

"That time I was twelve and we had another shot gun house and not enough rooms for all of us but I liked it there in Electra, Texas. Nothin' but a water tower and dust but they had a good school with teachers that didn't whip you. It was alright there and I'd made friends with the landlord's daughters and they started givin' me their old dolls. Porcelain ones with cracks in their faces and broken arms but I loved them. Mamma let me use this shed out near the fence and I'd keep them out there where the boys couldn't get to 'em. She even gave me a padlock to keep 'em safe. God, I became obsessed with those dolls. I'd clean them and name them and move them around. I'd do anything for a new one too. Once the Jameson twins brought around this beautiful doll with the most perfect brown ringlets hanging down it's back and a green velvet dress. She only had a chip knocked out of the tip of her foot. God, that one was my favorite. I named it Jessica, just like you. She was the most beautiful doll I got. But those girls wouldn't just give me the doll. They brought their brother along and I had to let him chew on me down there over my panties for a full minute while them and their friends watched. But I took care of those babies. Kept them clean and even looked for new arms and legs when I could and touched them up where I could with old bottles of nail polish I'd get from the landlord's wife."

Mom would interject into these stories repeatedly as she went along "I'll never make you leave your babies. Never." and I'd watch her face like a trance.

"We're leavin'," I could almost hear Grandma say like an omen. Once Grandma yelled at me to get in the car, "We're leavin'" she shouted and I burst out crying even though I knew she was just taking me down to the grocery store.

Mom would start shaking her head and I knew it was the place

in the story where it got bad. She'd shake her head fierce and pull at her ears like she had a bug in her head she was trying to get out.

"She just didn't care. Didn't care." I knew Mom was getting pushed into the car at this point, knew every inch of the car was stuffed full of clothes and kitchen utensils and humans.

"I kept askin' for just a minute. Just to get one..."

"We're leavin'," I could hear Grandma's voice getting urgent and firm.

"I had to sit in the back of that car and watch that shed get smaller and smaller and further away and I just held onto that key that went to the lock. Ta this day I can still imagine that landlord bustin' that lock open and I can see those spoiled little girls throwing my babies in the trash like nothin'. Ta this day..." she'd say and her eyes would get squinty and shine up. She'd never look at me at this point. She'd get all still and hold her fist up next to her neck like she still had that key in her hand.

"Ta this day... I can still tell you what each one of those babies was wearing and what shelf they were on..." That time they left Texas for good. Drove straight for two and a half days to California.

"I aint goin' back to Texas" she'd mumble but her accent would be strong and sharp. "Never goin' back there not even if someone dies", and she never did. Not even when one by one all her people back there died off. She never made me leave my dolls either. To this day I have a box full of them wrapped up in bubble wrap even though I could give a shit about them. I'm just too afraid what it would feel like to leave them behind.



Flight 4906, Lori J. Haraldsen

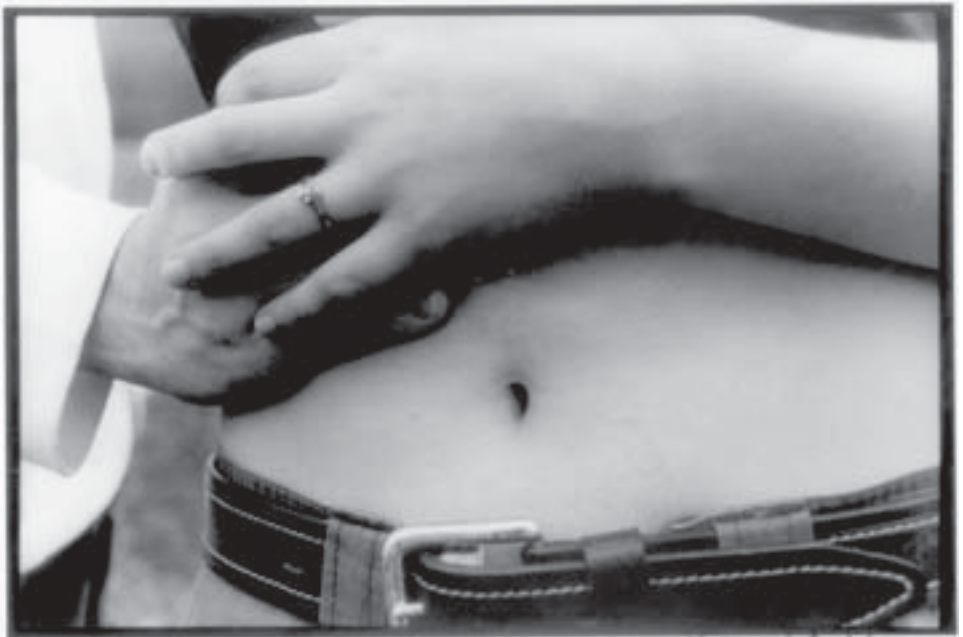
Orgy poetry

Anonymous

I heard through the grapevine,
That the poet reader would rather
Visit the realms of young female virgins
Panting and raving on the beds of orgy delights.
And of young men with strong loins and
Deep set Grey eyes.

Is this true?

If so my hopes of traveling
The world reciting poetry of dreams,
Oceans and desert mountains
And infinite love
Are gone.



Maureen Quinn

Maureen Quinn 3/200

Insomnia

Sylvia Bortin Patience

Another sound in the fan's soft whirl
I lie between sleep and waking
a wailing, keening without language
trapped inside the towers' collapse
far off Afghani women,
children fleeing bombs.

I turn from side to side.
Nowhere to go, and hungry
American flags on every street
whimpers of an Iraqi baby dying.
There is no clean water.

Night fades slowly to dawn.
The planes fly low into the city
frantic escape efforts of the victims
men trained to sacrifice their lives
for the destruction of symbols
bombs dropped in Afghanistan
years of sanctions in Iraq.

Into this waking nightmare
parade thousands of innocents
unimaginable heat of burning
terror of the passengers
no roads, no medicine
no treatment of water
finally, they wait to die.

In a marketplace
in ruined Iraq, a young boy answers,
"When I grow up I will be a pilot
so I can bomb America".



Joanne Toth

San Quentin Stew

Dammon J. Adams

Verse 1):

At fifteen to the hour, we pace
inside of our steel and stone cages.
All is quiet, not knowing what to feel.
Outside, protesters chant. We know their rage.

The witnesses pack into their assigned seats
noses to the wind, sensing the kill.
The predators prowl and pant, excitement prevails,
'cuz they know, they are served by the people's will.

Verse 2):

At ten to the hour, they make their move.
TO THE KILLING FIELDS. There comes the prey.
The throne awaits. All the faces painted just right,
reflecting the countenance of those whom have the say.

A voice rises up from the depth of heart, on hopeful song,
and spreads. "Amazing Grace", across the tiers.
Another joins, in fervent prayer, another and another.
And another joins from beyond the stone. One filled with
tears.

Verse 3):

At five to the hour, we begin to pray,
for the passing of a man that none of us have known.
Last rites and wrongs aired with last checks of the device.
To do it right the first time, is all the mercy they've shown.

Time passes slowly, each second's a stretch.
Talk turns to whispers, as if out of respect.
The straps are all fitted, and tightened snug.
A man yells. "Fry 'em!" It's what they expect.

Verse 4):

Upon the hour, the phone is hung up.
All preparations made, souls preserved, the room is cleared.
The warden reads the people's words; to confirm the right,
as if a mistake may have been feared.

Silence prevails, the air is still.
Then, it's rarefied. They're making their kill.
The electrified feel, confirms the earth's been sanctified.
It's the people's choice. They claim the right and will.

Verse 5):

Then drifts the sweet rancor smell, like bacon in the morning.
It waifs upon the smoke and air, like a spirit horse.
The Truth? It is lost. A stain is set.
It forever rots the stew of our Just-discourse.

For every animal in their cages knows.
This is where man falls; in error and waste.
For not even in God's perfection, does He take,
what He can't return upon error, or in Grace.

Jamie S. Uyematsu



Huen Yu Lai

Ward Garing

I want to tell you about the firefight. The one where I lost my eye. That was the day my vision cleared.

The drop that day was supposed to be clean; no problem. They're always the worst—the ones with no problems. It didn't help that the Looey was short and the top kick was getting a little *dinky-dau* after three tours. He was shackled with a baby-san in the vill, passing scrip to her mama-san and planting rice in his spare time. He was so far over the hill he thought *Ba-Moui-Ba* was good beer. The shit still tasted like formaldehyde to me, but I'd only been in-country four months and, for that matter, it wasn't any worse than Lucky Lager or Black Label.

The short-timers were still calling me a “candy-ass from Californiafuckin' U. S. of A.” Yeah, I was a candy-ass alright and I still believed 'em when they said tomorrow's landing would be easy, though the name of the vill, Huen Yu Lai, sounded too close to what my momma used to tell me: “You know, bad things'll happen *when you lie*.” Shit, maybe I'm getting a little *dinky-dau* too.

“Chill, Candy-ass. This one'll be a cinch. Charlie's split for the high country, he don't like the smell.”

Jimmie Jones, Spec. 5, Squad Leader and company sage always had an answer. He based his decisions on his ghetto years, Black Panther teachings and his nose. Old-timers said he could sniff virgin poontang upwind in a typhoon. I doubt it. There wasn't any virgin poontang over five-years-old in Nam.

“Smell? What you talkin' 'bout?” I asked.

“Flesh, Candy-ass. Human flesh what done been fried by napalm. That there's what I's talkin' 'bout. Whole vill went up yesterday 'bout three klicks from there. Charlie can't hardly stand the smell, so's they'll be splittin' fer the white folk's neighborhood. We ain't gonna find nothin' but roasted gooks when we hit the LZ. Piece 'a cake.” Jimmie's smile was dangerous on a dark night. He showed two rows of monstrous pearly-white teeth in his inky-black face. The effect was startling and his accompanying deep, harsh belly-laugh echoed through our hootch.

“Jimmie's right, Candy-ass. Y'all lissen t' that nigger 'n' y'all gonna keep yore pecker in one piece fer that li'l woman y'all got in the world.”

Ex-Staff Sergeant Roy Cummings, now busted to Corporal, and Jimmie Jones, child of the ghetto, made strange allies. Roy was a Tennessee hillbilly boy with three years of school to his credit, no shoes in his closet at home and yet he was the only person in the platoon who could call Jimmie a nigger and get away with it. I'd heard several ver-

sions of a story of another grunt who tried it and ended up very dead after a firefight. Nothing unusual about it, except the deceased had a knife imbedded in his chest. AK-47s don't shoot knives.

The rest of the squad concentrated on cleaning their weapons, sharpening knives, stakes, bayonets and other weapons of choice. They smiled, whistled, hooted and applauded the free entertainment, but they had more important things to do than get involved in my latest lesson of life near the DMZ.

Jimmie and Roy took up the lessons, ostensibly for the "Candy-ass," but open to anyone who's ears were available.

Jimmie: "Always keep yore head lower 'n' yore ass. Ass cheeks is easier to fix than brains."

Roy: "Shit, ain't no fuckin' Yankee from California got no brains. I'll bet his family tree don't fork."

Jimmie: "Yo, Tennessee boy, we gotta keep Candy alive jest to cover yore sorry ass. We all know yore woman can climb a tree faster 'n' a cat 'n' yore momma has ammo listed first on her Christmas list."



Roy: "Yeah, 'n' my momma found yore whole family in the tree eatin' bananas."

The squad wasn't even trying to disguise their interest in the exchange. All eyes were on Jimmie. The hootch hovered in airless space, eerie silence.

"INCOMING!" Jimmie's ears were finely tuned, a product of two tours.

No hesitation. No thought. Move, move, move. Out the door, round the corner, dive into the sandbagged culvert. Open your mouth, cover your ears, hug the corrugated metal. Scream, or pray—individual choice. No color here, no feeling, no thinking. No politics or religion.

Survival requires total concentration. When its over, you're too tired to think, or fight, or feel. Tomorrow there's the challenge of the LZ. Then it'll be time to fight—time to concentrate on what's important.

0600. Misty dawn, 93 degrees, 90% humidity. Just another day in paradise; another day shorter.

Lieutenant Perez, the "Tweety Bird," is displaying all the finely tuned skills of a short-timer. He easily slides under the latrine door and oozes up onto the honey bucket. He's so short he's getting the runs, the ague, any physical dysfunction to keep him out of the field. It won't work today. The Chinook is waiting to ferry the platoon to the easy LZ. Tweety-Bird has his orders. One more mission before DEROS. He'll lead Jimmie, Roy, Candy-ass, Hawk, Jew-boy and twenty-five more one last time before he clears Nam for "The World."

We hoist our packs, cradle our M-16s and buckle pots on our heads just like we used to put on slickers, galoshes and pick up lunches before going to school on a rainy day. Somewhere between the hootch and the chopper, in the back of the duece-and-a-half, my stomach starts doing gymnastics. Getting there's the hardest part. Every time I look around, I see new faces. Some replace the lucky ones who've made their time and rotated out, back to "The World;" that dreamy place of long-legged, round-eyed angels, flush toilets and clothing in tones other than OD green. Then there're the others. Replacements for Rash, whose itching skin won't bother him any more, or Jim-Bob who only lost a foot to a land mine. Million dollar fuckin' wound.

The new slick-sleeve, Jose-something-or-other, is fingering a cross around his neck and mumbling in Spanish. He doesn't get it yet. God deserted his sorry Mexican ass when he left The World. There's no God this close to the DMZ. Someone ought to tell him.

Jimmie and Roy pick up where they left off the night before.

Jimmie: "Hey, Tennessee. Man, I hear where you come from you wipe yore ass with a Monkey Ward catalog."

Roy: "Shore do, but it's a step up from where y'all come from. Paper beats a corncob any day."

Jimmie got a chuckle from that one and pretty soon Roy was laughing too. I couldn't figure these two, but stopped thinking about it when we lifted off.

Huge twin rotors beat the air, blasting sticky-hot wind through the open clamshell door in the rear. I watched Firebase Delta fall away behind us, swallowed up in encroaching jungle spreading to the horizon, lost in rising misty heat waves. The firebase looked like an ugly brown scab on green velvet skin. I felt like a microbe escaping from the scab, floating free in a vibrating husk shaken from a healing sore. The scab was home. I missed it already.

"Vamos, hombres! Ya vamos!" Tweety Bird only knew a few phrases of his native language, but he loved to demonstrate his semi-

linguistic skills over us poor folk who spoke only one language. I guess it made him feel superior. “Sangre!” he yelled as we jumped the few feet from the open door to the ground. Yeah, I thought, but whose blood—ours or theirs.

The “quiet” LZ was a hot corner of hell. The Chinook never had a chance. The platoon was barely out when a rocket chopped the chopper into pocket sized pieces of metal, plastic and fabric. The hot, smoking pieces of our magic carpet blanketed the clearing, popping and steaming in the rice stalks. The concussion spun me around with a mighty hand and put me on my back in water and dung, sheltered by slender green stalks waving at a bright blue sky.

From where I lay, I watched two Huey gunships, riding escort to the LZ, as they wheeled and dove, hovered and fired missiles into the surrounding jungle. Door gunners snapped prolonged bursts from their 50’s, chewing up leaves and dropping branches from trees around the clearing. Tracers arced back, as if ricocheting from the ground. The Hueys retreated from the kill zone, limping away to perceived safety.

“Form up! Form up! Return fire! Shoot, you god-damned mother-fuckers! Kill somebody!”

I didn’t recognize the voice. It sure as hell wasn’t Tweety Bird, I knew that much. Somebody wanted me to do something, but I was so comfortable. Moving was dangerous, maybe deadly. If I just stayed quiet, maybe it would all go away.

Training and drills don’t prepare you for this. It’s too sudden, too violent. Your mind rebels, your body shrivels. You piss in your pants. You either fight, or you whimper and die.

A part of me I didn’t recognize rolled over and squeezed the trigger. My head and shoulders are above the rice stalks, weapon at my shoulder, firing on semi-automatic, changing clips furiously. Someone’s screaming. It’s me. Incoherent. Loud. Firing. Screaming. Firing. Killing.

A firefight is not unlike a swift, violent summer storm. An eerie calm shattered by a wall of fury and drumming sound. Clear vision is replaced by murky half-seen images. Staccato raindrops, the automatic fire of M-16s and AK-47s assault your senses. Wild winds whip around you, even if the air is still. Confusion. All is chaos.

As lightning illuminates in a storm, crystal clear scenes occur amidst the blur of battle. In an instant I saw a scene, blue-bright, intense. Lieutenant Perez rose in a half-crouch and disappeared in a billowing burst that instantly turned to a muddy, bloody pillar of water, earth, rice stalks and body parts. The lightning was immediately followed by the whoomp! and concussion of mortar thunder. The pillar dissolved into a rain—muddy, bloody rice soup. Lieutenant Perez had been instantly converted to fertilizer.



The storm rages and there's no shelter. Hot little blips identify tracers from automatic weapons. Red and angry, they tear up earth, harvest grain not yet ripe and reap human fruit in season. Jose Whatever-His-Name found his God, exploding in a bright red spray like a watermelon violently smashed against a stone wall. His lifeless shell lay crumpled across the dike at the edge of the paddy.

A storm front does not maintain its intensity forever. As energy dissipates, winds moderate, rain eases to a steady stream and thunder rumbles further in the distance. A semblance of order returns to a world altered by the violence.

"First squad! Form on me! Behind the dike!"

"Third squad! Move right to flank! Off your asses. Let's kick butt!!"

Some order, less chaos. I'm not screaming now. Roy's ahead, crouching and firing, moving forward. Jimmie's big, black face appears in the rice beside Roy. Jimmie's looking at me, waving and yelling.

"Move it, Candyass! Git yore sorry ass over heah!"

I can't help myself. This shit is getting good. I'm alive! I'm more alive now than ever in my life. I can run forever, fight an army and screw all their whores before dinner then do it again tomorrow. Jimmie, Roy and Candy-ass, the three baddest dudes in Nam.

Before I can reach my bros, the world erupts into a towering wall of heat and flame only a hundred yards away and right in front of the VC positions. Flames in all the colors of hot twist and claw at the sky, consuming oxygen, sucking breath from our bodies. The fires chase the two F-4s clawing vertically for precious altitude after coming in hot and low ahead of their sound. Explosive gelatins, black powder, volatile liquids mix and tangle in the inferno in a hellish recipe concocted by the chefs in the driver's seats of the F-4s to flash-cook Victor Charlie. Char-broiled Charlie. VC hash. Viet Cong burgers—well done and smokin' hot. A mother-fuckin' feast!

The scream of jet engines signals another pass, another curtain of fire behind the first. A God-awful hell on earth and fuck peace and goodwill to men.

“BURN, BABY, BURN” Jimmie has his M-16 extended high in a ferocious Black Power Salute. His eyes spark with an intense inner fire, his face is contorted, muscles stretched to the snapping point.

The Huey gunships sweep in over us, the 50 caliber door-mounted machine guns spraying unnecessary thousands of deadly rounds into a kill zone already devoid of life. Hot shell casings rain safer, democracy brighter, and mom, apple pie and the flag a little closer.

Standing on the pinnacle of my life, two things happened that... that. ...This is hard. I want you to understand, but I feel somehow inadequate. I'm really not very good with words. Bear with me.

Jimmie, Roy and Candy-ass. In the calm, the blessed silent Jimmie was sprawled across Roy's lap, most of his uniform blown away. Tattered OD green, crimson stained, on a field of Black. A heraldic Coat-of Arms identifying Sir James of the Ghetto, Grand Knight of Lost Causes, rife on a field of Tennessee Hillbilly, recently relieved of his left leg.

I puked.

Jimmie and Roy. Roy and Jimmie. A mismatched, bloody pile of humanity in a rice paddy a long way from home. I was an audience of one. It became my duty to tell the story. I'll never, ever, forget ...

Roy: “Yeah, 'n' yore momma got married in the delivery room.”

Jimmie seemed to like that one. He tried to say something, swallowed hard and tried again. Blood bubbled, pink and frothy from multiple wounds and he gave up trying to speak. He looked deep into Roy's eyes, smiled and nodded his head.

“You alright, ... Tennessee.” The words came in labored gasps through bloody lips. “You 'n' me knows pig's knuckles ... 'n' corn pone. Jest ...like... bro's.”

Jimmie didn't die like they do in the movies. It wasn't pretty or dramatic. He just stopped breathing, twitched a little, and relaxed. Maybe he felt kind of peaceful, like he did in his mother's arms when he was a baby. Roy's tears splashed on Jimmie's chest, mingling with the pink bloody bubbles and the whole scene blurred suddenly. The pain from my wound finally assailed me, but I was crying because of a deeper pain. There was a death in the family. I was reaching for my brothers when I passed out.

Today I think about Jimmie and Roy more than my missing eye. I've grown accustomed to seeing a two dimensional world, but I have trouble seeing you because when your brother is in pain or dying, you can turn two blind eyes because the brother's skin reflects a different color, or he speaks a strange dialect, or worships a different God.

I lost an eye. Roy lost a leg. Jimmie lost his life. How lucky we are compared to what you have lost.

Norte Americano

Dane Cervine

We have arrived at the end of the earth, cannibalizing
the four directions, everything that lies between.

There is no end to what we cannot have, which is what we want;
every king knows this—the world is not enough.

Hunger consumes its children, picks over the bones that remain.
We are the children of bones, oblivious to what consumes us.

We are loud.

Silence has many advantages—hearing what we cannot have,
the open hand, the space it leaves, the nothing that is left

our one hope, emptiness capable of receiving, what is simple:

the heft of a hoe handle,
the weight of water

a fist uncurling fingers

surrendering this infinite seduction, the chain of want
spread across the globe as a cloud, pale as the skin of ghosts.



Maureen Quinn

Curves Lori J. Haraldsen



Eye of God

Alice Moore

Meditating the first time
I accidently saw it.
Solemnly staring back
right between my own two.
All knowing
my soul stirred.
At long last home.

Kid Tied to a Stick

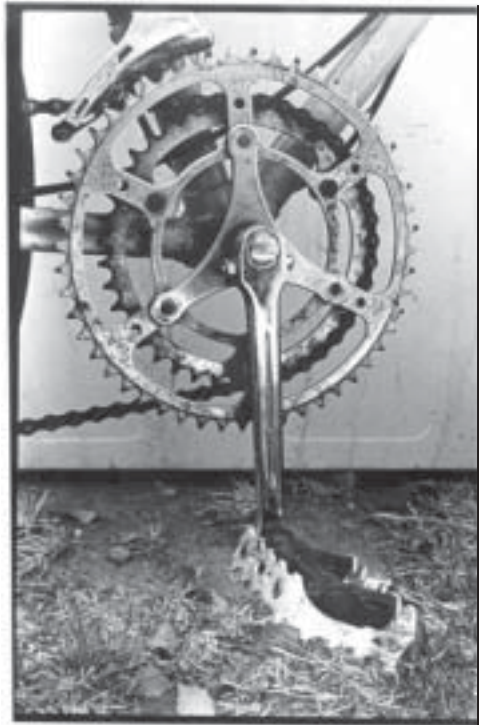
Paul Gosselin

The darkest man will set fire to his daughter's dreams
He will lash out at her beauty
And drown her

A tragic man will come and take her hand
She will soon devour her children

Being taught the consequences of actions
And the limitations of factions
Having heard the warnings of politicians
And the apocalypses of sermons
Being led to schools of instructions
And institutions of deductions
And the usual corporations of destructions

It's no wonder I told a cop I wanted to be a poet



Jamie S. Uyematsu

Annie's Lobster Story

Marc Darrow

When I was about nine years old, my dad worked for an ugly man who made him stay late a lot. My mom stayed home with me and cleaned and cooked and volunteered down at the church. I don't know what she did there exactly besides volunteering. Maybe it was helping other kids.

I was a sensitive little girl, at least that's what everybody always said. In our part of the country this didn't seem to be anything to be proud of. And most families on our street had more than one kid, which made me different in two big ways, but I didn't care.

So one day my dad said that my mom should get something special for dinner because he was inviting his boss home so he could get a better job with the company.

"What should I get?" Mom asked.

"Something really special, Louise. Use your head for a change," my dad said.

"How about a porcupine?" I suggested.

My dad gave me this look he'd been giving me about every ten minutes since I was four. It wasn't a good look. It was like you smelled something bad but you were raised too polite to say anything.

So later, after my dad left for work, my mom and I went to the expensive grocery store we never went to where I figured all the shoppers were really rich and probably wore fur coats and alligator shoes but it turns out they looked like everybody else. This store was cleaner than our store, though, and instead of being tired and broke-down looking, the people working there seemed a little bit happy in a way you don't see in a store much.

So we marched right in there like we had every right to shop in an expensive store if we felt like it and then my mom asked to see the manager.

This was going to be trouble, I thought. When my mom asked to see someone like that she usually complained about something or told them how to do something better than the way they did it. I couldn't imagine what she'd noticed in the half a minute between walking in the door and asking what she asked, but you never knew with my mom. She could get upset over the littlest things, like if there was a gum wrapper on the ground, or if the smelly dog next door howled with the air-raid siren.

Anyway, it turned out that mom just wanted to ask the manager — this really tall man with bulgy eyes — what was the most expensive thing in the store, which I guess was her way of trying to get back at my dad for how he'd treated her. Mom and dad fought over money a lot. And me. They fought over me a lot, too.

“Lobster,” the man said with a big smile.

A lot of men smiled when they talked to my mom because she had harmonious features and large breasts.

“Ah,” my mom said with a smile back. “Lobster. Let’s go look at them.”

And before I could even get going, the two of them were hightailing it down this long aisle that had drinks all along it. Even though they had a big head start, I know I would’ve caught up before they got to the lobsters, but they had some sodas I’d never seen before so I stopped to look at them.

“Annie!” my mom called. “Come here and help me pick out the best lobsters!”

I was so embarrassed. You could hear her all over the store and now all these strangers knew my name. But I forgot about that as I ran to the big lobster tank because my mom usually didn’t need my help and I wanted to show her I could be real handy.

The tank was next to the cold cuts section and I wondered if the poor lobsters were too cold in their dirty-looking water. They didn’t look happy, that’s for sure. But maybe it was just because they weren’t in their old lake back where they came from and instead there they were, neighbors with Oscar Mayer and all these foreign sausages in this fancy grocery store. There’d been a new boy in school last year, in fact, who’d had the same kind of expression on his face a lot, only that might have been because he was a cripple.

So at first I thought we should get the biggest lobsters. My mom said we could only afford to get two. And she seemed to like the idea of getting big ones at first but then I said we should get the best-looking ones and she laughed at that and then she said that that was definitely the way to go. The manager probably had lots of other things to do, but he just stayed there and smiled while we went through all this.

None of the lobsters were very good-looking. They looked like big wet bugs, to tell you the truth. But some definitely looked worse than others. So what I did was I ruled out the ones that looked sick or angry or just fed up with life as a lobster until there were two left and then we bought those. I think they were a boy and a girl.

They were so expensive that my mom had to write a check for them and then we couldn’t go buy new towels like we’d planned.

The lobsters had these little black plastic handcuffs on them, only they didn’t have hands so the little cuffs were on their big claws. They were in this box that was way too small for them plus I don’t think it was even meant for lobsters in the first place. I held the box up to the car window on the way home so the lobsters could see where we were going but I don’t think they really looked. Then the box got heavy so I put it down.

When we got home, my mom said she had to go do something special that the man told her to do to keep the lobsters fresh, but I was right there and I didn't hear the man tell her anything like that. Then she told me to go out and play and even though it was real hot and sweaty, I did because spending that much time with my mom always made me all pent up.

I don't remember much about the rest of the day until five or so, but I probably played with Katie and Euna from down the street, who were not that fun but they were always right nearby.

Then my mom called me in to help with dinner, although usually I just set the table or something else that didn't have too much to do with dinner, really. But I liked doing it. My mom was a good cook and I was going to be one too someday, so being in the kitchen awhile couldn't hurt.

First she got a big soup pot and filled it up with water and then she put it on the stove on high heat. That was my favorite setting — high heat. I really don't see why they have all those other ones. They just make everything cook slower and by five-thirty when my dad usually got home, I was always starving and not wanting my food on medium or low heat, that's for sure.

While my mom worked on the vegetables and I put out the glasses, she started telling me how I was supposed to act when Mr. Macy was over. I shouldn't get smart or speak up on my own or tell anything embarrassing or burp or even laugh unless everyone else was laughing.

"I know how to act," I told her.

"I know you do, honey. I'm just nervous about the dinner, so bear with me."

"Why?"

"Well, I wish I'd had more notice to get the house ready and I've never cooked lobster before and one part of me can't wait to see you dad's face when he sees what I bought, but another part's worried about it. How's that for a big answer, Annie?"

"It was okay."

We were quiet after that, just doing our work and I felt good because I wasn't worried about the dinner or my dad like my mom was.

Then my mom had to go to the bathroom. We had a half one downstairs right around the corner from the kitchen. I don't know why they called it a half bathroom. You could do everything in that com-mode you could do in the one upstairs.

After just a minute, the kitchen timer went off, and my mom called to me from the bathroom.

"Annie! If you want, you could check on the water and see if

it's boiling yet. I'll be out in a minute to put the lobsters in."

"Okay," I said.

I went to go look in the pot but it was up too high so I scooted a chair over and I stood on that so I could see. From up there, the bubbly rushing-around water was way below me, but so were the poor lobsters crawling on top of one another in the sink right next door.

"I'll be out soon," my mom called. "Be careful."

I didn't hardly hear her. I suddenly realized what cooking lobsters really meant and I was shocked. My mom was going to boil them alive! What was she thinking? She hadn't ever murdered anything before.

At first, I was kind of frozen about the whole thing, but then I got all panicky. What should I do? What should I do? This was all that ran through my mind. It was like there was a squirrel loose in my head. I didn't think about my mom or my dad or Mr. Macy or how much trouble I could get into. I just kept thinking, "What should I *do*?"

Then I just grabbed those lobsters out of the sink, one in each hand, and it was very scary because they were big and slimy and I was sure they'd bite me any second. I ran out the back door to set them free in the yard, but then I figured they were slow-moving critters and my mom would probably catch them right away. So I ran into my playhouse, which was made out of real wood and was a lot nicer than most anyone else's. I opened up my toy chest and I put the lobsters under some dolls. Then I closed the lid and ran back in. I got there just in time, although I know I looked all messed-up and my mother could tell something was going on.

"What's wrong, Annie? Did you burn yourself?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"Are you squeamish about the lobsters?"

I shook my head again, which I figured wasn't a lie since I didn't know what the word squeamish meant, even though I knew what she was trying to ask.

Then she looked in the pot. No lobsters. Then the sink. No lobsters.

"Annie, this isn't funny. Mr. Macy and your dad are due in twenty minutes. Where are the lobsters?"

"They escaped."

"What do you mean, 'they escaped'?"

"They're gone. They went back to their lake."

My mom took a real deep breath like she does when she's trying not to lose her temper.

"Honey, lobsters live in the ocean way up north and I need a little cooperation here. They didn't jump out of the sink, now did they?"

"Why not?"

"They don't have legs, for one thing. Were you feeling sorry for the lobsters?"

"No ma'am. What happened was they got away, I guess."

I was trying real hard not to lie but even lying was better than murdering two of God's creatures, however ugly they were.

"Are they in one of the cabinets?"

"No."

"The garage?"

"No."

"Your room?"

"No."

"Well are they outside, Annie?"

"No." They were in the playhouse and that was like being back indoors, really. Just a smaller kind of indoors.

"That's it. You're getting the spanking of your life if I don't get a little help here."

I started to cry. I don't know why. I wasn't sad.

My mom stomped off to go find the lobsters, giving me one last look like a mean snake would look at you if you got too close to it. I didn't know what to do, so I got a Coke out of the icebox even though I wasn't supposed to, and then I went into my room to drink it.

By now I'd stopped crying and I felt kind of like one of those saints you hear about — you know, the ones who get yelled at or hurt real bad for being extra good. I was scared, too. And sick to my stomach. But it was mixed together with all the rest.

Since I hadn't ever done anything like this before, I wasn't sure how it was going to turn out. Would the lobsters get found and then get murdered? Would they like it in the toy chest with my dolls? It wasn't a lake, but it wasn't boiling water, either. And did they know those were dolls or did they think they were little people who might hurt them? And what about my dad and Mr. Macy? What would they eat? Would my dad get fired? Would we have to move back to Grandma's?

I don't know how long it was, but my dad and Mr. Macy came home early while my mom still hadn't found the lobsters. I stayed in my room and I peeked out my door so I could see what was going on.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Macy," my mom said. "Something out of my control has gone terribly wrong with the meal tonight. We can order in or take you out somewhere nice. But I'm afraid I've nothing to offer you right now."

My dad's face got almost as ugly as Mr. Macy's, only in a different way. It was like they were both yard dogs with pushed-in faces but my dad wanted to bite you and Mr. Macy only wanted to slobber on you, and slobber didn't really hurt. I guess what my mom said was

like a bad dream coming true for my dad and he just couldn't help himself. At least his face would go back to regular later. Mr. Macy would always be ugly.

"Louise?" my dad said, and there was a whole lot more than just my mom's name in that word.

"Don't fret," Mr. Macy said. "Accidents happen to the best of us."

I'd never heard that one before and it got me thinking. Maybe it was an accident about the lobsters. I couldn't figure out exactly how, but they do happen to the best of us. Mr. Macy said so.

They everybody pretended to calm down and nothing much happened while they talked more about dinner and what to do.

My mom and dad knew I was there but they were ignoring me on purpose. I guess it was because they were so mad about how things turned out. But nobody told Mr. Macy that he was supposed to be mean to me so when he finally noticed me down the hall he came over and gave me a dollar.

"Don't make my dad stay so late," I told him. I must've been upset, too. I never said anything like that before.

"You're welcome," Mr. Macy said.

"Oops. Thank you Mr. Macy," I said.

"Oops. I'll try to get him home sooner now that I know he has such a beautiful little girl waiting for him."

He tried to pat me on the head, but I wiggled out from under him. Mr. Macy wasn't so ugly close-up, but he still wasn't anything to write home about, either, and I was pretty sure I didn't want him touching me.

A little while later, they decided to go out to this restaurant I'd never been to, only I had to go stay at the neighbor's house. This was okay with me because I knew Mrs. Cairts would be nice to me because she didn't have any kids of her own, and not only that she had a TV, which my dad wouldn't allow in our house because he said it gave young people ideas. I didn't understand that. Wasn't I supposed to have ideas? How could I think without having ideas?

Also, I figured I could go check on the lobsters with everybody gone, but then I ate pork chops and salad with Mrs. Cairts and we watched some really good shows and with Mr. Cairts on the road again, it didn't feel right to leave Mrs. Cairts all alone. Then I got sleepy.

When my mom and dad came to get me, they were a little drunk but they were mad, too, and they said I was going to get punished in the morning and they'd straighten me out if it was the last thing they ever did.

It seemed like they were just as mad at each other as they were at me. My dad said my mom shouldn't have gotten lobsters in the first place for "obvious reasons" and that leaving me alone with the lob-

sters “was tantamount to committing a crime.” When my dad was drunk, he talked even more like a college man than he usually did. He’d gone to a big school up in North Carolina somewhere that was especially for very smart people.

My mom said he should never have sprung the whole dinner idea on her that way and that if he could just get along with other people he wouldn’t have to have such a crappy job and they wouldn’t have to bounce a check to pay for some asshole’s steak dinner. When my mom got drunk, her language got more colorful. That was how she’d explain it to me afterward, anyway. My dad hated it when she talked like that.

They were still fighting when I fell asleep in my comfy bed with my stuffed bear and my little pink pillow from Florida. I slept real good, too.

And I dreamt. I know I did because I always dream. Sometimes I dream I’m flying and sometimes I’m a hundred foot tall and I’m stepping on things like my school, only when nobody’s in it.

But anyway, next thing I know I’m being shook awake in the morning by my mom. It’s a really bad way to wake someone up, in my opinion. Usually she just called my name from as close-up as it took. But I guess she was still really mad.

“Put on your robe and come with me,” she said. Her voice wasn’t loud but it would’ve cut me if it’d been a knife, or maybe even just a wooden letter opener like the one Grandma had.

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, and I jumped right out of bed and put on my green plaid robe, even though it was already too hot to need it. When my mom was like that, you didn’t say, “Oh, I don’t need my robe.” You just did exactly what she said and hoped for the best.

Then she grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the room, down the hall, and out the back door.

“Uh oh,” I thought, or maybe I even said it.

Without thinking about it, I dug my heels in and tried to stop where the back lawn started, but my mom pulled me so hard it hurt.

“You’re coming with me and you’re going to see this whether you like it or not,” she said.

Then I noticed this awful smell. It was really, really awful. I can’t even describe it, but it made me feel sick all over, even inside my mind. I guess it was because deep down I knew what it was.

In a few seconds we were at the playhouse. The toy chest was open and the smell was ten times worse now. I thought I’d throw up and I almost did.

Then my mom grabbed the back of my head and pushed my face at the exact spot on this planet I least wanted to have anything to do with.

There they were. Those poor dead lobsters. They were brown now and lots of bugs were crawling all over them. They smelled like the mess that death really was.

I started sobbing when I realized that it was me. I was the murderer.

“See what you did?” my mom said. “See what happens when little girls lie to their mothers? You killed them, Annie. You killed those lobsters, you stupid girl. I hope you remember this morning until the day you die.”

I’m not dead yet, but I haven’t forgotten. I don’t think I ever will, even though my mother apologized to me later. She said she was tired and hungover and I wasn’t stupid at all and I was just trying to do what I thought was right.

But you can’t undo some things. You can’t undo dead lobsters.



Sara Friedlander

Mister Mustache

Jeffrey Duane Hager

Mr. Spatz made a deliberate show of looking at his watch while shaking his head. He removed a pen from his shirt pocket and began tapping it on the edge of the clipboard he held. "Well, Mr. Jenkins, it looks as if you are late again."

Our eyes met for a moment, and I then looked down toward my ten-dollar pleather shoes, as if to say, *yes, I am tardy again, and I apologize for my stupidity and pray for compassion and understanding on your part, oh exalted manager of Peachy Burroughs Terrace, Fine Dining at the P.B. Country Club.*

"I cut myself shaving and it wouldn't stop bleeding. I practically bled to death. See?" I asked, pointing to my shirt.

Mr. Spatz looked at my shirt suspiciously, raising his eyebrows as if it was an elaborate hoax. I knew that he was filling out an EDF (Employee Disciplinary Form) that would require my signature when finished.

I continued with my explanation. "I was trying to get the bleeding to stop, which it wouldn't, and when I realized what time it was I rushed over here and in the process forgot my employee identification card." I put my hand to the cut on my chin. The little piece of TP was gone and it still bled ever so slightly. Mr. Spatz shook his head again, his favorite gesture, as if his world was just filled with one unbelievable disappointment after the other.

"I know you know this, but I'm telling you this so that you will know I know you know this. You are on some seriously thin ice around here, Mr. Jenkins. This is your third strike. Normally we terminate employees on their third strike, but in your case I am going to make an exception." Mr. Spatz scribbled on his clipboard as he spoke. "I am not going to fire you. I am putting you on probation. You are a good busboy, you work hard, but you are late for work far too often." Spatz stopped writing for a moment and shot a glance in my direction.

I looked down at my shoes again, and noticed my pants were unzipped, which explained the draft. "It won't happen again," I said, waiting until Spatz returned his attention to his clipboard before reaching for my open fly.

"Each time I have been assured that it will not happen again. This is your fourth tardy in two months. Look, Mr. Jenkins, I'm not here to give you a hard time. I want you to succeed. I want you to have a long, happy employment here at Peachy Burroughs." Mr. Spatz flashed me his trademarked unctuous smile as he handed me the clipboard. "Please sign here."

I'd been accused of being late, of forgetting my employee identification card, of having a dirty uniform, and of improper hygiene

(not shaving completely). I informed Mr. Spatz that I was growing a mustache. The employee handbook stated that mustaches were the only facial hair employees were allowed to cultivate. Goatees, beards, sideburns lower than the earlobe, or any other creative types of facial hair were strictly verboten, as were visible tattoos, piercings, and unnatural hair colors, but the employee handbook said I could have a mustache.

Mr. Spatz looked even more disappointed than usual. "I don't know if I would call that a mustache, but very well. I'll strike that comment from the record." I signed the form. He handed me my pink copy that said *For Employees Records* at the bottom. "Now, chop chop," Spatz said, clapping his hands. "Clean your face off and get your vest on. There is a dining room to set up." Mr. Spatz turned to leave but paused a moment. "I will be studying your performance closely this afternoon, Mr. Jenkins. Any more mess ups and you'll be no longer employed here at *Peachy Burroughs*." Then he was gone.

The employee bathroom smelled of a thousand dumps leached permanently into the dirty linoleum and cracked paint. I washed my face but my cut still bled. I grabbed the vest from my locker and went down to the first aid kit in the kitchen for a Band-Aid. The only bandages were the size of a large butterfly. I had no choice. My little black and gold vest almost but not quite covered the blood on my shirt.

The other busboy, Cirilo, was already busy setting the tables. Cirilo was never late. He never forgot his employee identification card or arrived with blood all over his white shirt. Plus Cirilo was so fast and efficient he made everyone else seem incompetent. Cirilo already had half the dining room set up. He'd wiped down the tables with a damp towel, spread out the tablecloths, set the salt, pepper and candles. Now he was setting out the side plates. I grabbed a rack of wineglasses. The wineglasses were tricky. Leaving fingerprints meant signing an EDF for mishandling of glassware.

When Cirilo finished the plates, he wheeled a cart full of silverware around the dining room. At each seat he placed two forks, two spoons and two knives. Fine dining meant using extra plates and silverware. Instead of polishing the silverware before he set it, Cirilo somehow palmed all the utensils in a way that left no mark. He shuffled them out like cards, only stopping occasionally to polish ones that weren't shining quite enough. And damn he was fast. Even though he had to place six pieces of silverware for every wineglass, he was still catching up to me. Pretty soon we stood at the same table.

"Buenos dias," I said.

"Hola, amigo," he said. We shook hands with a slide and a snap, and then bumped our fists together. "Amigo," he said, "you do the coffee and iced tea. Do the sopas. I'll do this." He pointed to the rack of wineglasses I held.

“Okay,” I said, and went to the rear corner of the dining room. I brewed coffee and iced tea. I brewed some decaf. I ate a package of oyster crackers and sucked on an ice cube. I went into the kitchen and got two soup pots from the cooks, the clam chowder we had every night and salmon bisque, the soup du jour. One of the cooks asked me what happened, pointing to the bandage on my chin. I looked at the cook whose name I didn’t know, studying his bushy mustache and the toothpick hanging from the corner of his mouth. I wanted to tell him that I had cut myself because I was distracted by my decision to grow a mustache, but knew any man with such a healthy mustache would never understand.

I shrugged my shoulders. “Muy borracho,” I said, and everybody in the kitchen burst out laughing, even the dishwasher with the lazy eye and the broken teeth. I couldn’t tell whether they thought I was funny or stupid. I wasn’t even sure what I thought myself.

I took the soup pots into the dining room. I filled the bread warmer with a few bags of sourdough rolls, and then took one out and gnawed on a corner of it like a caged rodent. Mr. Spatz suddenly swept into the room, inspecting the table setup and the general appearance of everything. He didn’t have his EDF clipboard with him, but I knew it was probably close at hand. I quickly tossed the roll I was eating into the garbage. Eating rolls was grounds for an EDF.

Spatz stalked through the dining with his hands behind his back and his sharp eye searching for any flaw in the dining aesthetic. He paused and leaned in close at one table in particular. He carefully picked a wineglass up by the stem and held it toward the window. He wanted to know who had set the wineglasses out. Spatz stared me down, and I became painfully aware of the background muzac.

Of course it was one of the wineglasses I’d set out. I wanted to confess my mishandling of glassware, but still had a mouthful of sourdough and could not immediately speak. Cirilo approached Spatz and said that he had set the tables. Spatz set the wineglass back on the table and told him he had done an excellent job. Superb, he said. He patted Cirilo on the shoulder and then looked back at me. He told me he hoped I was taking notes. I didn’t know whether to feel relieved that I wasn’t in trouble or angry that Cirilo had stolen a tiny piece of praise that could have been mine.

Cirilo carried a bucket of ice over to the rear of the dining room, and poured it into the extra large ice bin next to the ice tea machine. When the ice bin was nearly empty in the morning it was possible to read a warning label attached to the side near the bottom of it. It read *this ice chest is not intended to store ice for human consumption*. One of our most important jobs as busboys was to keep this ice bin filled, brimming so the label was always covered with the ice we used for waters and ice teas. *Not intended to store ice for human consumption*. I always felt

confused in the face of it, paralyzed by this moral dilemma.

I walked over to where Cirilo was filling the ice bin. I thanked him for telling Spatz that he had set the tables. I was glad he had taken the focus off of me.

"I thought he was being very mad. I think he want to fire you." Cirilo began pouring ice tea into a few portable pitchers, for refills.

"He told me one more mess up and I'm gone." I suddenly realized what a long day it was going to be, with Spatz watching my every move, waiting for any mistake at all. I hated long days, so I tried to let it go. Just pretend I didn't even care anymore. Maybe I'd even try to get fired.

"Mr. Jenkins, please clean the windows before we open." I turned around and found Spatz behind me, holding a squeegee. "You know where the Windex is."

I took the squeegee and retrieved the window cleanser. As I sprayed and squeegeed the windows, I decided that whole quitting and/or getting fired on purpose line of logic I had been exploring was a little premature. No reason to rush things. Just because I didn't care whether I got fired or not didn't mean termination should be an immediate goal. The money at Peachy Burroughs was good, so good that I was often left speechless while counting the pile of twenty-dollar bills I had been stashing under my mattress at home. It was enough to make me forget all the bad things and focus on the good.

Having that much money just lying around made me believe I was well on my way toward the illustrious world of success and notoriety. I was thinking about going to Vegas, thinking of rolling seven after seven at the craps table. I would have a big baggy mustache. The dealer would call me Mr. Jenkins, or maybe he would call me Mr. Mustache, which would become my nickname because of my amazing facial amendment. The busty cocktail waitress would slip me her phone number while eyeing my stack of chips. Smoking a Chesterfield and sipping on my complimentary Long Island iced tea; I would laugh remembering my days as a lowly busboy at Peachy Burroughs.

"Mr. Jenkins, chop chop." Spatz clapped his hands behind me. I dropped the squeegee mid squeegee. "I do believe that window is clean." I had cleaned the same window about ten times in row, leaving it so spotless it had practically vanished.

I moved on to the next window. Spray, squeegee, wipe. Spray, squeegee, wipe. I had found my rhythm. I was a lean, mean squeegee machine.

A few people in suits and dresses milled around outside the front door. It was five minutes until the dining room opened for business, and usually there were a few tables worth of people waiting to bust the doors down and commence their fine dining experience. The first diners of the day always had a hurried immediacy to them, en-

gulfing their basket of rolls and polishing off their beverages as if they had been waiting for weeks. And boy were they cranky if you didn't refill their ice teas and coffees before they were halfway finished. Boy did they let you know when they needed more bread and butter. They liked to snap their fingers and say, *Garçon*, more bread and butter, too sweet.

Candy pulled up in her little Honda Civic just as I was cleaning the very last window. Candy was the opening waitress, and had signed her fair share of EDFs. She was late. I saw her spring from the car with her hair confused, her white shirt halfway buttoned, the cigarette hanging from her lips one drag away from the filter. Mr. Spatz unlocked the front door to let the extravagant loiterers into the *Peachy Burroughs Terrace*, and the line of customers spilling into the dining room blocked my view.

Mr. Spatz sat three tables. He flashed the same pained smile while explaining the daily specials and soup that he did while extolling the virtues of proper dining etiquette to trainees, or pointing out someone's failure to perform within the expected parameters. His smile made Spatz look like he suffered from a painful and extended constipation.

Because Candy wasn't ready to take tables yet, Mr. Spatz pulled Andrew out of the bar and made him take drink orders from these people. Andrew the bartender was big in every way. He had at one time been an offensive lineman at some collegiate level, and now was bald as an onion and unpredictably emotional. He was known to throw bar patron's tips back at them at high velocity when they left him coins and break down into hysterics while watching college football. Today Andrew was smiling huge, each of his teeth many inches wide.

"Hey, you," he said to me. Andrew never remembered my name. Charlie I told him. "Charlie? Yeah, Charlie. Will you take some bread out?" I shrugged and told him I guessed so. His smile faded and he gave me a dark look like *take the bread or else*. So I took the bread. Some people have no sense of humor.

Cirilo dropped the water. I dropped the bread. Andrew walked out from the cocktail lounge with a tray full of martinis and cocktails, and also a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket. Appetizers, anyone want appetizers? He asked. One table ordered the crab cakes. Another table ordered the artichoke picata. The last table just wanted to sip on their champagne for a while.

A group of three people walked in the front door and stood next to the *Please wait to be seated sign*. Since Mr. Spatz was nowhere to be seen, I took the initiative. It was a younger couple with an older man. The couple wore matching tennis outfits that made them look like some freaky combination of sibling and spouse, with feathered blond hair and sparkling teeth. The older man wore a blue blazer with a tiny in-

signia like a coat of arms on one side and a white captain's hat, as if he had sailed to *Peachy Burroughs* in his yacht, even though the nearest marina was about two hundred miles away. I gave them some menus. Cirilo dropped some water. I dropped some bread. We stood around in the rear of the dining room with our hands clasped together behind our backs like we'd been trained to do, waiting for something to happen.

After a minute or so Mr. Spatz stormed in from the kitchen. His hair was gone. I hadn't even known that Mr. Spatz wore a hairpiece. Without it he looked diminished, frail, a mere stick figure compared to his former self. He turned to face Cirilo and me. The fury wrinkling his extended forehead and the glint in his eyes gave me the urge to drop to the ground and go fetal to protect my vital organs.

"Dios mio," Cirilo muttered.

"Mr. Jenkins, I've changed my mind about you. You are no longer on probation. You are fired. You can pick up your final paycheck tomorrow morning." Mr. Spatz looked down at his suit, ever so slightly ruffled by whatever force of nature had removed his toupee. He pulled on the bottom of his silvery jacket, sweeping a hand over its surface in an attempt to smooth over any discrepancies. Mr. Spatz was accustomed to making discrepancies disappear with a wave of his hand. He looked back at Cirilo and me. Neither of us had moved. We both stared at Mr. Spatz with our mouths hanging open. "Is there a problem, Mr. Jenkins?"

"What happened to your hair?" I asked, since I was fired anyway.

Mr. Spatz' eyes pointed quickly up toward his forehead, as if he could inspect his hair though the top of his head. Then he returned his gaze to me, as cold and hard as an ice cube. "Please leave the premises." He waved me off with a pass of his hand, as if I was just another discrepancy needing a quick fix. He told Cirilo to follow him, and the two of them left me standing alone next to the two-way door to the kitchen. As Spatz walked past me I noticed that one side of his face was red, a slightly swollen discoloration about the size of an open hand.

I wanted to throw a tantrum. I wanted to scream *Fuck You Asshole* at Mr. Spatz. I wanted to tell him that bussing tables was the worst job I'd ever had, and I'd had some horrible jobs. I'd cleaned stables. I'd cleaned toilets. I'd worked the graveyard shift at an all night donut shop. I'd done horrible things and this had been the most horrible, the king of all royally screwed up occupations. I wanted to rip my stupid vest off and throw it into Spatz' stupid face.

I did none of those things. I walked through the door into the kitchen and past the cooks and the lazy-eyed dishwasher. I walked up the stairs to the employee break room, taking one slow step at a time

and unbuttoning my vest as I went. As I reached the top of the stairs I removed my vest and crumpled it into a wad of material. I had visions of slamming it down in the trashcan in the employee break room. But then I decided I would keep the vest as collateral, until I got my paycheck. It felt almost like I was taking a hostage.

I found Candy in the break room applying a coat of lipstick with the help of a small mirror. She had straight blonde hair and a quick smile, and when she spoke her voice sounded like it was filtering through gravel lodged in her throat. When she turned and saw me, her face lit up. "Hey, Charlie. How you doing?"

I wanted to tell her it was going crappy, but instead I said I was okay.

"Hey, look at you. Growing a mustache, huh?"

At that moment I loved Candy. Candy was always telling me I reminded her of her son. Sometimes at the end of our shift she would pull me aside and slide me five extra bucks, telling me I was the best-damned water pourer she had ever seen. She was the oldest waitress at Peachy Burroughs, a single mother with a teenager, and she was prone to long, tired sighs. She once told me she had ventured to the dark end of the street that mothers warned their children about. She had hit the dead end sign at full speed and somehow bounced back to the land of streetlights and sidewalks.

"Yeah. My new nickname is going to be Mr. Mustache." Candy smiled at me and I smiled back. When the smile faded off her face I noticed the redness of her eyes, and she was sniffing.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, what's not the matter?" She smacked her lips together and put her tiny mirror back in her purse. She began tucking her shirt in. "My son is going to send me to an early grave. Either that, or I'll kill myself trying to get away from him."

"What'd he do now?"

"He's in the hospital. He O.D.ed on heroin last night. Fifteen years old and a junkie. Can you believe it? Supposedly he's very lucky to be alive. I guess I'm the unlucky one."

I'd seen pictures of her son before, bright blue eyes magnified by his glasses and straight brown hair parted down the middle. I tried to picture her son with a needle in his arm. I couldn't. "Oh my God," I said. "That sucks."

"Of course, Mr. Spatz was very understanding. We all know how understanding Mr. Spatz is." Candy rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, tell me about it. He just decided to fire me out of nowhere. He told me I could pick up my paycheck tomorrow."

"Ah, honey. I'm sorry to hear that."

I slammed the vest into the wastebasket, knocking it over and sending paper cups and napkins spilling across the floor.

"You're lucky, Charlie. You're young. You've got your whole life in front of you. You don't need this place. You don't need Spatz breathing down your neck every day. I wish I could get the hell out of here." Candy smoothed the wrinkles out of her shirt with a few gentle passes of her hands. "Someday you're not going to be able to walk away. Believe me, if I could I would quit right now. I'd tell Spatz to take his EDFs and shove them up his ass."

Candy tied her apron around her waist and tucked her purse into her locker. When she turned around I caught a glimpse of something furry nestled in one of her apron pockets. It looked like it might spring from her apron any moment and scurry away. She reached down and stroked it once, and then stuffed it further into the pocket so it was out of sight. I wanted to ask her how she had ended up with Spatz's toupee in her possession, but I didn't really want to know. Candy reached into her apron held the toupee out toward me by the scruff of its neck.

"Would you like a souvenir of your stay here at Peachy Burroughs?"

I studied the tangle of hair in her hands, wondering what I could do with it. I thought about holding it for ransom. I considered whether I might be able to construct some sort of fake mustache with it, something so manly that people would have no choice but to stare and think, *who is that guy?*

"I better not, but thanks anyway. Not just for that, but for everything. You know, for being so nice to me."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Mustache." Candy flashed a smile while she tucked the hairpiece back into her apron, and then gave me a hug. "Take care of yourself." She turned and exited the break room, leaving only the scent of her flowery perfume mingled with hair spray.

I reached up and touched my upper lip absent-mindedly, surprised by the proliferation of bristles there. No doubt about it—my mustache was filling in nicely.



Tony DeFrancesca

From the Slippery Copper Roof of a Montreal Cathedral

Ryan Masters

This is not a religious poem
just because there's a cathedral in its title.
The cathedral was just another cathedral
in a city littered with cathedrals.

In fact, this cathedral barely
garners mention in most guidebooks.

("Built between 1875 and 1894
the cathedral is a less-than-successful
copy of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome,
built to roughly one-quarter scale.")

Nor is this is a religious poem
because of its new 24-ounce copper roof
which glowed on high like the burnished
seat of heaven just blocks from St. Catherine Street

Where ten thousand blinking bulbs
Sold triple X delights. Where the light
originally sinned before plunging up Crescent Street,
bouncing wicked with a crazy crackle
from one windowed building to the next,
refracting at schizophrenic angles
into the benevolent face of this copper roof
that drew me like a bug light that turned me
deliriously at a right angle and nearly
into the path of a speeding taxi.

And this shall not be filed under Poem, religious
in memory of the old roof, a greenback blight which
in flaking away each spring for 100 years,
had bit by bit crumbled,
washed off the warped flashing,
swirled down the byzantine system
of bent rain gutters
in tiny oxidized fragments:
a monument to modern man's ruined faith.

And I am not willing to concede
that this poem has religious significance
because of the copper workers' scaffolding
which clambered conveniently
up the stone cathedral walls,
which enabled me to climb one hundred feet
into the night air with an open bottle of wine.

And furthermore,
the way that fresh copper roof shone
around me like a ring of Jesus fire
reflecting the adjacent lights of Montreal
when I stepped from the scaffolding
onto its steep slope of new metal
does not qualify this poem for religious status.

Nor, for that matter, does the memory
of my bare feet gripping its cool surface
when I took off my shoes for a better grip
up the roof's steep arching frame.

This is not a religious poem because
I straddled that mediocre cathedral
and drank that wine until the sun came up.

This is not a religious poem
because of all the drunken, self-
piteous thoughts that clung like rust
upon my mind that night.

This poem is religious because
when I slipped
on the way back down the roof,
for that flash exposure
of copper-plated time,
when I slid
on palms and soles and ass towards the edge,
the 100 feet of open air
between that roof and Rue Sherbrooke below

I cried out for God to help me fucking help me.

Echo

Erin Gardner

Starting with my mother,
who showed me the conch shell, held it

to my ear and explained that it was not
the waves pumping the beach, but my own blood.

Later, I learned more scientific things, how
the tides are, actually pulled back and forth

by the moon. And how even she,
is really a rock, floating like a tiny earth

among billions of other round rocks,
and stars and planets and moons and somewhere

I was told was god too, who milled
little copies of his own image, to pass infinite time.

And when my mother's belly curved
against the inner pressure of my brother growing,

I almost remembered my own conception
when that place comprised the whole universe.

And I placed my head against her navel,
to listen, maybe I would hear him first, and

I sang too, wishing if only my calling would,
thru the rushing fluid, echo in.

Maureen Quinn, Taste's

