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TROY UNIVERSITY

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John M. Williams

The Year of No Wisteria

I'm thinking, this could go any way at all. But after God knows what kind of a ride through life you'd expect some old memory-haunted, relic-cluttered house at least-not *this*-like finding the key to the universe in a Bill's Dollar Store-but on second thought maybe it fits. The parking lot gives no hint that she might drive-no askew Desotos, no wing and a prayer Packards-but that doesn't say much-of course she wouldn't-and would she be the type to look out windows-no-but know somehow I am here?

Condo-land. Everything new. Busy road-cars swooshing past. A long row of built-overnight townhouses-each in a different style, connected to each other in a long ridiculous row-what is she doing here? Her book has, in some as yet unnamable way, taken up inside me like a stray cat.

The sound I hear during the course of my knock attempts evolves from subliminal disturbance to distant animal cry (I cock my head) to close-range bark. I seem to have been invited in.

Crossing the threshold and meeting an unidentifiable odor, I scope the room-then see her-anchored in a chair angled oddly before sliding glass doors, sharing a view of her kitchenette with the patio, narrow back yard, and a swampy grove of woods left by the contractors. Just around her head from the edge of the patio fans a spiky trellis with crucified vine. I look around-no photographs, nothing that looks valuable or long-owned-like she could pull up and move at any time and leave only the ninety-nine cent view. She is smoking; the table beside her holds an overflowing ashtray, a fleet of plastic cups, and a precarious tower of magazines and books. Can't make out any titles, but I'd know Pall Malls from twenty feet.

sat there gauging me, a character looking capable-what did I expect?-of thwarting anything I might have expected, jowling like some venerable but still venomous frog

She takes a short hard hit on her smoke, squinting. She doesn't exactly blow out the smoke, but lets it bleed around her head. What's that? she asked Tallulah Bankheadly.

Maybe a four for artistic debris, but definitely a ten for frog. She is appraising the bag in my hand.

Mrs. French said you might like . . .

Spit it out, son.

Show don't tell! I unsack the Usher's Green Stripe. She looks at it then cuts her eyes up to me.

Oh, she did?

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I was only trying . . .

Just set it down. No, right here. I have an occasional sip. Why don't you go in there and find us some glasses?

I do-the cabinet yields two grimy tumblers which-no soap or dish-cloth-I at least begin to rinse out at the sink.

Oh goddamn, son, she croaks from her chair. What are you afraid of this stuff can't kill?

I finish anyway, then return and open the bottle. Crrrk.

The good stuff, she says.

I glance at her. I'm playing with you, son-it's all good stuff.

Alone I go

(His signature haiku if nothing else)

Sniffing the useable

Tank the bag

By the time I get a chair and position it at the right distance she's drained her appetizer and leans forward to pour some more. She lights a cigarette in a seamless quick motion like a snake tongue and looks at me like *well?*

holding audience, this smoke-cured unnecessary queen

I wanted to talk to you about *The Wonder Jar*.

Where'd you find it?

I did a search. Some bookstore in Detroit. She hacks a laugh. But I haven't been able to find any of the others.

The only one worth bothering with is *The Plastered Parlor*.

I jot it down. Her gaze is dead-level. I take a sip of warm Green Stripe. Some of the language, I say-what are those, dream sequences?

No, the dream is the whole thing. She takes a good swallow, holds it, sucks in her cheeks as it slides down the hatch. On the bottle it's already down to the top of the label. I sip.

You smoke?

Cigarettes? No.

What-you're all dopeheads, aren't you?

No, I didn't mean . . .

What'd you say your name was?

Feurel Ivey.

She turns up a lip at it, then holding her drink-she has yet to set it down-turns to gaze outside, her head rotating within the arc of the trellis. Bird feeders. A cheap plastic patio chair and another ashtray, plastic-cup crowded umbrella-crowned table. The little island of woods.

That big oak tree over there, she says, and I lean around to look-looks like it's just an oak tree, now, but it's full of wisteria, even if it is killing it, but everything beautiful's got to suck off something, and this

time of year, a little earlier, it turns purple. Looks like a big purple tree. Or, what?-violet. But not this year.

I look out, then back at her. Why not?

How the hell do I know? Some kind of curse. Blight. Wasn't any this year. Didn't bloom.

It's a type of vine?

She stares at me. Wisteria.

What was the point of the midget in *The Wonder Jar*?

I needed a midget so I used him.

I mean . . .

I don't know, son. Everything that had anything to do with me in that book was over the minute they got their hands on it. I don't know-I don't remember. It was what? . . .

Tip of my tongue. Thirty-four years ago, I say.

Sometimes you just need a goddamn midget.

I laugh-she doesn't: then forges ahead from sloppy seconds and the bottle is starting to look half-fullish. Occasional sip, no shit. It goes glug glug glug coming out. She leans back and takes a deep drag on a Pall Mall.

another of Ivey's patented raids of literary liposuction, this time the sublimely obscure Babs Kath, author of five novels, if remembered at all remembered for The Wonder Jar (1955) and, possibly, the 1962 collection of poems Lonesome Web; wife of Gordon Kath, magnetic center of the Forgotten School, remembered for his "zebra" poems I Shall Smell You All: Remembering the Forgotten School.

When did you meet your husband?

When I was nineteen.

And you got married . . .

The next year.

And this was . . .

Thirty-nine. My daughter will be fifty in July if that tells you anything.

Where is she?

She's been living in France for twenty-something years.

Does she like it there?

She must.

Do you ever see her?

I close my eyes, I see her all the time.

And your husband-would you say he was a strong influence on you?

Jesus, son. You're nineteen with three notebooks full of poems and you meet a twenty-five year old best looking man you've ever seen in your life and a genius-what do you think?

I mean your work.

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That's what I'm saying. My work. It's all my work.
The only one of his books I could find was *Adventures of a Bad Rug*.
Even though *Already Dead* is the best.

What was it like with two writers in the house?

There weren't two writers in the house-there were about twenty.

Real writers, some of them.

Some aren't?

Of course not.

What is a real writer?

Somebody who takes the time to do what anybody could do if they could only do it.

I laugh. I remember reading somebody's definition of a poet: one who renders in the sun what is lived in the moon.

Sounds like they rendered that in the moon. Poetry's just how you overcome the fact that there's no single word for a porch with a mop hanging from it in the late afternoon sun that reminds you of your mother.

You were in San Francisco?

She slowly nods.

When?

Her features make a shrug. Early fifties.

Is that when you started writing?

No, that's when somebody started reading it.

Did you like San Francisco?

Yep.

Why did you leave?

It was time to go.

This was before Miami.

Oh, yeah.

What about your husband during this time?

What about him?

Was he writing?

He was a writer, what do you think he was doing?-except for his spare time which he was better at than me too, but I tried.

Do you still write?

Not with my hands-they hurt too much.

Pickled Pearl: Re-Wondering The Wonder Jar

What do you read today?

Same thing I read yesterday and the day before that.

Which is . . .

Things I like to.

Contemporary fiction?

Good God, no.

Why not?
It's not any good.
Maybe you should write a novel yourself.
About what?
About this. Now. Your world.
My *world*? A broom closet in the backside of nowhere? Do I look like a goddamn English teacher to you? Why would I write a book about nothing?
I don't know. And no.
No what?
You don't look like an English teacher. *Rabbit*.
Boredom begat art, she says-and now art's returning the favor. But it's not like they have a choice-and I'll tell you something-it's like pouring dirt into water-once they take over-
English teachers?
English teachers couldn't take over my butt. Do the math-you won't even know this place. It'll look like Bumfuck, Egypt. They'll have football and baseball and all that but the boundaries won't really count every time. And the art-good God.
What?
What do you think? About 1930-that was the end of European art. About a century ahead of Europeans.
Do you ever read criticism?
Not since I realized it was really about them. Glug glug glug. Drink up, son. I take a sip. How old are you? she asks.
Thirty.
Good God. What's your-what do they call it-your rank?
Assistant Professor?
I'm asking you, son.
Okay. Yes.
Do you write?
I write. Yes.
I mean anything any good.
I've been working on a novel.
Are you crazy?
To be working on a novel?
No-mad.
Angry?
Either one.
I have my psychotic episodes.
Oh, phtpt. She takes a drink and a drag on her cigarette-turns her frowning features once more to the back yard. Then she says, it's amazing how every time I'd think this is it and start trying to figure out

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what the hell I was going to do-after one of those times I'd come after him with a knife or something-and for that tenth of a second really want to kill him-not that he ever really wanted to kill me, he never loved me that much-then the next day it'd just be gone, and we'd settle back to our separate ends of the house, typewriters whacking away-spider web blooming on the TV screen with the cracked bottle of gin still smelling on the floor below it-then out of the blue one day he just decided to die.

When did he die?

So long ago it's like he was in *The Iliad*.

Do you read his books?

Hell, I typed every one of them-I don't have to.

Did he read yours?

Of course.

Did he like them?

Everything but the parts about him.

How much was that?

Most of it. But I learned to disguise him by describing him exactly the way he was.

He's Rayfield in *The Wonder Jar*?

She half laughs, half coughs. Oh, Jesus, son. Hell no.

Then who?

He's the house, and Julius, and the boy on the bicycle, whatever his name was.

Buchanan.

Yes, he's all of those. Rayfield-that's different.

Did you have affairs like Lucinda?

I told you when I could-but Kendrick stood out.

Who?

Rayfield.

You said Kendrick.

It was.

Can I ask what you believe?

Sure, go ahead.

What do you believe?

Nothing till somebody asks.

Okay, I'm asking.

Hell, that's why I made up all those people-to do the believing so I wouldn't have to.

You can't be more specific?

She reflects. I practice being dead by looking at pictures I'm not in.

No Goddamn English Teacher Daddy-O: Babs Kath and the Practice of Death

All this shit, she asks-is it that we make whatever means anything in our heads, there is no objective anything and everything comes from that and it's all just words or whatever the soup is that words come from, but they're really nothing but panes of glass we put up along the way and believe that since there's a word there must be a thing-but there really isn't such a thing as a forest or a book or a you or a me?

Something like that.

Then what?

Then what? I don't know. Nothing, I guess. That's the point.

She hacks a bronchial laugh. So that's it, she says-three thousand years and it ends up with a little group of people in berets saying it's nothing.

Well-yeah-

Hell, they've got to make a living too. Ask me something else.

Well-tell me about the Miami years.

Careful-you're asking the only one left alive.

I'll take my chances. Did you know Delmore Plover?

Know him? I couldn't get away from him. I even sucked the little son of a bitch off.

What was he like?

You sucked one, you sucked them all.

No, I mean . . .

He was smart-everybody was smart-about three-fourths full of shit-but like every poet made his living off it.

I hear objections.

Everybody objects when you tell the truth about them. But who cares? Can you knock the expression off somebody's face with words-that's what counts and it's all that counts. And make them laugh. I mean really laugh.

With words.

You-the person.

Why?

So they'll know you're there. Or slap the shit out of them. Either way. She takes a drink, looks outside. You ever done anything?

Done anything? Yeah, I've done things.

Like what?

Well, twelve years of school I still wonder how I survived.

No, I mean done anything-not proved you're trainable.

Yes, I've done things.

I can't see any of them. You're not drinking.

Yes I am.

Well, you'd better hurry. Glug glug glug.

How long were you in Miami?

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Oh, she thinks-seven years. Eight. All that missile stuff scared us away. But we'd started dying off anyway.

Who were we?

Well, most were just sawdust people-but some, if you took a swing at them with a machete, you hit metal.

Who do you know like that today?

There's nobody to know anymore, son.

How'd they die?

Mediocrity, most of them.

I never thought of it as being lethal.

Well, it can be.

Like boredom?

No, boredom's different. It can bloom.

And the others?

What does it matter? They died.

Do you miss them?

She shrugged. The only difference is I don't have to personally deal with them. The part of life where you're doing the breathing is the smallest part.

I wanted to talk some more about your book.

Go ahead.

I mean ask about it.

There's nothing to say. My head split open and that's what came out. I can't say it was worth it-but it's the only way to get anything any good. A-what'd you call it?-psychotic episode.

Babs Kath's Prose Piñata: Cracking The Wonder Jar

Anyway, I'd need about three days to sit here to think all that shit up again-and I'm not going to do it. Why are you squirming? Do you need to go pee-pee?

Lonesome Web or Black Hole?: Stop it Babs, You're Killing Me

Then go, I said. Sitting here having a drink of boy. Remembering.

Nothing left but those Friday afternoons-all that should be left-our natural ritual in that hallucinated place-never knew who would come by-martinis beginning at three, or two-or who knew who began what when?-didn't matter, people everywhere-God, the people-those days you never dreamed they'd run out-in every room, on the porch, outside, in the hall, in the bathroom, sitting around the kitchen, and you could see out the window through the oleanders people coming up the drive, usually wondering who they were-that house full of books and art and music and the people that made it-Chad Grantham making his little balance creations on the kitchen table-salt shaker, lemon, coffee cup, knife across it with a grape on each end-remember the first time I saw Kendrick-one of those things where you didn't see him come he was

just there and even when you saw him it was only like something finally coming into focus that was already there-never knew who brought him, if anybody-I'd forget for a while, then see him again-finally caught his eye-then I went over-standing there with a glass of wine talking to Helen Bain-she said writing is an exhausted art, and he said he doubted it was the writing-and I laughed-and she asked him what he thought about so and so and he said his mastery of the already-perfected shines in every line-and I laughed again-that got rid of her-goddamn good-looking boy he was-I call him a boy-he still had some boy-something lingering about him-made it through his whole life mainly on that-so I'd come and go, always drift back to him-and Gordon: I'm telling you, he was just one inch away from coming up to women and hunching on their leg-he was the *horniest* man-he was after this long-legged black-haired claimed she was a painter-hell, I didn't care-then I was back to my boy and somebody was talking about God, and he said, look Him right in the eye and still not know who is whose character-

Who?

God.

No-who said?

Rayfield.

I thought you said Kendrick.

I did. But if we're getting rid of religion, he said-let's get rid of it-don't dump it on art-art has better things to do. And I started asking around and finally somebody showed me something he'd written-a review-

in the craft of wordplay he has, like millions, some facility; of the art of writing he is perfectly innocent

And it was that, but more wanting to run my hands up those long smooth arms-he was smooth, not hairy-and that whatever he had that was just about to laugh-how many women have killed themselves trying to have just that?-and by the time it started getting late I'd gotten past the arms and just wanted his clothes off and his body all around me.

He still didn't know I was married to Gordon-and God knows I wasn't about to tell him-and then for a while I thought he had left and I remember how goddam mad I was-and then the painter or whatever she was slinked out-and Gordon got good ol' David to go through their routine-I don't know why he bothered-going over to David's house for a nightcap, probably be too drunk to come home, just spend the night there-and I was about to pick up something and start swinging-until I saw him: lurking in the shadows down at the end of the hall where it turned into the bathroom-all Gwendolyn's paintings hanging there and stacked against the wall-looking-and then I thought, watch Gordon not

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leave now-but he did-so the painter got the drunk half of him-well, more like three-fourths-still some people talking about Existence in the front room but they were on their own and I caught his eye. Him standing there at the end of the hall looking at me: that's what I remember. More than the year-off and on-and you saw he couldn't help but work his way through the women, one by one.

In the book you were on a boat, says the boy.

I look over at him surprised because I had forgotten he was there. He re-forms in his chair in the shadows.

Yes, it was on a boat, I say.

That sounds like at your house.

It was. Drink up, son.

I think I've had enough.

Oh come on-get to the bottom of it.

Dusk falling outside-frogs commence in the accidental marsh-and suddenly a brand-new deep-throated thing throbs in like the year hitting adolescence. The first whippoorwill, a train somewhere.

Which one was real? he asks.

Hell, son, I don't know. What difference does it make? Something was real somewhere, I know that. And there aren't many things I'd live my life over to have again, but him closing that door would be one.

He's dead, isn't he?

Yes.

What did he die of?

Same thing we all die of: disappointment. It's not thinking something up-the trick is believing it.

Baptists do that.

No, they don't think anything up.

Well, snake handlers.

Okay, they're geniuses. But you can't have both.

Both what?

Both of whatever it is.

This beyond life-but it was all beyond life-I look at him again: Buster Brown pinned against the wall. Time to let him go.

Outside, the scented night-jasmine, clover, no wisteria-waits.

I can't drink like I used to.

John M. Williams (Ph.D. Georgia State University) is an associate professor of English at LaGrange College in Georgia. Since the publication of his novel Lake Moon, he has completed two short story collections, a collection of one-act plays, two or three feature-length plays, and is currently working on a new novel, The Next Passing.

Tem Montgomery

The Lieutenant: A Faulknerian Tale

As they tell it in the town—those still there and old enough to remember—the little “Lieutenant” came all the way from England seven years after the war with a converted Spitfire to crop dust in Fermata Bend, Alabama. There are versions of the story from years of people getting together to talk. The most common story is that he came not for need of money—it seems he had money from somewhere. It was not because he wanted to become an American, or to see America or the Deep South. He didn’t. The reason he came was that Fermata Bend had no aerial regulations and he wanted to keep flying dangerously. No one knew that at first. He was such an oddity, an unusual deliverance from the sky. Nor did they know what an isolated and childish stranger he would turn out to be. The name “Lieutenant” would become synonymous with the little man and the town’s impression of him. For the young, especially the boys, the name became legendary, associated with manhood, glory, and being a hero.

He came to Fermata Bend on a June day, literally appearing out of the blue, unannounced, unanticipated, like a traveling salesman or a bum would. Only in his case, from the *sky* with this dark, foreign, mean-looking aircraft. It was an olive green, oblong-winged plane with steel spray rods running under each wing. The warplane appeared from the direction of Legger Mound, the thick-wooded mound, no one owned, where Indians were buried and where there were worn, overgrown mounds of Civil War breastworks. The warplane circled low over a cluster of one and two story nineteenth century buildings, and descended on the long dirt road that cut through fields toward town. People stared as the plane taxied into the quiet town square. It blew up dust, as it circled the median of the Confederate statue and other war memorial plaques and World War I artillery pieces. The windstorming plane slowly gyrated and the engine cut right in front of Miller’s Hardware before the cars, trucks, and a couple of shied mules harnessed to wagons. The propeller blades whirled slowly to a stop. The people stared as the pilot slid open the cockpit. Somebody in the crowd said, he looked like a human bug with his uniform, tight cap and goggles. He climbed down off the plane, raised the goggles from his eyes, peeled off his gloves, bowed to introduce himself to the group of gawking men on the tin-covered porch of the hardware as “Lieutenant Barker”. He had a soft voice and a serious face for such a little man dressed in leather headpiece and goggles, khaki jump suit and a sheer

white scarf draped around his neck. He looked like a movie character or someone from a costume party.

"Boy, you're lost," came a simple, impetuous utter invading the silence of the porch.

The little man ignored it, gave a parsimonious smile. He pranced before them and spoke more at them, than to the gaping, rough men with plain, weathered faces dressed in drab work clothes. He spoke with a polite but laconic speech; it was a peculiar English they had never heard before.

"Like holding your breath 'til the end of a sentence and whining off the last word," someone said.

Gloves in one hand, fists on his hips, it seemed more like a little dressed-up man who dared the larger bullies to take him on, his imposing machine behind him in the dirt. The men couldn't follow what he said very well. In fact, no one remembered what he had already said. But they got the gist of it. He inquired about, no, insisted they give him work.

This oddity finished his peculiar elocution. He stood and faced them with hazy eyes that didn't tell, see, or seem to concern themselves with what anyone thought of him; his mouth was frozen with an expectant smile, following what he had just said, as if insistence in itself would bring his sole reward. The mules calmed down, the dust settled, and a still group of men stood in the shade of the porch, as this stranger stood his ground in the hot sun, arms akimbo. He waited, holding his courteous smile for no one in particular; he appeared patient, polite, but he expected to receive from them what he wanted. They watched as beads of sweat formed on his face.

"Who the hell does he think we are?" somebody said.

It seemed this bizarre and idiotic standoff would go on forever when stout Jupo Demus, who was like someone out of the nineteenth century in Fermata Bend, in his dusty white coat, plantation hat, and trimmed, salt and pepper Vandyke, stepped off the porch and went forward, looked from side to side, and stretched out his hand to greet the stranger. Only Jupo did it. He was really somebody in Fermata Bend. He was of old cotton and pecan family, and he knew it.

He drove a black Packard, had a family name, and a thousand acres outside of town. Jupo gave the stranger a perfunctory nod, a handshake, and never looked at him twice, stared and smiled toward the plane, glanced back to the men, and asked vague questions. It was like he had seen something he wanted to devour, or more likely, it was just the idea of the plane. In actuality, a dissimulation of his was that he had not served in the military like his father and his grandfathers had before him, being too young for World War I and too old for World

War II and now, the Korean Conflict. This was where the high school male graduates were all going to, three boys had already come home in caskets, each to a somber town procession with a military honor guard, a folded flag and taps played at an opened grave beside the old Confederate and Spanish-American War tombstones in the Fermata Bend Cemetery. Jupō had not lived up to Fermata Bend's family tradition, what the older veterans of proper families had done and how Jupō had always wanted to think of himself—as he was brought up to idolize and emulate his soldier father and grandfathers, their stern portraits lined up above the mantel of the fireplace at the old home place.

Jupō glanced at the plane and then back at the men on the porch with a slow smile and a wink; he offered the stranger work before he even got his name or price. Jupō nodded at the man, but he didn't seem to hear the stranger's response, as he took the warplane in with a grin and wonder.

Everyone knew that Jupō had hired the stranger because the plane was something to show; it was something no one else could have done. It was one of the things of land, an indifference in what the Demuses thought of themselves with the old family home place that Jupō's grandpa had swindled from a carpetbagger. The house stood on a rise outside of town that overlooked the fields in view of Legger Mound and the surrounding countryside. The two men shook hands there in the dirt of the square before the silent onlookers. The pilot grinned at his luck and Jupō smiled. The men watched as Jupō got back into his black Packard. The pilot climbed into his plane and started it. Men grabbed at their hats as the engine coughed and boomed, blades whirled and the plane turned and began to move. The Packard led the way around the square and out of town and the pilot taxied his plane after it. The simple farmers watched them as they circled the square and left. They just shook their heads and scoffed.

"The rich act rich," someone said.

At the Co-op, Jon Stephens and his boys stopped what they were doing as the little "Lieutenant" walked in.

"He pulled up in one of them Demus International trucks, Ol' Jupō driving," Jon told them. "They both came in, this little clown in his get up leading, his shoulders square 'cause he knew Jupō was behind him. I thought he was a circus character or a movie star; he was that pretty, with this damn scarf 'round his neck and a thin silver wristwatch flashing on his wrist. And he was sweating, ha, sweating like a laboring mule in that hot khaki get up and leather cap, goggles shining on top of his head and all that sweat running his uniform dark; there was sweat dripping off his fingers, face, nose, and he was trying to ignore it as if we wouldn't notice. He was numb to reality. I figured it out quick;

either they were the only clothes he had, or he HAD to wear them, know what I mean? Well, they marched up to the counter, this clown acting like he knew what he's about, and Ol' Jupo just behind him with this set, closed smile and a look that knew he got something we don't; the whole time Jupo looked at me and then him, like a kid impressed with his new puppy."

"The little clown bids me good day, smiling with sweat flipping off his nose, and I knew then and there he ain't from around here. He offers me a quick hand (the one without the watch) and it's limp, which is another bad sign. Jupo just stands behind him and keeps nodding to me. 'Afternoon, Jupo,' I say. The clown pipes up, says he wants a thousand gallons of liquid pesticide, may come back for more, he says, charming as you please, these hazel eyes, a quick smile, and he's raining water the whole time. I wasn't in the mood and I didn't like his. I seemed to forget my manners. 'You don't say now,' I said. 'Boy, I thought the war was over. Ain't you hot? Or shall I get you a glass of water?' My boys, loading the shelves, looking on and just a tittering.

He shoots me another short smile. 'I'm on business,' he pouts. And I want to hit him. 'Yessir,' I drawl it out as long as I can. 'But it gonna take a week or more to bring it up from Mobile. Can you wait that long, sir?'"

"He shoots a querulous look at Jupo, then nods at me, all detached and intent. 'All right,' he says. He says it funny-like, real crisp-*All right*. 'You do that. Order it,' he demands. 'I'll be back in a week.'

Jupo nods, too, which means it's on his account. 'You do that,' the little man echoes, like the cameras are still rolling, the war's going on, and somebody's watching. He gives me this gamely nod and grin, turns around and slowly marches or slushes, depending on how you want to look at it, back out with Big Jupo behind him in his dirty white suit, who hasn't removed his hat, and who hasn't said a word all this time, which is not like Jupo. Jupo only gives us a quick look over his shoulder, nodding, and hurries to keep up with his new boy wonder. They go past the sacks of feed and seed, my shiny stacked buckets and plows. The boy walking like he leading an invisible parade. Soaked with sweat, he leads it all the way out the door with Jupo to the truck. Me and the boys watch them go; at the door we see them climb in the truck and it's obvious—Jupo is driving." Jon said.

Jupo Demus drove all day long and the next. "Meet Lieutenant Jonathan Barker," he swaggered in and announced loudly to those at the hardware, the drug store, the barbershop and then at the post office. "Formerly of the RAF," he stressed, then added with emphasis, "the Royal Air Force," as though no one could know that and it was somehow a superior and unique privilege through Jupo, himself. The

stranger entered and stood beside Jupō in his war outfit; he acknowledged everyone with a tireless, zealous smile and a quick nod, flashing a silver wristwatch when his hand moved. People noticed how he smiled but seemed to avoid eyes, with a somewhat smooth indifference. The stranger appeared confident, with a quick, precise stride in his boots and an erect back, overly erect, like a ramrod. A veteran at the barber shop noticed his abnormally wide and high boot heels. But no one said anything, at least in public. They smiled and remembered their manners before Jupō, introduced themselves to the little stranger and spoke. The little stranger held a small smile. He said "ma'am" or "sir," to everyone and often glanced over at Jupō. The little man gave quick, laconic answers to questions about himself and his warplane, but offered no further conversation. Jupō just grinned and nodded along with him until silence ensued and then Jupō nodded for them to leave. The stranger and Jupō headed for the door; the little stranger in his uniform still held by the silent onlookers, made a quick bow with his head before he stepped out. In an instant imitation, Jupō did the same, and everyone nodded back as well.

One farmer swore he saw a glint of silver above the little man's ear as he turned to go, and if so, that proved he had a mental injury. "He ain't the real McCoy," someone agreed. The veterans scoffed. They said there wouldn't be an England left if the U.S. had not entered the war. But everyone kept their manners, and in typical Fermata Bend fashion, never said what they were really thinking. Then a day later, Jupō had to go and brag about the "Lieutenant" at the pecan farmer's meeting to anyone else who would listen. He had put the stranger in one of his abandoned sharecropper shacks below the Demus home place and the mean, green warplane was parked out front of Jupō's big barn in full view of the highway, for everyone to see. Jupō told everyone, with his thin and silent teenage son with the club foot named Michael, standing there bareheaded and looking on, how he liked the fact that the Lieutenant had been a fighter pilot in the war and still acted like a military man. Each time Jupō always reminded the veterans that he, himself, had been too young for World War I and too old for World War II. But he would have gone, yessir, he would have. He was a Demus. He paused, hesitated with Michael, quiet and watching, then added that Demuses had a long tradition of soldiers; his father had been in the Spanish-American War, both his grandfathers served in the Confederacy, a great-grandfather in the Mexican war, all of their names were carved at the base of the marble veteran's memorial on the town square, along with several of his other relatives and the names of other old families in Fermata Bend.

“Demuses are ALWAYS fighters,” Jupō added, with a quick glance to and then away from his son. Several men nodded out of politeness for respect to the memory of Jupō’s father.

“Besides, the Lieutenant’s a man,” Jupō said. “He can hold his own. Brave and smart. Best damn mechanic I ever saw. He broke down my tractor engine and put it back together in a jiffy.” Jupō paused for emphasis and looked around. Those listening to him smiled and wondered.

“He’s all right,” Jupō repeated to them. “Quiet and sure of himself—he’s all right.”

Someone said something to Michael to break his silence and change the subject. Though, Jupō inevitably brought the Lieutenant back up again.

“Well, I guess he’s all right,” someone said to Jupō.

“When is he leaving?” someone else asked.

And they all watched Jupō’s smile fall.

Jupō talked and the town rumored, and then in a week the Lieutenant went to work. However mysterious, odd in speech, dress and size he was, however quiet and aloof the stranger was and whatever the reason he came to America and Fermata Bend—the fact remained, the boy could fly. He put on an aerial performance no one in Fermata Bend could have imagined.

“The dark, green warplane did acrobatics,” someone said. “You never seen the likes of it.”

“Oh, yes,” someone might add and whistle. “It was a show, now, sure enough.”

People pulled their cars or trucks over onto the side of the road near the Demus Fields, got out and stood along the railroad tracks, shaded their eyes and watched. They gathered on the town square before the Confederate statue three miles away, and gazed up at the sky, some with binoculars, while the plane did loops and rolled. It circled high in the blue, disappeared into the blinding sun and then was back again in the heart-stopping dives. The plane was a dark form falling through the blue with its engine screaming; the plane grew suddenly larger as it swept low over the fields of cotton, with white trails streaming from the wings. The trails cut off, then the plane would pull up, scale the telephone wires, the treetops, or it would dip its wing and skirt the Demus’ water tower like a deft, metallic bird that swayed back and forth before the rise of the thick-wooded Legger Mound, then it would turn back up into the blue, climb up and disappear into the sun. It continued to dive again and again; it swept over the fields, and streamed more spray—like a mirage. One moment it was there, loud and roaring; next, it was gone with only a faded drone. Everyone had to look away

or cover his eyes when the plane led them into the sun.

"It's a wonder," someone said, whistling and shaking his head, "a wonder what's in that boy's head."

Farmers said that you shouldn't crop dust like that. Too fast. Too stupid. The veterans said he was using bomber attack tactics, like some serious game. The old people shook their heads.

"A young fool. A looney is what he is," someone declared.

For days, this lone, secular show of a foreigner appeared to be fighting an invisible foe. He bombed before the local spectators and the silent, still fields and trees, all beneath an infinitely blue sky and bright sun. The locals began to wonder why he traveled so far to fly like this, especially to this small, dull and telluric community of farmers. There was nothing there but bland sun and flat, fertile land. This foreign oddity and his crop dusting war machine could beat the excitements of the traveling circus or the country fair or even what the old timers remembered from barn storming days. The plane was just fun to watch. It looked like fierce play. It flew fast, did loops and rolls, ear-splitting dives, hard and sharp climbs that just missed the telephone wires and trees as it pulled up and hid in the sun before it bombed the fields again and again, day after day, to release a soft, settling mist. Stout Jupio drove into town with a broad grin.

"Quiet little fella," Jupio remarked as he winked at the farmers and veterans that listened. "Hard worker and got the cleanest table manners you ever saw." Jupio said it matter-of-fact, stroking his Vandyke.

The pilot had fought in the war, he was pretty sure: the Battle of Britain, Dunkirk and D-Day. Jupio talked about the plane. It was double walled construction. It had the biggest single engine he had ever seen. "Rolls Royce," Jupio announced with a nod. There were brackets and welded plugs where the machine guns had been. The glass cockpit was a foot thick and there were bullet holes in the body that had been patched, welded over. "He's the real thing," Jupio declared, nodding for effect, his eyes searching the others. He wouldn't say how much he paid the man.

Among themselves, the veterans observed that his plane had to be a stripped, surplus fighter. How did he get it? How did he bring it over here? But now, they had to admit, the boy sure could fly. Everything the plane did had precision, control, and daring speed. Their wives wanted to know what the English stranger looked like. Their girls wanted to know his name and whether he was good looking. Their boys imitated him on the playground at school. They would spread their arms out like wings and chase each other and issue machine gun sounds from their mouths, all inspired with the idea of such freedom.

Jupio Demus, in a clean, white coat and his Vandyke trimmed,

proudly brought the stranger with his teenage son and daughter to church. Everyone watched as Jupō took off his hat and noticed that his gray, balding head was not so dark or shiny as his Vandyke. They saw the Lieutenant was a little, wiry man with a smooth face, wavy platinum blonde hair, with soft, hazel eyes; and shy and uncomfortable in a borrowed coat, shirt, and slacks too large for him. The thin silver watch stood out on his wrist and he tried to avoid eyes as he sat or stood beside Jupō. After the service, he quickly shook hands, but said little. As everyone went outside into the churchyard to congregate, he went to Jupō's Packard, sat on the running board as if to guard his rear, and began nervously to pop lemon drops into his mouth out of a brown paper bag, he stopped only to smile and nod quickly to onlookers when he had to.

"Well," someone commented, "so much for his manners."

While the adults talked in the yard, the boys and girls got a look at him. The children would nudge one another, as they watched him. The boys were at one end of the church yard under the trees, while the girls were at the other end near the church steps. It didn't matter what the adults thought. The little stranger was different. He was new. His silent, nervous reserve seemed esoteric, unique. The girls thought he was cute. The boys took his behavior as a sign of toughness, and they admired him; they would shoot furtive glances in his direction from beneath the trees in their Sunday clothes. There he was...real. In the flesh. A real fighter pilot. A survivor of the war told to them, by their fathers, the men, and their talk—only this man flew the warplane with welded studs, where the machine guns had once been. They all had watched the war machine fly and dive in the sky. It had flown against the Germans. It still flew.

"Hey," a boy mustered the courage to go closer but somehow 'mister' didn't seem appropriate to use. "Were you really in the war?"

The other boys watched. The small, bareheaded stranger in his oversized clothes looked up, his cheek bulging with lemon drops, made a slight grin with lemon-stained teeth...

"Oh, yes," he replied.

"Ever get shot down?" another boy called from the trees.

"Many times." The smile broadened.

"You kill any Germans?"

"Many, many times," he replied.

A pause. "You ever wounded?"

"Many, many, many times."

A longer pause. "Well, say, why did you come here?"

"I can fly here."

In the pause that followed, he rose from the running board and

stuffed the paper bag of lemon drops into his coat pocket. The boys followed behind him from a distance; they whispered about him among themselves. They watched as he went over to the WPA rock wall that bordered the street, sat down, produced a cigarette from a small silver case and what looked like a lighter and lit it. His thin wristwatch flashed once or twice in the morning sun and they watched the quiet stranger's reserved face as he smoked. They also listened to thin Michael Demus, Jupo's son, as he dragged his club foot in the special shoe.

"He don't talk much, but my Pa says that only means he's seen a lot," Michael said as he neared the other children.

"I didn't see any scars," someone said.

"He let me sit in the plane," Michael continued, searching the other's faces.

They let Michael talk; his quiet monotone grew more and more matter-of-fact as he watched the small stranger who seemed somehow as stolid as the wall he sat near, calmly smoking. They watched as Jupo's daughter, Katrina, parted from the chattering girls on the church steps and made her way across the churchyard to the wall. She had the thin, forming body of a woman in a simple cotton print dress Jupo always kept her in. Katrina stopped a few feet from the Lieutenant, a smile on her face, her hands behind her back.

"Poppa told me I was to look after you," she said.

She grinned and began to gently rock on her heels and swing her long, simple black braids.

"He might even take me up with him. He might teach me to fly," Michael said.

A boy turned and looked at Michael. "You can't fly," he said.

Michael hushed at that and the boys watched the Lieutenant as he nodded to Katrina's constant, soft questions, her steady look on him. He smoked and tried to look away, but Katrina would not leave him alone. She held her smile with its blank, eager look, and offered conversation until the stranger had to look at her. Then he laughed. The relaxed and briefly vulnerable look on his face was not the way the boys wanted to see him, nor was it a violation of their impression of him; it was just that he, somehow, was supposed to stay constant and distant in the way he looked and acted. The silent and impervious manner on the wall was not supposed to waver. A boy sneered and scoffed.

"What does she think she's doing?" he said morosely.

One of them commented that he had heard the Lieutenant shot down seven German planes. Two shot from under him, another said. Who said? someone echoed. Michael, looked on, but he would not confirm or deny it. It did not matter. They wanted to hear it. Someone said that

he was lucky to be alive. They nodded and watched the pilot while he watched Katrina. He had not wavered. He was in control and independent. They watched him light another cigarette and cough slightly, though the steady gaze of his eyes, now, did not leave Katrina, and she had stopped rocking on her heels.

The air went quiet when there was no more crops to be dusted. The warplane remained parked before Jupō's barn for a day, and then it was gone. It came back two weeks later, circled the square from the direction of Legger Mound and landed in the long, even pasture behind the Demus home place. It left the next day. It began to return every week or two, sometimes it stayed a weekend or longer. By then, everyone knew it was because of Katrina. Or that he could fly here, unlike in Mobile. Or both. Katrina, who was a young, beautiful lady, just like her deceased mother, was beginning to realize it. In the absence of a wife and ignorant of women, Jupō had kept her in simple dresses and no make up. Though true to being an old-time gentleman from Fermata Bend, Jupō had made Katrina an idler as he had been reared to treat ladies, no less his deceased wife. Slender, with her mother's face and large, black, banal eyes, Katrina smiled a lot and often waited to be spoken to, she knew she was somebody's daughter. Jupō discouraged the approach of the local boys because as everyone knew, Jupō, who had married late in life after he found the right woman from another town, did not think anyone was good enough for his daughter. It did not seem to matter that Katrina was not bright, and was not expected to finish high school. She was obedient to Jupō and attractive. A black maid ran the kitchen and cleaned the home place while Jupō waited on Katrina, drove her to town or high school in the Packard, to piano lessons and even to visits, teas or birthday parties of other respectable families.

But now, there were new events. Everyone knew when Jupō took Katrina to buy new clothes at Sue's Clothing store. He took her to the drug store to buy lipstick, perfume and rouge. The ladies whispered about Katrina's "romance". The men joked and winked at the hardware store. Katrina no longer wore her hair in braids, but long, full, gathered behind her like Tarzan's Jane in the old movies shown down the road at Citronelle cinema, and she was suddenly taller and trimmer in new shoes. She was more eager and courteous in public.

"How are you? How are you?" she echoed, along with effusive 'Thanks-yous', offering little else but just the same smile to further discussion.

"And how's the Lieutenant?" people asked Katrina about town. Jupō stepped back and smiled. Neither Katrina's grin nor her eyes blinked.

"Oh, why, he's fine," she drawled.

As the months went by, Jupō was seen with Katrina and the little stranger in his Packard. The couple was also seen on horseback rides on mornings in frosted fields. They were seen on picnics at Fermata Bend Springs. Jupō drove them to high school football games on Friday afternoons, and the couple would sit together and hold hands on the bleachers, apart from everyone. Katrina's smile would beam in a new overcoat and heavy lipstick, while the little stranger would be in uniform and a leather flight jacket.

Jupō was pleased that the little man was courting his daughter. But soon the question "Who's courting who?" would be asked by someone. People knew it was Mobile now, where, as Jupō told them, he thought the Lieutenant did professional flying and mechanical work.

"It's a good match," Jupō declared to everyone.

He would smack his hands and grin. Jupō liked the little stranger because he was a gentleman. He had manners. English manners were just like Southern manners. A man knew how to act, how treat a lady, eat at the table, and how to treat a guest.

"It's a good match," Jupō would repeat and he swore the Lieutenant had good blood, like the Demuses had good blood—going back five generations on the same land in Fermata Bend.

"Hmm, that before or AFTER the carpetbaggers?" someone quipped when Jupō left.

"We've got some English in us, too, you know," Jupō would look about and nod.

"The fact that the stranger's English don't mean shit," someone muttered after Jupō was gone. "He's different is what matters."

In May, Michael Demus forced the little man in his skivvies out to the sharecropper shack at night, while he brandished one of his grandfather's service revolvers in each hand. He hobbled after the Lieutenant in his special shoe and his Sunday suit under the half moon and into the fields, ordered the Lieutenant to turn around and made a fervent declaration to the memory of his mother and how he was ready to kill or be killed for his family's honor. He finished and threw one of the revolvers at the Lieutenant's feet but the little man would not pick it up. Michael then challenged the stranger's name, his manhood, forgot his manners and insulted the stranger in every way he could think of; he even spit on him and called him things that were perverted. When that did not bring results, Michael, in a righteous rage, decided to shoot him anyway, but then could not pull the trigger. Michael wept and felt humiliated; he threw the other revolver and left. The next morning, out of spite, anger, or shame, he confessed to Jupō what he had done to the Lieutenant and why he had done so. Jupō heard him out and said

nothing; he waited until the next weekend and caught Katrina and the little man nude in one of the old slave quarters that was used for a shed. Jupo entered the shed just as Katrina had found a switch and had instructed the little man, like a stern schoolmarm to a dunce child, on how to sit so she could mount him. Jupo forced them to dress and get into his Packard at once by gunpoint; he did not threaten the Lieutenant, but instead he slapped Katrina before the little man's eyes. With shame, fear, and indignation and the memory of his dead wife, Jupo drove them over the state line into Mississippi to a Justice of the Peace. Jupo Demus could not tolerate disgrace.

The news hit town fast. It stunned them. All the ladies of proper families were shocked. A Demus? Married without a formal engagement? It was beyond belief. Jupo was quiet, he wouldn't talk, but he ran a full-page announcement in the *Fermata Bend Bugler* and then brought the couple before the entire church congregation to have the marriage blessed. On that Sunday, the little man with the warplane walked as if wooden, in stolid stupor and reticence, his face white as a sheet while he went through the motions in a coat and tie, with Jupo and Michael behind him. He went before the altar, kneeled with his happy wife in her Sunday dress before the minister and all the eyes of the packed church. Afterwards, the women gave a party with presents for Katrina at a neighbor's farmhouse. Katrina, in a new white dress with lace that Jupo had ordered from Birmingham, couldn't hide her smile or meet everyone's gaze while her three men looked on, the silent Lieutenant seated between Jupo and Michael.

The couple flew away to Mobile to live, but came back six days later because, as everyone knew, especially the women, Katrina was homesick. All she had ever known was Jupo and Fermata Bend, and some suspected, too, that the Lieutenant still wanted to fly without restraint. Rumor had it in Mobile the Lieutenant paced the floor of their apartment, smoked cigarettes, and said very little to his wife; while she cried herself to sleep each night, she suffered from a sweating fever with dreams of cruise ships that leave harbors to sink, mansions that crumble to the ground, and an old, white-bearded man that waves goodbye. Within three days, Katrina went into a violent fit; she refused to eat or sleep with her little husband until he agreed to take her home.

The Lieutenant and Katrina flew back to Fermata Bend. They settled in at the home place and lived there for over a year. The little man and Katrina went to church every Sunday with the Demuses and sat in the family pew. The Lieutenant crop dusted the Demus Fields and the surrounding farms. Sometimes he still made trips to Mobile, but soon those stopped too. He took on odd jobs and mechanical work at Morton's filling station and he flew alone every day, weather permit-

ting, whether there was work or not. The plane would be high in the sky, it screamed and droned, whirled and tumbled, it would fall and rise, over and over again, like a big metal bird in flight. It looked like ecstasy, it looked like practice, it went on and on and on—and yet, it went nowhere.

The boys at Fermata Bend Elementary School, when asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, all clamored that they wanted to be pilots. The girls said they wanted to be wives, mothers or nurses of pilots. The women in town thought the little man and Katrina made a cute couple. The men and veterans shook their heads over the thought that the weirdo was here to stay.

Jupo gave the new couple a dowry of fifty acres directly across the highway from the Demus Fields and the home place. He supervised the field hands in the construction of a new house, a small rock house with a shed and dirt runway. The couple moved in the house the following fall after their first anniversary. It was after crop dusting season and the harvest that Jupo invited all Fermata Bend to the house warming.

People of Fermata Bend came in their Sunday clothes to see the little man and his wife the closest they would ever see them. The lieutenant was dressed in a blazer and tie, yet he appeared still quiet and small. The guests observed that Katrina was in a new red dress, and she talked for the two of them and gave quick, apologetic smiles when she goaded the little man about how he served the punch, the sandwiches, or the cashews. She would also complain about how he stood around and did nothing.

Within a few months after the house warming, the flying noise above Fermata Bend stopped. The warplane was parked by the shed and the new rock house. The Lieutenant could sometimes be seen outside washing it or working on the plane. It was learned through the Demus' maid that within a few weeks after Katrina became pregnant she suffered from the fevers again. This time she saw black cats, spider webs, and crashing bats in her dreams. She became fearful for the Lieutenant to fly. Katrina would whine, beg, and nag the little man about it at first, then she went into violent fits for weeks until at last she extracted a promise from him not to fly until after the child was born. The Lieutenant then cried himself, groveled, and begged her to recant, but Katrina remained firm. The child demanded it, she told him. The town saw the Lieutenant drive Katrina around in their new Ford. He was by her side in town, out of uniform, in plain clothes and jacket while Katrina was larger in a flower-print maternity dresses. The little man was servile and attentive to his wife, but he would nod and speak quietly to others when he had to. At the grocery store, people watched Katrina goad him with plaintive whines, usually too impatient to wait

for his answers. She would give peremptory orders, or read the shopping list always quick to smile at others, her cheeks growing fatter and glowing.

"Nature's call done caught him," someone said later.

"Ha, yeah," someone agreed. "He's run right into the very thing he was running away from."

Three months before the baby was born, the warplane was gone. Katrina and the Demuses did not come to town. The first, polite response of people was that it was work, after all, perhaps in Mobile. Good manners required that no one ask outright. Had anyone heard the plane leave? After the plane was absent for a month, the talk began to fly. He had jumped the coop....there had been an argument about living in Fermata Bend.... the little foreigner had married thinking there would be money in it for him.... there was another wife in England, or Mobile. So it went. Katrina and the Demuses became reclusive while silent, hard-faced, and impervious. They kept to themselves, tried to avoid the others and not talk.

Then one evening, people heard the plane come in from the direction of Legger Mound. In the morning, it was back in the runway, parked by the shed at an off-angle, dirty and mud-splattered, the paint chipped, the glass on the cockpit flimsy. It sat like that all day and in the afternoon, Jupo drove across the Demus Fields and slowly crossed the highway in a ton truck full of field hands, got out of the truck with his pump shotgun and blasted the tires of the warplane flat. He ordered the field hands into the woods where they cut a large oak down, trimmed the limbs off and, with the truck, dragged it to the plane. Jupo produced a heavy chain from the back of the truck and directed the field hands to run it through the landing gear and spike the ends of the chain into the tree trunk.

"Barker!" Jupo bellowed at the rock house he had built for Katrina and the Lieutenant.

But no one came out. Jupo stood and glared. He ordered the hands onto the truck and drove off, the truck tires lifting dust. The warplane remained still, dirty and shackled. Jupo hired a biplane duster out of Waynesboro that summer whose flying was ordinary. The baby, a girl, came in the fall. The Lieutenant was now a father and Katrina, a mother. Katrina stayed at home and the Lieutenant worked odd mechanical jobs, while in town, people gossiped. They stared at him, nudged one another, then smiled when he appeared on the square behind the wheel of a Demus truck, or walked about the stores, or if he was in line at the post office dressed in drab overalls and work boots. He avoided people and spoke little. Whenever the subject of the Lieutenant was brought up to Jupo, he would press his lips together and look away.

"Why, I think I could whip him blindfolded, and with one hand," a farmer would declare at the hardware, in Jupō's absence.

Of course, the farmers and veterans would be gathered together, seated in the rockers or leaning on the counter, drinking soda pop or chewing tobacco, talking about the weather or planting, politics or history, or telling tales as men in Fermata Bend would do.

"For all them Demuses think, he ain't nothing much," someone would drawl and spit.

Slow snickers. A guffaw. "That little stranger—he's so good he's not one of us."

"Take those wings away and he ain't much now is he?" Soft laughter.

"Flyboy," someone would add and laugh low, "got caught with his fly open."

At the afternoon baptism, the child was christened Jimma Demus Barker. Jupō's pride swelled in his new beige suit and tears welled in his eyes while he held his hat in his hands and watched his grandchild. The Lieutenant and Michael stood beside him in new beige suits Jupō had ordered for them, too. It was not in fear, or even distance from what was before them in Katrina's arms at the baptismal font, but in a shifting and boyish awkwardness at what to do, which was nothing but to look on and be there while Katrina in her new, flowing, yellow dress, her cheeks still plump from pregnancy, smiled like her father, in a simple self-absorption and purpose, clutching the child in its gown and blanket, all aglow in the middle of her men. She handed the child forward to the preacher at the baptismal font and before everyone in the church, mostly women, who had come to watch. The preacher gave a benevolent smile, as did, almost spontaneously, all the women in the church, mothers and mothers to be, their men either deceased, at work, or not claimed yet. Then everyone smiled in polite awe as the preacher prayed, touched the child's forehead with water and repeated her name. A piercing cry uttered from the small and insistent creature in the blanket. Jupō and Katrina's smiles grew even larger. Michael's mouth closed, small and solemn. And the Lieutenant stared.

In April, people noticed as they drove by on the highway that the war plane was clean and the glass shone. The field hands that lived in the shacks beyond the runway began to line up on the fence in the evenings to smoke, talk, and hum to themselves with that ingrained placidity and defeated mentality of knowing one's place for so long that one did not even think or dare to question on the other side of the fence and watch Mister Jupō's son-in-law, the "white man's white man," they called him, for being from England. He was solitary, quiet, alone and looking even smaller in the runway beyond the fence, in the

slow, quotidian and arduous restitution of his Spitfire. In denim overalls now, and tee shirt, his long and unkempt hair falling in his face, they watched him evening after evening until it grew too dark, watched him wash the windows until the glass shone, scrub and hose off the dirt and grime. They watched him polish and mend: a lone man's slow, diligent labor, section by section of the warplane. The field hands began to lean on the fence, talk and smoke everyday before dark and supper, and watch him with feigned indifference, slyly, with repressed eagerness. They watched him with occasional exclamations under their breaths, guffaws or long, slow chuckles.

"He doing a whole lotta work for a man to go nowhere"

"Ain't gonna be no energy left for his woman tonight!"

"Hey, don't you know he ain't had none? Why you think he out there trying to fly?"

"Naw. That ain't it. He scared! He scared she wanting another one."

And they watched every evening, every dusk, acted nonchalant, casual, but with quiet curiosity and respect, not that they understood what he was doing or why with his machine, that they could not ever know, but wonder at the "white man's white man" lone, daily, and self-driven labor. Every evening after a hard day's work, they were there to watch, bemused, befuddled, a little awed, and with envy reborn from abnegation with whites, at this strange white and his strange machine, and stranger to them yet, his dogged, self-absorbed and assiduous devotion to it: a little white man, face set with determination, not of revenge or conspiracy, but with a look more like need, someone who could not leave the warplane alone, had to touch the machine, maintainance it, be with it and not like love, but more like helplessness or a desire for hope. The upstart was that he directed all this "affection," as the field hands called it, on a warplane that couldn't, didn't move, on flat tires that Jupio had shot out, alone in the overgrown dirt runway, like a dead, shackled steel bird that needed paint, chained and staked to the stripped tree trunk Jupio had made them do on his orders. Yet, they watched and wanted to watch, in a silent hope, that the little "caught" white man who married Boss' daughter, but didn't know "he done married Boss." They watched him work with contained and impervious faces, wondering among themselves how the Boss could not know, and how much he would allow, and what he would do. And like many things, what they knew did not get outside their circle because something was about to happen between white folks.

They watched him work on the flaps and the engine from a ladder, and gradually polish the propellers and pivot the plane by its tail so it faced the highway. They watched him clean out the cockpit and check the flaps again. Over the weeks, their casual, quiet lounging on the

fence grew into a hush, a rigid vigil of the evenings, their eyes riveted on the man transforming the tethered plane, interpolated with low exclamations when the little man brought new batteries and slowly, meticulously took the old ones out and installed the new ones. He changed the spark plugs, drained the oil and the radiator, added new oil and radiator fluid. He greased the engine. He jacked up the wheel legs, straining the plane against the chain, removed the tires one at a time, replaced the inner tubes, patched and inflated the tires, and put them back on the warplane.

"He fool, sure enough." someone said.

They watched him slowly fill the warplane's tanks with fuel, carrying two five gallon cans back and forth from the larger drums in the shed, and an evening in June, they watched him bring the war plane back to life after several moments in which the little man just sat in the cockpit in silence, staring ahead as if in seizure or prayer. The engine coughed black smoke out the side exhaust pipes; the blades slowly turned, stopped. The engine coughed two more times, the blades stopped. Then the engine coughed, caught a rhythm, the blades slowly turned and spun into a blur, sending wind and dust into the falling dark. The field hands caught their hats, bowed their heads, squinted their eyes; but in spite of themselves, grinned and laughed, danced and clapped. The little white man stood up in the opened cockpit and turned to them, the propeller wind blowing his hair to one side. He grinned and waved. The field hands' cheers were drowned in the wind and noise of the plane, but they waved back. The engine roared, the blades whirled a storm, the wings slightly rocked for fifteen or twenty full minutes...and the warplane went nowhere.

But Jupo knew. He was too conscious of being a gentleman, or too proud, too white, and too aware of his place in Fermata Bend to confront his son-in-law again in front of blacks, or in public, certainly not at church, or Sunday dinner at the home place before every member of the family, or to walk into a man's house, not so much because of his daughter, or even the respect of his daughter, he had that regardless, but some inherent principle that said a man did not demean another man in front of a woman, much less his wife, no matter whose daughter she was or what she may or may not have told her father in the first place.

Jupo drove in to Joe Morton's Rabbit Oil filling station in his big black Packard one morning, and smiling, told Joe Morton he had engine trouble and would like to see his son-in-law. In the dim and contiguous rear of the small, cinder-blocked garage, with the hood of the Packard raised, out of the light and sight of anyone and the street, but not completely out of the hearing of one Joe Morton, came the

sharp, metallic ring of a tool hitting the concrete floor and a thick “whump” of what Joe later realized was the tall stack of new tires beside the back wall hitting the wall together, like someone had been flung or shoved against them, and then with Jupō’s voice there was no question—coming hard, low and guttural, “Do you think I’m blind, boy? You think I’m blind?”

What came after was a long, effusive tirade or sermon, depending on how one heard it, after which, came a pause, undoubtedly for air, and a quiet, plaintive reply, “I’m just looking after my plane.”

“Sure now,” Jupō declared, his tone mocking, “looking after your PLANE. It got you here, didn’t it? Its the only damn thing you can do well—except for maybe falling for a girl and then shunning your obligations and this family when you do. Oh, I been watching. Sure now, look after your wings—until you go buy rubber inner tubes and batteries. Then maybe you better kill the idea. Them days is over, son. You ain’t leaving again. You should have thought everything out before you shackled up with a Demus. The only rubbers you’re goan need, boy, are the ones you’re collecting in the septic tank.”

Then, according to Joe Morton, came a long, bitter, bellowing laugh that echoed from the garage, that Joe Morton later realized contained all Jupō’s fear of shame and disgrace, and all the hard anger that checked it. Jupō could be heard, loudly now, talking and laughing at the same time. “You think I don’t know? Mike and me—we got us a telescope! We ordered it special through Sears Roebuck in Mobile two months ago. Ha. Set it up in the kitchen just to watch your house. What you do inside is your business, boy, but what you do outside is OURS. We might say,” Jupō taunted, “we Demuses got vested interest.”

Then as Joe Morton explained, the Packard’s hood slammed, you could hear the car door open and shut, the engine start.

“Old Widow Beck drove up for gas in her Henry J and I ran forward from the office to tend to her at the pumps as Jupō backed the Packard out of the garage and abruptly braked to doff his hat and smile out the Packard window to the Widow before he drove off. The Lieutenant... he come walking out, in his dirty maintenance overalls, wiping his hands fast on a rag, looking up the road after Jupō while I told the Widow good day and gassed up her Henry J, cleaned the windshield and checked her oil and tires—me acting like I don’t know nothing but what I’m doing. The Lieutenant just stands there, bareheaded, staring hard up the road, and wiping his hands over and over, though they didn’t need wiping to begin with; he hadn’t done anything to Jupō’s car.

“It was the plane, you see. Jupō knew that. It weren’t that he couldn’t leave, if he had a mind to. Any man can run away from a woman. But

it was the plane for a reason I don't think anybody ever knew; and therefore, maybe that's why we never understood him. Maybe it was power, you know, though I think he was powerless, was a stuck up fool, a stuck up dreamer—and the plane was his dream, the magic that gave him a way he wanted to see himself. That, and that suit and scarf he liked to wear and that ever glinting wristwatch that he had to have polished everyday. I've wondered. Here I am years later, the same, alive and pumping gas. There he was—wanting to fly . . . and ruined.

"But it weren't the woman, nossir, not alone. A man can leave a woman. He could have slipped out at night, drove, or hitch hiked. Or hell, he could have caught the train at the cross switch, taken the Blue Goose that ran every Tuesday night through Citronelle and Mobile. It was the plane. There was something about him and that plane that weren't normal. He was polite enough. Courteous, is the word. He knew his manners and knew how you're supposed to treat a stranger and a lady—though he weren't good much after. That, and the fact he was married to a Demus, is why we tolerated him. And he was a good worker for a spell—not for long, mind you—he couldn't do the same thing over and over. He couldn't work on cars for more than a week. If it hadn't been for the different jobs he picked up, he would have quit working for me out of mounting boredom. You could see it coming in his eyes and the way he slowed down in his work. He was only good for a little while—but never any job for long. He sure couldn't just sit here, chew the fat with people stopping by and pump their gas. No, he would get edgy, that man couldn't stay still."

Jupo's telescope was set up on a tripod in the kitchen, new, shiny metal and glass, beside the old wood kitchen table, before the large window, and aimed across the fields, railroad tracks and highway toward Katrina's. What was learned about the telescope came through the maid who cooked for them or the teenage boys who delivered cords of firewood and came into the kitchen to wait for their money, among others. People in town talked and imagined the two men carefully watching the rock house and runway through the telescope in a contained but consistent and driven anxiety, participating in a private, coveted, even childish stealth; of course, assuming they were in the hidden cloister of their act, their thoughts, and in their family house, never admitting or telling anyone, but doing it out of fear for the image of themselves and the belief in a reputation of their family name in Fermata Bend. The stories grew. People imagined Jupo and Michael taking turns night and day, taking shifts from work, keeping diligent watch; another version was of them taking shifts at breakfast and dinner—sunup and sundown—one sounding an alarm when the little man was spotted. People could imagine, too, Jupo shoving thin Michael

aside to peer through the telescope, making loud declarations as he did so.

Months later, on a gray fall dawn, the field hands were awakened in their shacks by someone calling the Lieutenant's name. They looked out of their windows at the lone figure of Michael Demus doing a slow, circular dance, dragging his club foot in its shoe outside of one of the Demus trucks with its doors open, in the dew-covered runway by the wet, chain-tethered plane. Michael, the quiet, shy Demus, thin as a stick, who always worked in nervous silence in the shadow of his father, who couldn't brag or talk like Jupo—who never seemed to like girls, court one for long, or find one who was good enough for him—had a bottle of moonshine in one hand and a flame torch in the other. Despite the chill, his shirt was unbuttoned to his undershirt and a wide, diabolic laugh was frozen on his face as he whirled around, staggered, calling the Lieutenant again and again, hanging the name out like a long, primitive wail.

The chain lay parted from the wheels of the plane, the ends smothering on the ground. What the field hands saw was the little man come, first walking then running, out of the rock house in nothing but his Liberty overalls and untied work boots, his hair mussed from sleep, his face angry. He clambered over the fence, stopped and stood before Michael, blinking. Michael swayed, gave a leering grin, struggled for balance, and offered him the bottle, saying something inaudible, but like a pronouncement, like a declaration, maybe a boast. The little Lieutenant didn't seem to see him. He took the bottle and dropped it, staring at the plane, running to the chain and picking the ends up. Michael followed, holding out his arms, pointing, smiling with the flame torch, making a speech. "I'm letting you go," he said, "I'm letting you go." But the Lieutenant didn't seem to hear. He dropped the chain ends and walked past Michael, out into the dew-touched, dead ragweed-encroached runway; gazing at the still gray, foggy peace, toward the gray highway, the wet railroad tracks and the Demus Fields, heavy with cotton. Some of the field hands were outside and on the fence now, dressing, shivering and bleary eyed, and trying to affect indifference as they looked on, but not wanting to miss any of this.

Michael began yelling at the Lieutenant's back. He threw the flame torch down. The Lieutenant just stood there, gazing off. Then the field hands saw what apparently the Lieutenant was looking for, a plume of spurned dust rising in the distance of the dirt road across the Demus Fields, trailing a black spot: Jupo's black Packard coming pell mell from the home place. Katrina came running out of the house, her face covered in pale blue cream and pinched in a scold, unheedful of her

appearance in a white nightgown, the ends of her hair tied in tissue papers, and the child forgotten for the moment. She halted at the fence, gripped the top rail, and uttered a 'No' like a demand, but too loud, too sudden, to mask her fear. She shook her head, hair, tissue papers, and uttered it again. But the little Lieutenant, standing there and looking off, didn't hear her—or didn't choose to. He seemed deaf, oblivious to anything else. Katrina, Michael and the field hands stared, rooted and immobile, in that momentary hesitation of waiting for what someone else is going to do.

The little man turned for the plane and Katrina's mouth yelled 'No' again, only there wasn't any sound as he quickly climbed onto the wing and into the cockpit, the brown plume beyond the highway now a long cloud across the fields, Jupō's speeding Packard visible. Everyone stared as the plane coughed, died, coughed again, the propeller blades turned; the engine boomed to life, barking exhaust, making wind. The field hands on the fence bowed their heads, the tails of Michael's loose shirt rose behind him, and the hem of Katrina's nightgown slanted up to her white thighs. Katrina began mouthing "No" over and over again as if she expected to be heard. The field hands could see the little man's set face. But he didn't look at anyone, or wave, or even close the cockpit. He taxied the plane forward and leaving the trunk of the tree, the chains, gaining speed down the ragweed encroached runway towards the oncoming black car. The two vehicles were charging at each other with the highway between them. Jupō braked hard at the fence gate before the railroad tracks; the plane lifted, cleared the fence, swept over highway, railroad tracks and car in what seemed like a dreamlike suspension, its landing gear folding up under the wings as it turned up into the grey air, its thundering roar fading like a sigh.

Jupō jumped out of the Packard, bareheaded, gray and balding, in opened bathrobe and ragged long johns, and began firing away at the plane with his shotgun, unmindful of his appearance or who saw him, or that the plane was quite out of range and climbing with a distant drone. Katrina came running down the runway, the field hands behind her and Michael limping, no one considering, much less Katrina, how she was barefoot with a creamed face, only a thin nightgown on and tissue papers unraveling in her hair. Everyone stopped and stared up from the fence before the highway, across from the gate and the car and the fused, manic face of Jupō, who frantically reloaded and shot. They watched the warplane circle, dip a little and bank into a wide turn. "He rusty," a field hand said. The plane turned back, coming fast and low toward the car, its drone growing into a scream.

"He goan kill us!" someone said.

"Shit, man! Why don't he just fly off?" someone said.

TEM MONTGOMERY

Jupo stood his ground at the oncoming plane, firing until he and everyone dropped to the ground. The plane shot over them in a blasting scream, turned up over the pine trees beyond the runway and rock house, faded back into a drone and diminished into the sky. Everyone stood up, followed him with their eyes. The warplane banked, wings wavering then steadying, seeming to follow the line of the gray horizon above the serrated tops of the pines. They watched it dive, come in from the north, perpendicular to the cotton fields and the dirt road.

"C'mon, you useless imp!" Jupo yelled. He reloaded and began firing as the warplane came at him fast and low, as if delivering a bomb or a torpedo. Everyone dropped to the ground as it screamed over Jupo, the Packard and toward Legger Mound. Everyone rose and turned to see the warplane's wing slice the stilts out from under the water tower, the tower collapse, breaking and bursting water; and the plane recoil, bouncing hard into the heavy cotton field, sliding and spinning, its wings and violent propeller rutting up stalks, cotton and earth, and explode into a roaring, rising orb of flame that curled up into a thick, black line of smoke against the sky.

Jupo cursed and cursed the Lieutenant. He brandished his shotgun. Katrina began to scream and Michael laughed. The field hands climbed the fence, hollered and ran as they pointed and scattered across the highway and onto the railroad tracks. A pickup truck pulled off the highway and a man got out. A school bus braked and the children inside pressed their wide-eyed faces against the window panes to see. Everyone stared at the burning wreck, the long trail of smoke rising and thinning into the sky.

Tem Montgomery has worked for the *Jacksonville News*, the *Anniston Star*, and the *Gadsen Times*. His fiction has appeared in over a dozen literary journals as well as being selected to the anthology, *Southern Writers in the Nineties*. He has served as Chief Editor for the *Alabama English* journal, as a founding board member of the Alabama Writers Forum, and as a member of the Southern Literary Task Force for the National Endowment of the Arts. He teaches English and creative writing at Troy State University.

Poems by *Lauren Flowers*

They Say You'll Forget Everything

She remembers
 The painting strangely:
 black spaniels
 lounging by a green lake
 with an overdone reflection of clouds.
 It was comforting,
 and the memory
 still is.
 If she were a friend recalling a visit
 to a museum—say, a retrospective
 on the dog
 in English landscape painting,
 the picture wouldn't
 bother me at all.
 But she is my sister,
 talking about
 Our grandmother's house
 in Oklahoma.
 We agree on two things:
 it was a fine
 painting, and the varnish
 damn near ruined it.
 The dogs had gone
 mosaic long before
 we set eyes on them.
 Of course, in my heart
 of hearts,
 I know they were pointers—
 two of them, like her spaniels
 — facing left
 in a field of uncut grass,
 long tails out,
 tense on three legs,
 doing what pointers do.
 And only one of us is right.
 Or neither.
 I refuse to grow the picture,

Geometry Lesson

At a lecture on sacred geometry,
The speaker draws four columns side by side
On an otherwise empty blackboard.

He sets them at regular intervals,
Gives them all Ionic capitols, and
Asks his audience, How many there?

Right off, I know the answer's loaded.
No way we all came to number one, two,
Three, then four. I came for geometry—

A single word, taking the earth's measure—
And for the comfortable word sacred,
Its implication our keen numbering

Is somehow good for the world itself,
The redemptive force of meter, whereby
A tape measure whips us all into shape,

Fits Mother Earth with a new brassiere, then
Sends her on to Weight Watchers as penance
For letting herself go, world without end.

A lady on the front row answers four.
The speaker smiles. Ah, but the Greeks counted
It seven. Seven evoking one week,

Distant planets in their courses, closer
Demons in the head, the Ages of Man,
And now—at last—four columns made of chalk.

You see, the Greeks counted the gaps between.
In space we perceive the relationship
Of one column to another.
We're
Taught

To count only the visible object,
Thereby, neglecting our unseen graces.
And what else, I wonder, do we forget

LAUREN FLOWERS

To number? What rich emptiness attends
Our waking moments? What barren niches
Wait for us to saint them with awareness?

Leaving the lecture behind, I conjure
A host of unlived years between my years,
Shuffled just like cards, a never-born Jack

Tucked under the ace of spades I nurtured.
I devise elaborate equations
To ascertain the life I've left undone,

And naturally I sum up failure.
Half-lived, I feel really old, no longer
Forty-five, but double it minus one.

Algebra always brought me to ruin.
I return my thoughts to the lecture; and
In the columns on the blackboard, I see

My years side by side, crowned with capitols,
Neatly set apart by all my failures.
I call it the Parthenon of living.

Heading Home

Every road trip has its signs.
 Even the short ride out
 From my house to the new Winn Dixie
 Is crammed with oracles

And countless opportunities
 For making icons out of
 Billboards, for honoring
 The holiness of hamburgers.

Mondays heading home, who can say
 Where I will go—home,
 Yes. But a destination shaped
 By the road I travel.

Monday noon the preachers come out
 To change their church marquees,
 Playing scrabble with the traffic.
 Their black plastic letters

Too regular for beauty, but
 Trying still for wisdom,
 Like forgeries done on Sinai.
 A surfeit of vowels,

Marks of punctuation, commas
 Bigger than a Bible,
 Spelling epigrams for pilgrims,
 Hitching a ride with me.

“Never put a question mark,” writes
 The First Baptist preacher,
 “Where God has had a period.”
 And who am I to doubt

Whether God has one of those? I
 Let it stand, driving on,
 In praise of southern Baptists, while
 Down the road, the pastor

Of First Methodist stands wordless
 By his marquee—a bare

LAUREN FLOWERS

Y his only effort. It might
Become the start of You.

Alone it seems a chromosome;
Missing the rib it gave
An X. In my rearview, I watch
Y limping on one leg:

An old man. I flip him upside
Down to see him stand like
Some divining rod. He aims me
All the way to Adam.

Church Kiss

In the pew with my mother,
I am wondering, at the age of six,
Why church candles flicker

At immutable heights
From the moment the acolytes lights them
To the recessional snuffing them out.

They are hollow and plastic
Filled with liquid paraffin—
I do not know this yet,

At six their tender wax burns curiously inviolate,
A centifolia rose, permanently petalled.

The priest is chasubled
Like the tree for Christmas.
He lifts his arms overhead to break the host,

And Mother raises the church bulletin
To her mouth, biting its folded edge,
Rolling her lips in together.

The priest says, the gifts of God
For the people of God,
And Mother eyes her blotted bulletin:

The red imprint of her half-mouth
Almost smiles
On the edge of its front cover.

Post-communion in the pew—
The candles still holding their flames,
Torchbearers going the distance

—I ponder the mystery of Mother's kiss.
Careful not to spoil a line of its floral print,
I steal the bulletin from her purse.

Mesmerized by its exterior fold,
I open it—the glorified fullness
Of the human mouth.

LAUREN FLOWERS

Amazing: a tiny map made of wax
With little red roads connected together.
For all their apparent confusion,

They look well-traveled.
I see the world there, born and living,
And full of tenderness.

Missing Buns

Scanning the pantry, my son at eighteen:
 There's never enough buns in this house.
 A whole pack of dogs hung out in the fridge
 Waiting on buns to come home.
 He interrupted my thoughts to say it.

I parlayed the alchemical copout:
 Said, some things keep longer than others,
 And, thus far, not a bun on the market
 Can outlast a dog. Not to my Knowledge.
 But hey—they're working on it.

This left us at the impasse of why
 I never notice important things, like
 What day it is, or hour, or even
 Buns turning blue in their unopened bags
 —You'd think they were children, I almost said.

But it wasn't metaphor he wanted.
 Just bread for a hotdog. And after all,
 Hunger—even hunger that is named
 Ketchup chili hold the onions
 —even this speaks louder than words.

I wanted to tell him about magnolias,
 The one I'd seen that morning. It was May,
 And I'd come from the mailbox down the drive
 To see our front yard magnolia at work,
 Sending secret love letters to the world,

Its wide sheets of blooming curled up in scrolls,
 Two dozen diplomas treed on its limbs.
 I noticed it a thought of him—
 The boy then, calling it his climbing tree,
 The boy now, graduating from high school.

It had everything to do with buns,
 With why I never remember them,
 And not a bite to offer his hunger.
 So, I've come from the Winn Dixie now
 And laid the buns out where he'd notice.

LAUREN FLOWERS

I see him scrolled like a May tree blooming,
And he lines ketchup on dogs like ink.
The panfried buns won't keep, will perish
Like the seen magnolia, holding on
For a while, its long root augured in memory.

Lauren Flowers lives in Dothan, Alabama. She is the mother of three teenagers. This is her first publication.

Charles Rose

Mr. Hardcastle

After Katie and I called it quits, she took up with a ball bearing salesman, Freddie Snipes, and they got married and moved to Valdosta, Georgia. Freddie Snipes wanted to adopt Tommy, but I wasn't letting him do that, even though the child support was hurting me. In the last four months, I had only been to visit Tommy once, and that hadn't turned out well. I got into it with Freddie Snipes, over being behind on the child support. Katie had to pull me off of him.

Lately, I had been spending my Sunday afternoons fishing on the Alabama River with Cole Hoskins. We were house painters at Dixie Paint. His trailer was down the road from mine, and if you kept on going down that road you got to the Alabama River. I still went fishing with Cole Sunday afternoons even though Cole's wife Charlene and I were seeing each other on Saturday afternoons. Cole made it easy for me to be with Charlene. On Saturday afternoon he took Dyan, their little four year old, downtown with him; she was with him shaking a tambourine while he preached on a street corner half a block from the state liquor store.

One Sunday afternoon while we were fishing, Cole told me about his eye problem. He had trouble reading his Bible unless he kept his left eye closed. They came and went, these zigzagging motes in his eyes. He was afraid he might be going blind, and he didn't know what to do about it.

I was still doing odd jobs for my neighbor across the road, Elinor Williams. I'd replaced I don't no how many thirty-amp fuses for Elinor. Elinor used to tell me the next time she married it wouldn't be for love or money. She'd marry a man who knew how to do the things she couldn't do for herself. After I put in a float in Elinor's toilet tank one Saturday afternoon, I brought up Cole's vision problem. Elinor looked up at me from a novel she was reading, sipped on her Canadian Mist and soda. I felt the sun's flat rays heat up my neck and moved my lawn chair in toward Elinor.

"Cole says he won't go to an eye doctor."

I knew Elinor would set me straight. "Who says he has to, Wesley." All my friends but her call me Wes. I'm just beginning to get used to Wesley from her. "Tell Cole he should go to a drugstore and buy a pair of readers. That would be a lot cheaper than going to an eye doctor." She took another big sip on her Canadian. I didn't know how she put so much away every day.

Catch her early enough in the afternoon, what she said still made

some kind of sense. "All Cole has to do is put his readers on and he can read his Bible to his heart's content. You tell Cole these drugstore glasses are cheap. He can get a pair for nine ninety-five. I'm sure that's what you must want to tell him so I won't say anymore about it now."

Elinor dipped down to her book, waiting for me to say something.

Instead I asked myself just what had made her settle down in this trailer park. She liked it here by the river, with your kind of people, she told me once, because she was so far away from the people she'd known while she'd been married to Rutherford. She'd moved back here from Athens, Georgia, to not far from where she'd grown up, which was just this side of Wetumpka.

Rutherford was a paleontologist at the University of Georgia. She had never had much in common with him, so their marriage hadn't lasted very long. Rutherford would talk your ear off about fossils, she'd say, but he didn't know beans about the human heart. She'd say the human heart, for Rutherford, was just a muscle.

The novels Elinor read meant nothing to Rutherford, less than nothing he used to tell her, because they weren't about people who did something in the real world. I didn't know Rutherford, didn't want to. But he might have been right about Elinor's novels. She kept them in her mother's bookcase, a golden oak job with glass doors which she had with her now, in her trailer.

The binding was loose on the novel she was reading—a long one with pen and ink illustrations, a Victorian novel, she'd told me once. I offered to slap some tape on it, but she knew I had this other thing on my mind. She was waiting for me to get to Charlene Hoskins.

Instead I asked her about Mr. Hardcastle, what was he up to today, in what looked like about two fingers worth of her novel. "Is Mr. Hardcastle still blaming the wind for how he feels?" I asked her, swinging my foot up across my knee. Mr. Hardcastle blamed everything on the wind. If the wind was blowing from the north, he'd say that's why I'm pissed off today. From the south, hey man I feel just great. From the east he'd be crying a bucket. From the west he didn't give a shit about anybody. "I never knew a dude like Mr. Hardcastle," I told her.

"Well you see he's a little eccentric. That's how he's supposed to be. The wind can do Mr. Hardcastle that way because he's a character in a novel."

"You ask me, he's a weirdo."

"You, Wesley, might think so because you don't know what winds blow your life around."

"Are you telling me I'm not in control of my life?"

"I'm only saying you could be more in control. So for that matter could Mr. Hardcastle. That's why he's in this book, so the reader can judge for himself how wrong it is for Mr. Hardcastle to attribute everything he feels to the direction of the wind. His putting everything on the wind is irresponsible of him. If you read this book you would see that."

I sensed Elinor was floating up over the pines, above the trailers, way up over the river, and since I didn't want to pop her little balloon I said,

"If you ever get finished with that novel, you lend it to me and I'll read it. I mean carefully."

"Yes, carefully, Wesley, that you should do."

I let the subject of Mr. Hardcastle alone because I had something else to talk to Elinor about. I told Elinor Charlene and I had had a fight last Saturday, last time I'd seen her. Instead of dragging her off downtown so she could shake that tambourine, Cole had taken Dyan to see Charlene's grandparents in Montgomery. I had to tell Charlene she should be the one to do that. That should be your job, not Cole's, I told her. Charlene told me to stay out of her life with Cole. I said I'd try to do that in the future, and she said we wouldn't have a future if I didn't give her and Cole some respect.

I got a strong beam of disapproval, not Elinor's usual fuzzy focussing.

"Here you are sleeping with this woman and you think you should run her life. If Charlene stopped washing the dishes for Cole, you'd probably come down on her for that." Reaching over to pick up her glass, she let her other hand run through her matted gray hair like she needed to loosen it up.

"Let me tell you something, Wesley. I tried sleeping around for awhile.

About a year after Rutherford left me I would go to the bar at the Holiday Inn. I'd go on week nights, when men my age were there. They'd be moving on the next day, so both of us knew what the score was. But Charlene, she obviously doesn't know the score. She thinks she can keep Cole for a husband and have you on Saturday afternoons."

"Remind me to ask her what she thinks. I mean who knows what goes on in Charlene's head?"

"You don't know because you don't want to. You're only interested in yourself."

I saw a lizard crawling off the patio and thought of Cole going blind. He wouldn't be able to lace his boots or squint down the barrel of a shotgun. Charlene came out of their trailer and dropped a bag of

garbage in the garbage can. She had on the tight short shorts she was wearing the first time I knocked on her door. She waved at me from down the road, and I waved back, knowing I'd go to her unless Cole and his little girl Dyan came back from downtown while I was sitting here. If he did I'd tell him what Elinor told me, you get some readers and see if they don't help you see better.

I was looking at a Methodist church across from Burger King, it had a rec center and an outdoor basketball court. I was watching four boys shooting hoops, the basket ball dropping through the net. We'd been out in the hot sun painting a big house. We'd taken our lunch break without saying when we'd be back. Cole wasn't worried about going blind anymore. He'd gone out and bought a pair of readers first thing, and right away the zigzagging motes went away, and he was able to read his Bible again. He put them on while we were ordering and read off all the specials to me.

Cole was talking about Bible movies, what Hollywood did to the Bible, twisted and changed it, Cole said. I asked Cole why that mattered since some of the things in the Bible plain just didn't happen. I said no one Israelite could slay that many Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. Cole's blue eyes never wavered. "What you don't understand when you say that, Wes, is what the good Lord is showing us. He's showing us He can intervene in our lives just like He did in their lives. He helped Samson smite his enemies, and then He punished Samson for sinning."

"So how would the Lord intervene in your life? What does Samson have to do with you?"

Cole spoke slowly, without raising his voice. "Samson's story has everything to do with me. It warns me to shun the harlot's bed. I'm a man. I can be tempted. I was tempted and I gave in. The Lord has seen fit to punish me."

I didn't want to ask how it happened. I watched one of the boys across the street do this nice move with a basketball, holding it up in one hand, letting it ride on his fingertips. Then I made him look at Cole's blue eyes, still set on the path he was following.

"Charlene had gone to the Gulf Coast with Dyan to see her mama. I was painting houses at the time. We had this woman in our crew. Her name was Rena, Rena Latham. Rena asked me to take her home one Friday night? I got to drinking with her and then it happened."

"That's all you have to tell me, Cole?" I watched another boy pivot and sink a jump shot.

"No, that's just the beginning. Saturday morning, Rena Latham shows up at my house. She's all dressed up, ringing the doorbell on me. She's wearing this pretty flowered dress. I was hoping I had

locked the door, but I hadn't. I didn't know what to do next."

"So you waited for her to come in. Or you went to the door and let her in?"

"She had walked from her house to my house. I went to the door and let her in. She had a bottle. That was part of it."

A man and his wife and two teenage girls wearing shorts and not much on top came in, moved on to gawk at the specials. I heard something beep, the french fry machine, or maybe it was an oven somewhere, letting us know that its time was up, whatever was in the oven. We won't be letting you guys out alive, was what the beeper might have been saying.

"I knew right then I would pay for it, but for a long time nothing happened to me. Then one night in that same house Charlene and I were together in bed. We heard someone ring the doorbell. Charlene said I should answer it and I told her, Charlene it's midnight. I told her someone must have the wrong house, but that doorbell kept on ringing."

"And you answered it?"

"No way," Cole said. "I let the doorbell ring until it stopped."

"Are you saying that had something to do with the Lord?"

"I'm saying it did," Cole said. "I'm saying it was like the Bible says, when the Lord comes down on sinners. He was letting me know I'd done wrong before He came down on me for it."

I had to ask Cole how the Lord came down on him. Cole didn't hesitate to tell me how.

"The next time I tried to make love to Charlene, I couldn't do anything, Wes. It's been going on for a long time now, ever since I heard that doorbell ringing."

Coming back with their trays of fast food, this family had nothing to say to us, not the father with his tiny mustache or the mother with her big handbag swinging and swaying and bumping her hip, the girls with their acne and silly talk, they kept to themselves. Cole put his head in his hands. I looked at Cole's coffee getting cold, the slashed pink packets of Sweet'ner.

The next chance I got, I went to see Charlene while Cole was preaching downtown. There were the two of them on a street corner, Cole preaching, Dyan shaking the tambourine. I passed them on my way to the state liquor store. I thought I would stop and listen to Cole. He had a permit to use speakers, so his voice carried all the way to my car. He had to compete with the traffic, a burring monotone of passing vehicles. Cole was going on about Sodom. The Sodomites were hardened sinners. Lot never should have tried to reason with them.

Nobody paid Cole any attention, not even when Cole brought in fire and brimstone.

I stopped fishing with Cole on Sunday afternoons. Cole was painting his church, working for the Lord, he told me at Burger King, the French fry machine dinging away. I told him not to get carried away, he didn't have to sacrifice his Sunday afternoons, and he said since he'd talked to me he'd decided he had to serve the Lord first.

"Charlene says I should get paid for painting the church, that our church can afford to pay me. I've thought about that a lot, how much it means to me now not to get paid." Cole's simple blue eyes bored into mine.

"I mean it's helping me accept the Lord's will," he said. "That's all that matters."

"For you. But what about Charlene? What about your little girl Dyan?"

"Don't they matter?" I wanted to get across to him he'd better climb down off that church steeple.

"Of course they matter. Don't you understand, Wes, if I'm right with the Lord, then I'll be right with them too."

Out in my boat thinking back on it, I felt my stomach knot up. A crosswind was blowing my line around, so I had to shift my boat around so the stern was into the wind. I got to thinking about Mr. Hardcastle, would the wind have affected his fishing? What would it be like to be him, I thought. If the wind was right would I be a good man and give up this thing with Charlene? Would a north wind make me blow my top and a south wind cause me to laugh like hell or like Mr. Hardcastle ride my good steed over the moors, and let no one get in my way? Would a west wind send me back to my bed with the drapes pulled and the lights out?

It was time to get back to fishing. I had the idea of trying it close to the shore, so I took off my beetle spin lure. I worked the tail of my worm lure into the shank of the hook, about to snug it up to the eye of the hook. I stuck myself with the eye of the hook, something I almost never do. I slashed the ball of my thumb working the barb loose. I had the anchor down and the river was calm, nothing stronger than slow moving wavelets. Out here on this aluminum boat with no one, entirely on my own—what if I had a heart attack? Bad things I had done came back to me, back when I was married to Katie. One time Katie showed me a letter from an old boy friend she had before she had Freddie Snipes, and I hit her; I slapped her hard. The river glittered with sunspots. It brought back the sweep of my open hand, the flat pop, Katie's face jerking. It wasn't long before I hauled up the anchor and dropped the bass I'd caught back in the water. I took the boat back in

to the boat dock, and hitched it to the boat trailer. I got in my automobile and started driving, slow. Charlene was outside the trailer getting her mail. She was flipping through a stack of junk mail. I could tell she wasn't happy to see me show up. She bit her lower lip and walked away from me so I had to follow her to the patio. I had to go to her, that's how she wanted it. She set the junk mail on the gas grill, pulled the edge of her mini-skirt down so her thighs weren't showing so much. Dyan was inside watching TV so I couldn't come in. Right away she had to talk about Cole. "I see you been fishing without Cole?"

"That's right. I think it's better this way."

"Cole might like to go fishing with you. But what you do is what you do."

I saw a green lizard crawling past Charlene's foot, along the carpeting Cole had tacked down, a cheery sky blue surface for lizards.

Charlene was saying she'd been doing some thinking.

"Like about me?"

"That's right, about you. This is going to come back and come back to me." Charlene put her hands on her hips and the lizard blurred into a green blob. "Look there's something I ought to tell you. About how Cole came to find the Lord."

This green blob slithering toward my feet, I couldn't stomp on it so I slid my foot away. "Okay," I said to her, "tell me how Cole came to find the Lord."

"Cole's first wife ran off from him. He couldn't get over losing her. He wanted to throw his life away." What Charlene was saying, I knew it meant something to her, but it didn't mean anything to me. "Cole told me he got in his car one day and drove out on County Road One Seventy-Nine. He was going to drive his car into the first big truck he came across. It would have happened, but something else happened instead. Cole saw a little girl on a tricycle, and he forgot about ending his life. He stopped the car right away, and got out—she couldn't have been more than three years old. He asked her where she lived, and she told him. Cole put the tricycle in the back seat and took this little girl home. It was this little girl that saved Cole's life."

It took a lot of concentration, but I made those tufts of blue carpeting come back again, Cole's well spaced carpet tacks showing forth for me. I wasn't seeing a green blob now. So it was easy for me to say something Charlene would want to hear. "That little girl, who was she?"

"It was the preacher's little girl, at this country church."

"The preacher's little girl. If that isn't something."

"You ask me it was a miracle, Wes."

CHARLES ROSE

I thought of Cole up on a ladder, slapping paint on the boards of the squat little steeple that seemed stuck on, not actually nailed down or in some way built, the sun beating down on the back of his neck, Cole painting his way down from the steeple because he thought the Lord wanted him to. I would have said it, where does that leave you and me, Charlene, just to get started again with Charlene, make her feel like having sex with me was okay, but I couldn't speak, I couldn't even move. Sunspots flashed on the gas grill. I couldn't blink the green blob away.

I didn't have sex with Charlene that afternoon because Dyan was inside watching TV. I spent the afternoon in my trailer with a cold wash rag on my forehead. I watched the Braves lose to the Marlins. In the seventh inning I remembered the date, that today was my son Tommy's birthday. He was four years old but I had forgotten, not that he would soon be four years old, I had forgotten it was today. I turned off the TV and picked up the telephone and called Katie, but all I got was a busy signal. An hour later I called again. All I got was the answering machine.

Once the sun went down and it cooled off outside, I left my place and walked over to Elinor's. I knocked but she didn't come to the door. I heard her tell me to come on in. She was sitting in her favorite chair, by the book case in front of the television set. She was listening to the radio. The radio was turned down low, and the music was soft, music for dancing I said to myself, only I didn't feel like dancing. She had the lights off, her book in her lap. A mug of black coffee sat close at hand, on a low wicker table in front of her. She had positioned a chair beside her, for me.

"There's a can of beer in the fridge if you want one."

I didn't want one, not tonight.

There wasn't much light in the trailer. A moth lit on Elinor's novel, then spiraled on up to the ceiling light. He'd had enough of Mr.

Hardcastle. Mr. Hardcastle, he might look like this old man I used to see when I lived in Birmingham. This old man was vigorous for his age. He turned up all over the city. That's how this old man spent his life, moving from one public place to another, hospitals, the public library, city parks. He had a bald head and a gray beard, and in warm weather he wore his shirt sleeves rolled up. The books in the book case, the bindings were running together so I had to look back at Elinor. I saw her clearly for a little while, closing her book, marking her place with a book mark. She picked the mug up with both hands, sipped on the coffee, set the mug back down, her hands jittering from the effort.

"This thing with Charlene, it's doing things to my eyesight."

"Your eyesight isn't your problem. Elinor turned off the radio. She moved her chair close to mine. "Your shiftless way of life, that's your problem."

"Shiftless is how I have to live."

"You have to do better than that."

Fork tines, I felt them scratching my eyes. My left eye was burning, specks jittering, zigzagging floaters speeding up. Floaters, that's all they were, no way I would go blind.

"You can change, Wesley. You can be a new man."

A new man, like Cole Hoskins on Highway One Seventy Nine, saving that little girl on a tricycle? I'd just as soon stay like I was, but that wasn't helping any. Sooner or later tonight I'd have to go back to my place. I might go in the other direction first, go past Cole's trailer and on to the river. I'd take off my clothes and jump in, swim upstream, against the current, let the current carry me back. I felt the floaters settle like sand in a pool; they would go away pretty soon. All I had to do was get out of Elinor's chair, do something, keep on moving.

Elinor took my hands in hers. This woman half again my age, I didn't want her to let go of my hands. That's when I got down on my knee and thanked her for believing I could change. That's how the wind was blowing for me.

Charles Rose is a recipient of an Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowship for 2004-05, in literature/fiction. NewSouth Books has recently published his memoir, *In the Midst of Life: A Hospice Volunteer's Story*. He has published short stories in numerous reviews, including *The Sewanee Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Crazyhorse*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Blackbird*, and *Shenandoah*. One of his stories appeared in *Craft and Vision: The Best Fiction from The Sewanee Review* (edited by Andrew Lytle). He retired from teaching at Auburn University in 1994.

CLIVE WATKINS

Poems by *Clive Watkins*

A Pretty Positon

If knowing when to stop
is the mark of a true artist,

how much might be learned
from an hour's blind

obedience cunningly required,
in which we could lay down

the choices that consume us
and melt into a tutelage of small cries,

each an inkling of subtler nakedness,
more instructive crafts, yet to come.

In the absence of contexts,
categories no longer exist.

Tell me, then, by what insinuating art
you produced, one by one,

those elegant grapes,
those sassy cherries flushed

with invisible sweetness?
Tyranny is a very pretty position.

A connoisseur of such things,
how could you bear

the Midas touch
of so much possibility?

The Guilty Stones

"What one writer can make in the solitude of one room is something no power can easily destroy." Salman Rushdie quoted by Ursula Owner, Editor of Index on Censorship, in the Independent on Sunday, 27th September 1998.

1.

The yellow reading lamp clicks on,
darkness wincing into shadow:
a closed book-lined space-
desk, word-processor, telephone,
an empty cup.

Words must be found
that will lead out of this,
the dream of a common language
coming in the end to a single sound,
a gasp that touches nothing.

2.

Spent paper, fictions of demonic guilt.

A placard the size of a house
affords the bearded face its fixed vantage-point,
the air filled with obstructing smoke,
with furious cries of adoration.

The broken arm dangling at this side,
the others walking away between the houses.

3.

Gross habit of genuflection,
fervid observance,
in a fragrance of haloed candles,
in a drift of incense,
to be snuffed-
mute self-importance
masked as legitimacy-
to be snuffed out.

4.

Yielding in vivid ignorance
we mistrust

CLIVE WATKINS

even our own blank disbelief
its rational blinding
incandescence.

5.

From concrete pits, batted lawns,
from spinneys meshed with wire,
the howls rise up, the wails, the shrieks, the laughter,
the hiccupping roars, heavy animal farts,
slaverings, gnawing of frayed wood, peeled
sexual cries, clashing of teeth, snorts
despairing coughs, spiked foetid sneers.

6.

Meat sings on the hot wire.
Its smoky odours rise
between high courtyard walls
into enclosed spaces of the evening-
iron, stone, the masked attenuated smell
of earth, of broken roses.
Time now to take their wine indoors,
to view the water-colours, the Russian sketches
his clean acids eat into the copper.

7.

What are these engines,
these silent, iterative mouthings?
Well, shall we skip and caper
at the edge of the circle
or will the sharp whistlers whip us in?
Our accusers will not be bashful,
rolling the guilty stones
over and over in their pockets.

Dip oil, dip water, for wounds, for thirst.

Manifesto

"Our words misunderstand us." – Adrienne Rich

The pamphlet wars were not yet over,
the election deferred two fields away

at the far end of a punishing weather
when she lay back at last and thought of England,

that draughty place bowed under winter's furred occlusion.
Night-walkers troubled the streets, and a lascivious eye

winked over the restaurant tables-
frayed roses, bowls of lemon water.

Absolute power is a door into dreaming
(dangerous luminosity), but coercion, Sir,

requires free will - vanquished, to know
the offended tongue belongs now to another.

White shoulders cupped in cool hands,
her angry wing lay folded within her-

bruised grains of light, glittering perishable things
of flesh, of silk, of paper, manifestations

of impotence and desire and whatever
glozing fortune tossed in her musky lap.

If addressed, you will reply with modesty and politeness.
If not addressed, you will not speak at all.

As if trembling on the brink of the next revelation,
the next politic blow, they stare at one another,

indignant dust, each hoping the other will do
what both desire but neither dares propose.

CLIVE WATKINS

Ballad of the Outer Life

... And the children grow up with their deep eyes,
Eyes which know nothing—they grow up and die,
And everyone goes on in their own ways.

And the bitter fruit turns sweet and in the night
Tumbles like a dead bird into the grass
And lies a day or two and starts to rot.

And ceaseless is the wind, and without cease
Our heads fill up with words, we utter them,
We feel our limbs' delight and weariness.

And streets run through the grass, and here and there
Are places full of ponds and trees and torches,
And menacings, things dying, dust and char...

Why were these built? And none of them alike?
So many, too, they never could be counted.
And laughter? Weeping? Death? That checker-work.

All this, these games, how can they profit us,
Who are not children and wander without aim,
Eternally alone, in this vast place?

Having seen so many things, what good can come?
- Yet he says much who says that one word "Evening",
A word from which deep sense and sadness run

Like heavy honey from the hollow comb.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929)

Clive Watkins was born in Sheffield, England in 1945. His poems have appeared in a number of magazines including Agenda, Outposts, Poetry Durham, and Poetry Wales. His collection of poems, *Jigsaw*, was published in April 2003. The *ALR* is the first U.S. publication to publish his poems.

Poems by *H.L. Hix*

“The Fury of a Hermetic Language”

- *Cy Twombly*

Because what we hear and see so vastly exceeds
anything we can understand. The wordless heat
of the body and the mumbling cold of the mind.
Any measurement more accurate or patient
than fence rails in mist darkening down. Where leaves land
when they fall and the infinite patterns they create
going down, for one moment freer than the birds.
Sliver of moon, and Venus shining to match it.

Ardently attentive to the world, like a cat
worshipping birds. Flicker on a branch stump, leaning
over, pecking upside down. From a bluff's dry dirt,
growing horizontally, fifty red saplings.
Leaning from the garbage truck as from a sailboat.
The gods no longer speak to us, but they still sing.

H.L. Hix

***“The Shadow of the Machine has Drifted
Past” - Karel Appel***

The old man's left index finger has a bent last joint, but he still makes the bar chords. More evidence that our world is cursed with repletion, blessed with waste. The blind boy beside him with a pack of Winstons taps time to “Foggy Mountain Breakdown.” A man stakes a sign with his heel: *For Sale Rides Real Good*. Cell phones through open windows, and a mockingbird imitates their ringing. A box turtle gets stuck at a fence.

The grass has already lost but the war goes on between the clover and the dirt. Two goldfinches bob to the seed with one rhythm. Line of trees in a light fog at sunrise change colors by distance: green, blue, silver, white. And in Newark a dozen ships' ghosts sunk in mud rust into dark outlines.

H. L. Hix's recent books include *Wild and Whirling Words: A Poetic Conversation*, *As Easy As Lying: Essays on Poetry*, and a poetry collection called *Surely As Birds Fly*.

Poems by Christine Casson***Impromptu***

She stands there, ironing. Her arm moves back
and forth — her body slightly bent — with each
drag across the board and then a pause ...

She shifts the shirt's yoke, adjusts its angle
on the arm; water splutters into steam;
then pressure, slow draw until the wrinkles

disappear. She's staked her claim in the living room.
She likes to move her work around the house —
her sewing she can do most anywhere —.

Bored, she puts a record on; chords of sound —
a piano's hammered keys — released,
rise with the vapor's hiss, then veer and fall.

She rests her iron on its heel, recalls
her own impulse to sing, to feel the tones
vibrating in her throat, the firm funnel

of her chest supporting air, and then
the letting go, each note freed to settle
in the world with other ordinary sounds.

She listens to the cello's quick response,
the increase and diminishment of strings
that speak under the pressure and release

of rosined bow. Its weighty speech awakes
her need to sing. She draws in breath...and more...
resists the tautness of her sluggish lungs,

her torso now an amphora of air
that, pliable, controls the steam of breath
that burgeons, lifting from her throat

to fill the room. The fullness of her chest
is more than this. The late-day sun persists
through half-drawn shades, reddening, it burnishes

CHRISTINE CASSON

the walls, drifts in lusted portions on the floor
like the portioning of breath that resonates,
augments, and falls, flares on the discarded shirt.

Apophatic

It's quiet—so quiet—these few hours
snatched near the close of an afternoon--

no screeching children, no cars, no birds,
no conversation, everything settled

into itself, the earth holding its breath,
as though it ceased turning; neither heavy clouds

nor sun, but steady light, dull glow of gray,
no rain, no certain wind, an untranslated

pause, this exhale of curtains a shallow
breathing that won't last. My body listens hard,

drinks of this rich calm, almost too fragile
to hold, or hear, this fullness that floods all,

my senses soothed by this potent drug
that whispers in my ear, a haunting voice

that wears away—my hunger to be sated
only when I lie down late, in dark, alone.

Christine Casson is currently working on a study of the poetic sequence titled *Sequence and Time Signature: A study in Poetic Orchestration* and is also writing a sequence of poems about composer Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel. Most recently her poetry has appeared in the *South Dakota Review*, and her essays on Native-American literature have appeared in *Celebration of Indigenous Thought and Expression*. She teaches at Emerson College, and is Executive Coordinator of PEN New England.

JACQUELINE KOLOSOV

Poems by Jacqueline Kolosov

Swimming Off Jericho Beach

The waves carry me
 toward the garden
 of my grandmother. In the shifting
light, seaweed becomes peonies, and
 the water whispers softly
 so that I hear her voice
 within the voice of the sea.

 Here I find dogs swimming out
to fetch driftwood, and a girl
 stretching legs strong enough
 to dance the swan in Tchaikovsky's ballet.
Further out soars the high, white bird
 whose wings return
 the ocean's rhythms. He is keeping watch
over the girl and the lovers on shore,
 over all the children, young and old,
 surf yearning toward brown ankles.

 The ocean asks me
 to come inside
 where the small girl grows
 a tail of incandescent green
and swims into silences
 withing the ocean
 and ourselves.

 Deep within
the ocean, my grandmother is singing,
 and the small girl reaches
 for my hand.

Stitches

She remembers the crinkled edges of her father's eyes
when he spoke to her in his Reading-Aloud voice;

the steeped-in smell of the kitchen where
her mother hummed, the stove scrambled eggs,

and the tiptoe-nearness of cupboard meant
spoonfuls of jam and a mouth furry with peanut butter-

bread crumbs. She remembers the shimmering silent
feel of a sky brimful of stars. How she felt

all glossy and silver bright, a bubble floating
above the moss green land. Falling

asleep with moonbeams on her eyelids
and the let-me-in-voice of the sea when the sun slipped

out of sight. How she waited for the sea fingers
to slip in through shuttered windows

to share secrets with her. When sudden thunder brought
a sister to her bed, how they stayed up all night

telling stories, basking in that hunkered-down, bunked-in
feeling, all flannel warmth inside. She remembers

the soft hips of a grandmother who took her
to ride on trains, her ancient knowledge

sharp as the peppers pickling in glass jars on the sill.
And the wheat-colored haunches the dog played like a banjo.

How she loved the sinking-down feel of his coat
on slick nights when it rained,

the amber brightness of his eyes when she licked
a dripping ice cream cone. She remembers

when she didn't need to color in the silences, when
words stood upright. The everyday had happy edges then

JACQUELINE KOLOSOV

And the fractures in the good china. On white
tablecloth days, they ate off the good plates anyway.

Jacqueline Kolosov's poems have recently appeared in *Poetry*, *The Malahat Review*, *The Texas Review*, and *Cimarron Review*. Poems are forthcoming in *Passages North*, *Windhover*, and *A Room of One's Own*. She has also published two chapbooks: *Danish Ocean* (Pudding House Press, June 2003) and *Faberge* (Finishing Line Press, October 2003). Currently, she teaches creative writing and literature at Texas Tech University. She recently decided to return to her maiden name for her publications. She has published previous work under the name of Jacqueline McLean.

Poems by *Jenny Factor*

She Said to Me

The difference between the lived life and the slept life
is not the chipped ivory picture hung-or not hung-on the wall,

Or choosing to bring home the periwinkle bra
instead of the white one-

The difference is a quality of attention. The difference is
always knowing where Death is. Mislplace death,

and the ants in your kitchen matter, you'll care
that there are crumbs in your son's bed, your hair

needs a trim, and his socks don't match.
The slept life dithers on in a kind of otherly-

centered attention like a Viking compass, a lode stone afloat
in a bowl on a boat, bobbing directional yet directionless,

personally landless, othering, othering-
The slept life repels like North to North, retells like

your lover's favorite story, unspells like a malaprop
you chose only because it rhymes. So when you pass Death

on your drive, and stare into his street corner, his cardboard
sign, behind the wheel that's yours to turn,

you'll feel alive. Smile kindly.

JENNY FACTOR

Letting Go of What's Already Departed

Love, we grow old
unloved by degrees.
The hand curled to
the breakfast mug

spills coffee now.
Its amber gold
stripes the table
that we bought

when we were new,
while in the hall
a charleston chest
slumps like a hulking adolescent.

We lost the key
many years ago.
Our lives are this:
Row of fringes,

Row of doors
to rooms that are ours
we can't get into.
Shut by dust, and laziness,

And time. Mine,
and mine, and also mine.
My love, and my shadow,
my dailiness, my regret,

We watch light
lather the table, its suds
are lilac forgiveness.
We are not ended yet.

Jenny Factor's first book, *Unraveling at the Name* (Copper Canyon Press, 2002) was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award.

Poems by *Mike Alexander*

City Life

If asked to relocate,
you could set up shop
in the city or Ur,

teach yourself
to read & write
cuneiform,

apply to work
for bureaucrats
housed in the sky,

match jars
of jasmine oil
to a bill of lading,

ignore the roar
of restless camels
at night,

drink grain
with gods
on holy days,

follow weekly
installments
of Gilgamesh,

blame nomadic
tribes for cutbacks
at the temple,

covet new
metals, Cretan
axe-heads, saffron,

sleepwalk the long
shadows of
sandstone giants,

MIKE ALEXANDER

an abacus your palm
pilot, a clay tablet
your laptop,

the sky
turning above you
your cable,

a hundred thousand
stars, & nothing
to watch.

Gordium

We knew his greatness
 lived more in his sword
 than in expertise
 — what could we say?

His legions on either
 leg of our harbor let
 neither legend nor fact
 travel inward or out.

So when Alexander said,
 surrender up your mysteries,
 this, we said, Lord, is our
 holiest of treasures.

We told him
 an ox-yoke our first king
 knotted in a strap of hide
 held our city's luck

We bade him
 undo the knot, knowing
 in our antiquity,
 it could not be undone.

It was all of one piece,
 wound taut unto itself
 All ages had confirmed
 its integral adhesion.

We challenged, then
 stepped back, expectant,
 together we chanted
 a tuneless lyric.

*All that is atom,
 or water, or fire,
 All that is twine is tied
 into the knot.*

He stood & studied

MIKE ALEXANDER

the puzzle we'd presented him,
 & we knew he'd
 soon kneel down to begin.

Other men had
worked their fingers into its
 strands & counter-strands
 for hours, or days.

 Not Alexander.
 His philosophic pose
unsheathed into
 an arc of light;

his sword, his hideous—
 his sun-forged sword!
One stroke & the known world
 dropped to the floor

 like a serpent, slain.
 He stepped over
the several pieces &
 left us to our ruins.

What could we then say,
 when, as old men,
we saw a murderous new
word in the face of a new man?

Mike Alexander works in Trust Services for a major bank. He also is an associate editor for lyric poetry review, and a moderator for the on-line sonnet workshop at Sonnet Central, & coordinator of a weekly all poetry open mic in Houston. His work has appeared in several small journals, including *Texas Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Link*, *Curbside Review*, & *Edge City Review*.

Poems by Rhina P. Espaillat

Next-to-Last Song

Singer of mortal songs
in flight from kissing to kissing,
where shall you go when your nest
made of flesh and bone is missing?

Harp of five strings that play
in praise of this borrowed light,
what hand will caress you then,
fallen to endless night?

Oh setting of copper suns,
ocean of steel and tin,
oh moon that goes grieving by,
bleeding a silver skin!

Oh maples half dressed in bronze,
sulphur, scarlet in the wood,
tongues of flame that sing today
tomorrow silent for good!

Peacock

At the small local farm where toddlers walk
bravely with geese but circumspect with sheep,
behind a fence that neither wants to leap,
a ghostly clamor, an unearthly squawk
rings like a summons from some royal keep.

And there, far more than kingly, self-absorbed
as any god, and gorgeous as the night,
this barnyard apparition spreads his orbed
and iridescent plumes not meant for flight,
but for display and sacrificial rite.

What can these children make, with their two eyes
apiece, of countless staring pupils pinned,
unblinking, to his heavenly disguise,
which shudders when he struts through dung that lies
amid shed feathers puffed by a rank wind?

Eden the morning after comes to mind:
the maker strolls alone among the trees
heavy with unplucked fruit, all left behind
by his lost creatures in the void he sees,
in whose unpeopled light he is confined.

But here the metaphor, of course, breaks down—
as metaphors should know enough to do—
leaving the children safe in our small town,
under diaphanous September blue
innocent now of all it ever knew.

Rhina P. Espailat has five poetry collections out, including *Where Horizons Go*, winner of the 1998 T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, and *Rehearsing Absence*, which won the 2001 Richard Wilbur Award. Additional awards include several from the Poetry Society of America and the New England Poetry Club, as well as the *Oberon Prize* and the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award. She lives in Newburyport, MA, where she directs the Powow River Poets and coordinates the Newburyport Art Association Annual Poetry Contest.

Poems by *Dick Davis*

Cythère

To S-G.H.

Though we can start with Botticelli-
The blonde hair streaming, and the eyes
Fixed in provocative surprise,
Her hand strategic on her belly-

Your avatars dissolve and morph;
Flesh volatized to soul, the whore
Whose flesh is cash and something more,
Punk wraith, unwieldy Willendorf,

The skinny-dipper at Lake Tahoe,
The floating world, la belle poitrine
Of a long dead Minoan queen,
The plenitude of Khajuraho...

But now, for me, you coalesce
As French, immediate, medieval,
Making improbably coeval
Iseut, Watteau, *Bonjour Tristesse*.

I see you now, your body bare
And welcoming, your eyes intense
With passionate intelligence.
Your hands in mine, adored Cythère.

DICK DAVIS

Hérédia

French was his mother's voice, sweet, close and warm,
Muffling the Spanish of their vast estate -
Their backwater baroquely out of date,
Time's flotsam from a long-forgotten storm.
Latin and Greek sustained him through the swarm
Of present truths his heart could not translate:
Paris would distance them: there the debate
Would poise contingency against pure from.

Paris returns the febrile compliment
And her Academician seeks the sea;
Sated with Rome and with the orient
He walks the barren cliffs of Brittany—
Gazing across the formless waves to where
The huge sun sinks beyond Cape Finistere.

Dick Davis is a Professor of Persian at Ohio State University. He has published seven collections of poetry; the most recent is "Belonging" (Swallow / Ohio University Press, USA, 2002; Anvil Press, UK, 2002) which was chosen as a Book of the Year by The Economist.

Poems by *Loren Graham*

Translation

I still don't know what happened then.

Suddenly, I found myself in an unknown place, lying under foreign sheets with a stranger's arms around me. I got up that day and dressed in another woman's garments and put on her leather shoes, long molded by the odd shape of her alien foot.

When I wore her tank tops, I could never keep her bra strap from showing on my shoulder. Her brushes made my hair come out in clumps, and her toothpaste wasn't my brand. Her mirrors reflected a face that resembled mine, but with the chin off somehow, the eyes a bit too far apart, the hair slightly long and never exactly the correct color.

Who was she, this stranger who was the original of my sudden and poor translation? Whose concealer and blush, whose eyeliner and lip gloss on the bathroom vanity? Whose underwear folded neatly and placed in the wrong drawer?

Whoever she was, she never returned.

In time, I let her husband hold me. I didn't know him, but the feeling coming from him was overpowering, and I pitied him being stuck there with me.

He didn't know I wasn't his wife.

LOREN GRAHAM

The Transformed

Once I had become someone else, how could you remain the same?

At times, I took you for my father, at times for the older brother who, long after I was grown, still treated me as a child.

Newly shaven, you smelled like the boy who was my high school life, who told me I was pretty, who devastated me at last.

Occasionally, you resembled the boss who paid me well and talked to my chest, the man who pursued me for months with such vehemence and bitterness.

Behind the reflection on your glasses, you turned into the young professor I worshipped, to whose class I always wore a short skirt, whose attention could render me unable to speak.

You became anyone that anyone I used to be, used to be in love with-my collection of fading images that never fade away, the strange faces on stamps from old letters, forever saved, but not to be answered.

Loren Graham teaches creative writing at Carroll College in Helena, Montana. His first book of poetry, *Mose*, was published in 1994 by Wesleyan University Press. The work published here is from a just-completed collection of sonnets and prose poems entitled *The Ring Scar*.

Poems by *John Poch*

The Shadow Men

The cedar shakes at evening took on
 an Edward Hopper glow, broken
 with the hard-edge shadows he made
 famous in paint. These shadows fled
 because of the hill a half-mile west.
 Shooting hoops was perfect: when I missed,
 sometimes, the ball careened toward
 the house, its downward sloping yard.
 Retrieving the ball, I'd pause, stand stunned
 at each new lack of light and want
 to miss this way again. I did,
 and further, into the flower bed
 against the house, but not on purpose.
 It was there I heard the scratching, nervous,
 coffin-trapped, from under the shakes.
 I guessed a bat when I heard the shrieks
 stretching from some daydream trauma.
 I was sure when I saw the guano
 in the bed below. I sat in the grass
 and waited, watched the little claws
 reaching out from between the shakes,
 then back in, not ready to wake.
 A different kind of cave and dark
 (out of de Chirico's early work)
 poured over the scene as when one dreams
 and wakes, slowly, and swallows the dream.

No neighbors, but if there were, they'd think-
 Affected poet, worshipping
 his house! He ought to mow the lawn.
 Quick glances toward the high hill-gone
 were the pinks and oranges of before,
 gone the long cloud-edge of fire.
 I thought, I can hardly see or hear.
 I tilted a little forward for fear
 I wouldn't clearly catch him catch
 the air; his claws shimmied the edge
 of the shake, a wing struggling his body
 must have been disjointed and putty-

JOHN POCH

soft to have fit. I blinked. He dropped
like that and caught the dark with soft
skin wings thin as a human eyelid.
Another scrambled down and fled,
and then eight more. I watched them pivot
about the yard about a minute,
another shadow coming on,
the full moon cold and high and strong.

To Glass

The dance next door with a dumbbell full of sand.
The girl across the lawn holds, in her hand,
suspended time. Her parents plant a tree.
Small shoulders pull against the gravity.
Her heavy dance: a shadow-laden reader
new to the window tax repeal, sun-feeder.
The neighbors hear her reeling--how she hellos
goodbyes and leans back like the humming cellos.

Cleaning the windows makes me feel like a god.
The scene out there is over when my breath
fuzzes. I roam the house to clean, feel odd.
O mirror, soldier full of holes, the spray
I spray on me, a candidate for death.
My teeth are stones around a flame I say.

John Poch is the director of creative writing at Texas Tech. His first book is called *POEMS*. He is the editor of *32 Poems Magazine*.

ROBERT WEST

Poems by *Robert West*

On a Hawkish Head of State Who Says His Favorite Political Philosopher Is Jesus

As always, some disciples disappoint.
Some can't pass up the bribe, and sell you out.
More difficult to judge are those who out
of hand praise all you say but miss the point.

In Memory

Let me hear
my name again
in my father's
father's voice,

let me answer
in the boy's voice
he would still know
by that name

Robert West's poems have appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Cortland Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and other magazines. He teaches English at Mississippi State University.

Poems by *William Thompson*

Mockingbird

How would those pilfered notes he heckles
the other birds with sound in English?

*Sing skies of couple-color glance...
O living hand this brightening muse...*

Except my versions lack his steadfast
Malice. His racket's always loudest

Over high rooftops, when he's twirling
Down again, like the last seed

Blown from a maple tree. He galls
His neighbors with their own songs' shreds,

But that won't do: he has to show
The skill in his contempt, the flair.

WILLIAM THOMPSON

Goose

Goose

(for Herman, at The Acres of the Golden Pheasant
bird hospital, Truro, Nova Scotia)

Decoyish until summoned
from balance of sleep,
your blinded patient lunged,
slipped on rubbery spatula feet

and, thrashing with one
wing, splashed its way out
from the beveled watertrough
onto damp dirt,

sniffed dogwise in semi-
circles, lip to the ground,
hissing us one step back except
for you, Herman, who'd strewn

the grain for it, muttering while it ate,
them goddam hunters, somebody ought to....

William Thompson teaches at Troy University. He has recently edited *Fashioned Pleasures: 24 Poets Play Bouts-Rimes with Shakespeare's Rhymes*, forthcoming from Parallel Press.

Poems by *Daniel Tobin*

Conchiglie

Thrilled, or oblivious, the meal bugs
circulate inside the pasta box,
for them the one true earthly paradise
hardly dreamt of in the provinces.

To have wakened into life
in the ecstasy of conchiglie,
each coin of fluent flour-paste
machine-cast, transfigured
into a seashell's perfect artifice--
edible trove, infinite loaf.

Do they hear as they slide
into the conch's sweet tunnel
the siren's song of an ocean
equal to their insect hearts?

The lid lifts, and out tumbles
the cosmos into a boiling sea.
Dazed survivors scramble
on the folding corners of their world,
while a few flayed swimmers
bob lifelessly in the oil's slick.

And the one who managed to lodge himself
deep in the recess of his dream?
We'll let him stay, swaddled
in sauce, before we eat him,
corpse in a deaf ear,
like any eminence or god.

DANIEL TOBIN

Marduk
(after the Babylonian)

Here is the true adamant and will of the world:
out of my mother's body I made the world.

To cut her in two as though gutting a fish,
that is once recipe for making a world.

From her eyes empty rivers, from her breasts mountains,
from the wound of my birth, the release of the world.

The snows are her siftings, each breeze her last breath
that wanders the roads like the lost of the world.

To save them from loss I raise up my cities,
each one a beacon, a map of the world.

On streets I have left no place for the errant
for in every home I alone light the world.

If the gods want to sleep, I will let them sleep
and make myself god, the lord of this world.

I am the grain, the plough cleaving its furrow.
I am the storm that floods the whole world.

I am the singular, and the dispersal.
I judge all the living and dead of the world.

These words were judged by god's judge and given:
whispers through walls, wind, another world.

Daniel Tobin's books of poems include *Where the World is Made* (co-winner of Katherine Nason Bakeless Poetry Prize, 1999) and *Double Life* (Louisiana State University Press, 2004). His poems have appeared in numerous journals, and have been anthologized in *The Norton Introduction to Poetry* and elsewhere. Among his awards are the Robert Penn Warren Prize, the Robert Frost Fellowship, and a NEA Fellowship in Poetry. He is presently Chair of the Writing, Literature, and Publishing Department at Emerson College in Boston.

Poems by *Steven P. Schneider*

Beachside

The beach bums lounge by the edge of the sea
Drinking beer and watching the girls go by.
What do they know of life's infinities?

The Gulf's waves pound the shore relentlessly
And the breezes blow inland towards the inlet side
While the beach bums lounge by the edge of the sea.

The gulls circle above, plummet, and arise
A fish in their mouths -- on the waves gulls glide
Inscribing in air life's infinities.

They practice the art of thinking themselves free
Lying in the sun and tanning their hides.
The beach bums lounge by the edge of the sea.

The ocean is a kind of majesty
For those who walk and see the world besides
Themselves to plunder life's infinities.

Is the life of the beach bum for you and me?
Drinking beers and lolling in the tide?
The beach bums lounge by the edge of the sea.
What do they know of life's infinities?

STEVEN P. SCHNEIDER

Tropicalized

You grow weary of the pastoral elegies to emptiness,
The way a crab burrows beneath the sand to dig an air hole.

You get up to walk the shoreline
Of the Gulf of Mexico
And look out at the horizon
Where you see Jimenez, Paz, and Vallejo coming towards you -
The body and soul of the vast poetry of the sea.

You remember the presence of nature
Is not a long-forgotten dream
Blown across the Laguna Madre
By the gulf-side breezes.

You want to take flight on the wings of a sandpiper,
You want to probe the depths of the seas like a dolphin.

Steven P. Schneider, Chair of the English Department at the University of Texas Pan-American, is a poet and critic. He is the author of five books, including *Prairie Air Show*, a collection of poems; a critical study entitled *A.R. Ammons and the Poetics of Widening Scope* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994); and the editor of the essay collection *Complexities of Motion: New Essays on A.R. Ammon's Long Poems* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999). His poems and articles have appeared in many journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *The Literary Review*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Tikkun*, and *Critical Quarterly*. He is the recipient of a Merit Fellowship from the Nebraska Arts Council and has lectured widely on American literature at nation and international conferences.

Poems by *Robert B. Shaw*

Willows by the River

Here comes a man to make a myth of us.

He lets his eye glide up from our gripping
 toe-knuckles, wondering up our dusky stems
 into the streaming leafmanes that the slightest
 wind excites to whispering, a mild
 voice to meld with the river's mild voice.
 He counts us: three, and says to himself, "Three sisters."
 Not for the first time, we notice how
 easy it is for us to overhear
 a pensive passerby in conversation
 with no one but himself. Would-be-explainer,
 he seems to know about us. Should we listen?
 Soon enough he tells how we were down here
 washing our hair when some unlucky fisherman
 saw us and decided to get fresh,
 which led us, when our honor was at stake,
 to call for Father (we were well connected).
 The classic way to balk unsought advances,
 the usual outcome: we armored in bark,
 he, transformed to one of those bottom feeders
 that had disdained his hook

It could have happened—
 something along those lines. We don't remember.
 Listening all this while as we have
 to what the river whispers, to our own
 answer when breezes bend us over the water,
 visits on us a trance quick to resume
 when other voices fade. We're flattered, though.
 It makes a pretty story. Looking at us.
 he could have seen us just as we are and said,
 oh, anything: "Three hula skirts on hatracks."

Memory

A book that has contrived to hide itself
from you for months turns up one afternoon
point-blank, as you reach for a nearby volume-
misshelved, of course, and who's to blame for that?
You bring it down and plant it on the table
under a decent light and open it
to where you think you'll find the passage you
were hoping for, ensconced in some eventful
middle chapter. But the spine is tight,
spring-loaded, you might think, so avidly
the pages rise whenever you lift your thumb
and flip back to the outset of the story,
determined that you not skip the beginning
without which, after all, nothing makes sense.

How commonplace it grows to lose your place
when every search withers to retrospection.
There by the window glazed against a view
you know by heart and rarely choose to look at,
the fanned pages practice recalcitrance,
harking back as if they were enraptured
atavists, or as if they gave themselves
up to a breeze you can't feel on your skin.

Robert B. Shaw teaches at Mount Holyoke College. His latest collection of poems, *Solving for X*, was published in 2002 by Ohio University Press as winner of the Hollis Summers Prize.

Poems by *William Wenthe*

Looking for the Marsh Wren

A cold front: the pond's surface shaved
 of its chanting flocks
 of geese; absent
 the green-wing teal's
 iridescent brow—
 their fitful whistlings
 like Spring frogs.

Today, sky we must live under
 on treeless tableland
 casts down several gray eyes
 where stretches thin
 the stocking-mask of cloud.
 My dog and I sit down
 on a dry chert bank

where creek clogs into pond.
 Brown reeds incise
 slate water, angles over matted,
 indecipherable as old
 papyrus. In reed thicket
 a chirr, a flutter—
 binoculars turn up

a shard of ice, a flash
 of styrofoam,
 a childhood wanting
 to inherit more
 than a land
 fraught with signs
 of refuge only.

Tremble at reed-margin,
 a ripple faints
 like the question—
 what meager sustenance
 supplies the precise
 beak, the feathered heart
 taut and small as a pearl?

Recording My Poems for My Father

When I sent my skinny paperback,
I knew it wouldn't weigh much
in his lumber-handler's hands;
that it would hover, a bluish smudge,
before eyes that once trued joints.

I suppose, then, it's only fitting
to sit in this room I've set up
in the back of a garage—my studio,
I like to call it, reaching
for the aura of his shop.

Every layer of insulation,
of drywall, wood, glass, caulk
and paint is a mistake
corrected. He, who made blocks
I played with as a child,

and the room where I slept,
could surely, though almost blind,
sense these uneven fissures
in the spackled seams of sheetrock—
having sold it for thirty-odd years.

Now I speak into a recorder,
that he may hear the lines
I've measured and joined
in my fashion: more than toys,
they're rooms I work and live in.

And to him? I rewind the tape, and listen—
the shock of my own voice
coming back from the little box,
outside of me now, a stranger,
yet still recognizably mine.

William Wenthe has two books of poems, *Birds of Hoboken* (Orchises, 1995, reprinted 2003), and *Not Till We Are Lost* (LSU Press, 2003). He teaches at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

David Mason

The language of the Gun

The Ludlow Massacre, April 20, 1914, was a major event in American labor history, yet too few remember it today. Its vandalized monument stands in a dry wasteland in southern Colorado, about a dozen miles north of the town of Trinidad. My novel, which climaxes at the massacre itself, is not concerned with making a political case about it. Rather, I wished to convey the lives of various Americans and their communities at the time: the immigrants trained in to work the mines, the WASPS and Latinos who had already been living there, the corrupt militia and the politicians. I wanted to bring their lost world to life and give it as much ground sense as I could.

Most of my characters are fictional, but the following excerpt, Chapter 8 of the novel, deals with two historical figures, the union leader John Lawson and the Greek immigrant Louis Tikas. The setting is the fall of 1913 just as the strike begins with its bloody confrontations. Baldwin-Felts detectives have killed a union organizer, Gerald Lippiatt, and Greek miners have responded in kind. This chapter is called "The Language of the Gun."

Tikas had seen the village of Segundo
west of Trinidad above the river,
its view of the snow-tipped Sangre de Cristo Mountains
sharp as a far-off picket of the gods.
That was where a band of his fellow Greeks
ambushed the mine guard, Robert Lee, and shot
him in the throat with buckshot. He bled to death
beside his cocked and loaded Winchester.

And Louis saw the corpse
of Gerald Lippiatt the night they came
to Trinidad, and knew the fight had started.
His job at first was to restrain the Greeks
who listened to him with untrusting eyes.
The killing at Segundo was bad news
of the sort he hoped to stop, but one man
could never cover every trouble spot.

He took his orders from a boss he liked,
John Lawson, tall and seasoned as a tree,

DAVID MASON

who knew the work and knew what justice was
and won men over with his measured speech.
Like Lawson he would be
ubiquitous as far as train and car
and horse and telephone would help him to
appear wherever trouble had erupted.

The strike demands were posted. First demand:
recognition of the union. Second:
a ten per cent advance on tonnage rates.
Third: an eight-hour work day for all laborers.
Fourth: pay for all narrow work and dead work.
Fifth: weight men elected by the miners.
Sixth: the right to choose the stores we trade in.
Seventh: enforcement of laws, and no more guards.

He'd heard what Mother Jones and wild Frank Hayes
had said of these demands—that they made sense.
He'd seen John Lawson nod his weathered head,
declaring steadily the first demand
was the one that John D. Junior would resist.
“A difference of philosophy,” said Lawson
to a trusted few. “He thinks philosophy
can win against our hunger and our grief.”

This in the union office on the day
nine thousand miners dropped their tools and struck.
And Louis listened with a racing pulse,
the sense of danger close.
“I'll meet you boys at Ludlow,” Lawson said,
shaking his organizers' hands. “The tents
will come from West Virginia. We'll set up
the big encampment by the railroad tracks.

You men bring up your crews and families.
Tikas, you organize your people, hear?
Get them to hide their guns, come peacefully
and be prepared to wait.
That's the hard part for us now—the waiting.
and when they bring the scabs, don't beat them up,

but talk some sense to them. You understand?
Our job's to stay the course and keep the peace."

And Louis left the meeting in his suit
and tie, a full head taller in his mind
for having found both pay and purpose here
in Trinidad. He met a band of Greeks,
telling them when to gather for the hike
north to Ludlow, promising them good shelter
and the weekly union pay.

"Think of Mother Jones," he told compatriots.

"If she can show such courage, so can we."

*

Lawson drove the union Model T,
black and rattling like a heap of tin cans,
over the rutted road, past dusty scrub
and lines of people hefting their possessions.
Some stopped at Forbes beneath the closing mines
where Lawson ordered men to set up shelters
any way they could. By the time he drove
across the railroad tracks at Ludlow

everyone he saw was soaked to the skin.
A storm had blown in from the west and north,
snuffing the sunlight, turning rain to sleet.
At the open ground where he had planned the camp
five hundred miners and their families
hunkered in the mud, surrounded by their luggage,
trying to shelter under oilskin, blankets-
whatever came to hand.

"The goddamn tents," said someone at his side.
"They haven't come. There's people leaving houses
up at the mines, hundreds more still coming
and we got nothing for them."

Lawson swore and leapt from the Model T
and splashed in his boot and jacket, giving orders.

DAVID MASON

Out here in open ground, exposed to weather
and fresh September blizzard, Lawson worked

with steady fury that made others join him,
propping the wooden platforms built for tents
to use as windbreaks, overturning pushcarts,
sending men back south to Trinidad
for wagons and supplies. And as he worked
he tried hard not to see their disappointment,
the way ideals came slumping to the mud
and fear of what they'd chosen grew with the cold.

*

Louis wore his brand new pair of puttees
bought at George Reed's mercantile on Main.
They made his suit look funny, but were good
for marching in the late September mud.
Behind him a ragged band of Greeks cursed
the close sky and soaking sleet, forged ahead
with heads bowed, their bare hands red and cold,
the high hills entirely obscured by cloud.

They stopped at Forbes and saw the immigrants
huddled and ruinous, a union man
unloading cans of kerosene for fires.
"Gamó to," said a Greek. "Fuck America.
"Fuck this weather. Fuck the union, the strike.
Fuck everything that fucking grandma said
about our fucking freedom. Fuck it all.
What did we come here for? For fucking ice?"

Louis called them close so they could hear him.
Bedraggled, cold, he was inclined to feel
agreement with the man's complaints. And yet
he thought of Lawson, who had gone ahead,
and told his people they should show the strength
of Greeks who fought Bulgarians in such snow.
"Think of our brothers still in Macedonia,
freezing for the fatherland.

We're strong like them. We know what suffering means.
 Don't let those union people see you whimper
 like women. Winter's early . When we get
 to Ludlow our friend John Lawson will have tents.
 He will have food and fires to warm your hands.
 Show pride. Brush off the snow and follow me!"
 And as he marched north Louis felt the line
 of sluggish Greeks as if he tugged them after.

Some carried rucksacks. Some had rifles slung
 across their shoulders. Some carried their clothes
 in sodden bags. When darkness tightened in
 and snow accumulated on the ground
 and Ludlow's flickering lights were still ahead,
 they crouched beneath a hill that blocked the wind,
 pressing together like farm animals
 for the little heat their tired bodies gave.

Now Louis cursed the union, cursed himself
 for wearing a flimsy jacket out of pride.
 Tomorrow would be better. It must be.
 Nothing could be worse than taking men
 out of their shelters for some promises
 he only half believed.
Tomorrow, he thought, kept by cold from sleeping,
 hearing the men beside him curse in Greek.

*

At the first corpse-colored light on snowy ground
 the men were up and moving, stomping boots
 and swinging arms to pump blood into them.
 Louis thought of Gus in Denver, coffee
 heating on a stove, the Scholar's warnings:
 "The union's got you now, my boy. Watch out."
 "*Eláte paidiá,*" he said. "Let's go."
 They marched past snowy rabbit brush and sage.

DAVID MASON

Now to their left the canyons cutting west
were silent, though the glow of coke ovens
bled from somewhere near the Berwind mines,
casting a pale orange light on low wet clouds.
They trudged beneath the store at Cedar Hill
and up the Ludlow street, its buildings silent,
till it seemed a moaning rose from all the mud
ahead, a rumbling mound beyond the tracks.

And it was not a hill. It was people,
a thousand of them shaking off wet snow
and breaking up their carts for kindling.
They were exposed and shivering, their eyes
as darkly disappointed as the Greeks'.
Disaster, Louis thought. *Symforá*. Chaos
of crying children, shouting men. Work crews
fumbling armloads of wood for oily fires.

John Lawson stood in woolen cap and boots
beside the Model T,
directing men to keep their spirits up,
and grimly smiled at the approaching Greeks.
"Glad you made it, Tikas. Don't look so sad.
We've had some trouble from the railroad men
refusing to transport our tents. What's wrong?
A little weather got you Cretans down?"

Wagons bearing cookstoves had arrived,
their heavy cargo moved by men to platforms
organized in rows. A little town
of rootless families were lighting fires
with stolen fuel. Lawson stooped to put an arm
around the young Greek's shoulders. "Get some soup
in your belly, something warm for your men,
and by nightfall they'll have their spirits back."

So Louis set to work and others followed.
In days the tents arrived, the weather turned,
the colony at Ludlow almost thrived
beneath the watchful eyes of Baldwin-Felts

and other guards who gathered out of range.
 Work parties went in groups to ward off beatings,
 and in the meeting tent John Lawson had
 an upright piano moved for sing-alongs.

Twelve hundred people lived here now—largest
 of the strike camps in the southern coal fields.
 When ground dried the men paced out a diamond
 for baseball games. Women strung laundry lines
 between the tents where twenty languages
 were spoken. Louis Tikas made his way,
 not only speaking for the Greeks, but also
 welcoming folk from every fatherland.

He was, with the Croatian, Mike Livoda,
 one of the right-hand men John Lawson used
 to run the camp. They set up phone lines, a tent
 for courtroom, another for a hospital,
 and that was where he met Pearl Jolly,
 the miner's wife who said that she could nurse
 and seemed to look at him with flirting eyes—
 this handsome Greek in his suit and new puttees.

The mine guards mounted searchlights on high ground
 and kept the strikers sleepless through the nights
 by playing beams across the tents, shooting
 rifles into the air and shouting curses.
 Tikas had a small tent to himself,
 a phone for calling Lawson in Trinidad.
 Some said they saw a woman in the searchlights
 dashing between the tents to be with Tikas.

Some said she wore the white dress of a nurse.

*

Gunfire echoed from the hills. Out of breath,
 a boy came running with the news: Mack Powell,
 a striker who got work on the Greens' ranch
 herding cattle, was hit by a stray bullet.

DAVID MASON

The Berwind guards were aiming for some Greeks
out stealing fire wood, and when they heard
they'd shot an unarmed, married man, they laughed
and told Powell's widow where to find his body.

A few days later Louis took his leave
to run an urgent errand up in Denver:
October 13, 1913, Tikas
raised his hand with other immigrants
and in the sight of all his Denver friends
became a citizen. Next day he marched
with Mother Jones to publicize the plight
of miners striking in the southern camps.

No time to waste. He kissed the granny's cheeks
and raced back on the train to Trinidad,
skillfully feigning innocence as guards
patrolled the aisles, eyes peeled for union men.
He met John Lawson in the union office.
"Fifty fellas just got jailed for picketing
here in town. I can't budge. You go to Forbes,
Louis, and tell me what they're up to there."

And Tikas, wanting nothing more than one
night's freedom in his solitary tent,
a brief liaison with the willing nurse,
hopped a north-bound freight and left the rails
to join men huddled in the camp at Forbes.
"They got a secret weapon," one reported.
"Steel plates on a car they call the Death Special.
They claim we shot at them, and now they aim

to mow us down first chance they get." That night
he got his broken sleep, a Yankee now
on the plank floor of a tent full of men
who snuffed their lamps and waited in the dark,
nudged each other when they could hear a car
above them on the hill.

"That's the Baldwin-Felts," a man named Ure
declared in a voice made reedy by his fear.

They woke to gunfire somewhere up the canyon,
 maybe close to where they'd moved their women.
 Louis looked at men who hadn't slept
 and felt his spirits dampened as he had
 the day he led the Greeks to Ludlow. Now
 he opened a tent flap and stepped outside
 and saw the strangely armored car, the guns,
 and men observing across open ground.

"Careful," said Old Man Ure. "These boys is mean
 and they's just looking for a reason to shoot.
 They know we ain't as strong as the Ludlow camp.
 They aim to break us up-one camp at a time."
 Louis saw that one of the guards had left
 the car and crossed the field, waving a white flag.
 Impulsively he started toward the man.
 "I wouldn't do that if I was you," said Ure.

But Louis kept on walking—Lawson said
 they had to keep the peace and he would keep it.
 The air was cool despite the early sun
 and he felt strangely unafraid. The man
 approaching him had strapped a gunbelt on
 over an unraveling sweater, his hat
 tipped back so Louis saw his narrow face,
 a flag in one hand, bottle in another.

"You speak English?" said the man, who stopped
 an arm's length off. "You want a drink?" He held
 the bottle out and Louis, who had had
 no breakfast, took it to his mouth and tasted
 whiskey for the first time in all his life.
 "So," said the guard. "You like that? English?"
 "Yes," said Louis. "I am interpreter."
 He drank again and passed the bottle back.

The Guard wiped it with his flag. He too drank.
 "Well, look out, son. We are liable to shoot.
 You understand me?" Louis felt his blood

DAVID MASON

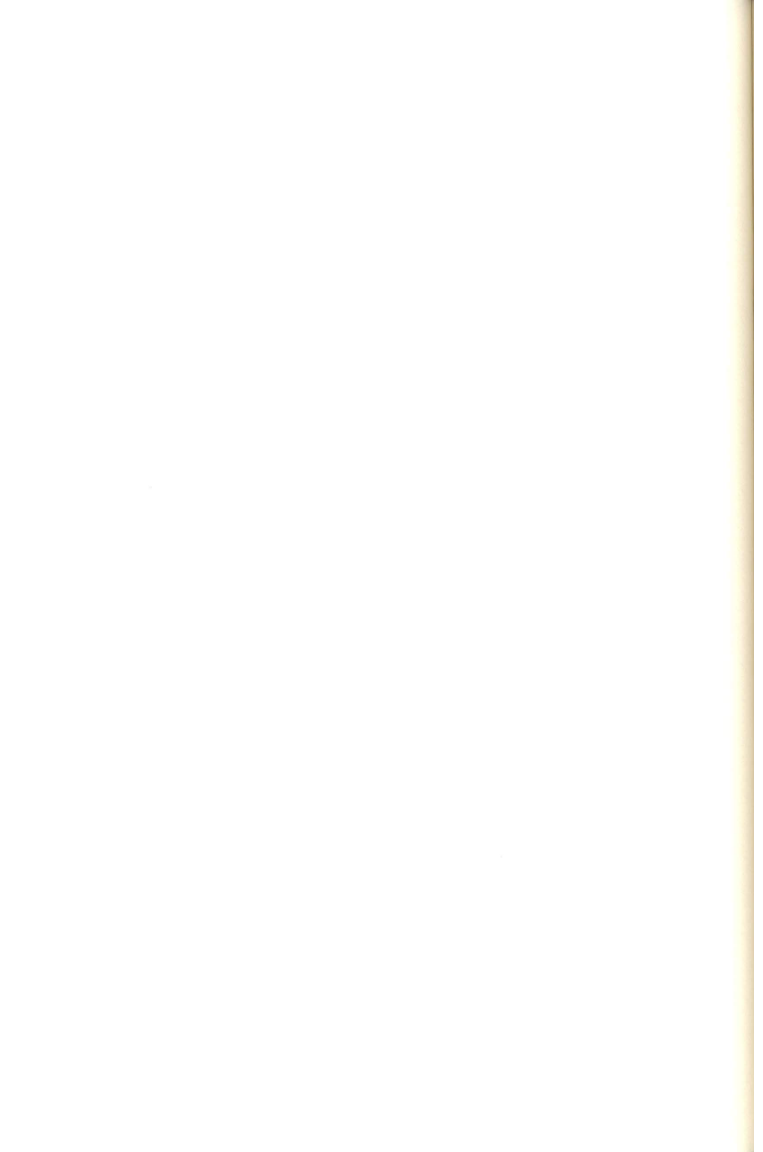
stand still, or seem to flow into the field,
all comprehension gone. "Excuse me, please?"
he said. "Excuse me?" And the guard: "I'd run
if I was you." He turned
and started walking back to the line of men.

Louis ran. He saw the tents ahead,
Heard his own quick breaths and the whipping grass
and then the snap of bullets past his head.
Before he knew it, Old Man Ure had grabbed
his wrist and yanked him up the slope. They drove
through an open flap, and Louis curled up tight
behind a stove. Someone made a noise,
and then he knew that noise was his own scream.

Bullets cut the tent. Across the field
the TAK-TAK-TAK was hardly noise enough
for all the havoc in the camp, bullets
hitting cookstoves, knocking stovepipes loose,
tossing coffee pots and china urns
in pieces everywhere. And then the screams
were coming too from other men in tents
not far away. And then the shooting stopped.

A yell went up across the field, as if
a crowd of cowboys had just joined a dance,
and distant laughter mingled with the screams
inside the tents. Louis looked at Ure
who shook his beard and seemed to mutter prayers.
"You like that?" a guard called across the field.
"You tell folks you just met the Death Special.
We'll keep at it till you boys leave the camp."

More shooting came, sporadic, just enough
to pin them down, but Louis crawled out back
beneath the canvas, snaking over mud
until he reached another tent. He heard
rain pattering on the cloth, now and then
another bullet ricocheting off





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