



# Inscape

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**Inscape 2001**  
**An Anthology**

**Pasadena City College**  
**Pasadena, California**

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**2001**

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**STAFF**

Michelle Angelini  
Ryanne Carroll  
Gabriel Garcia  
Annie Wong

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## Poet of The Year



### CATHY SONG

With knowledge of both Eastern and Western cultures, Cathy Song's poetry is a delicate blend of the two cultures, as she was raised in a multi-cultural family. She was born in Honolulu in 1955 to a Chinese-American mother and Korean-American father. In childhood, Cathy lived with her family on a plantation in Central Oahu. Just before she entered high school, her family moved to Honolulu.

In 1977, after two years at the University of Hawaii, Cathy earned her Bachelor's Degree in English Literature at Wellesley College. Furthering her education, she earned her M.A. in Creative Writing in 1981 from Boston University. Cathy Song's writing voice is that of the Hawaiian Asian-American woman, with her inspiration coming from her family, heritage, and interests. As much of her writing comes from personal experience, she uses herself and the females in her family as the basis of her poems — mother, daughter, and grandmother. These characters exist in familiar settings of Hawaiian sugar cane fields and college campuses. Yet, while these figures are the basis of her writing, Song additionally alludes to American artist, Georgia O'Keefe and Japanese painter, Kitagawa Utamaro. Adding cultural diversity, in her poem *School Figures*, the poet makes reference to painters Constable Hokusai, Mondrian, and Audrey Hepburn, of *Roman Holiday* fame. With mention of such people, Cathy Song declares in her poetry a desire to write outside the area of her own world and ethnicity.

Song now lives and teaches in Hawaii. Her works include several books she authored and others she co-edited. *Picture Bride* captures the essence of the custom of women coming to this country with only a photograph of themselves as an introduction to their future husbands. Four sections of this poem are named after Georgia O'Keefe. *Frameless Windows, Squares of Light* mirrors the comment in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. Song puts it this way, "what frames the view is the mind in the diamond pinpoint light of concentration tunneling into memory, released by the imagination." With *School Figures*, Cathy brings readers current on her poetry aesthetic and continues perfecting her work, as figure skaters on ice regularly practice their skills. Cathy Song and Juliet S. Kono co-edited *Sister Stew* (1991), a collection of poems and fiction about Hawaiian women. Her latest collection *The Land of Bliss* will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in the fall of 2001.

## WHY I WRITE

I used to believe that writing was an act of existence. I used to believe that every time I took pen to paper to create a poem, I was declaring quite loudly and grandly to the world that I existed. I'm not sure why I needed to declare myself in such a way, as if I were a rather spoiled child who needed attention. How ignorant really as if I didn't already have all the attention I needed – my fortunate life and the intricate web of connections that enabled me to love others as well as to be loved in return. Still, it didn't seem quite enough somehow. Like the spoiled child who has all that she wants and yet wants more. I wanted others to see what this creative self had made, to hold it up to the world for approval, to be admired, praised, and justly rewarded.

How wrong my views were!

Writing is an act of existence but not this limited and finite one, where success is measured in terms of awards and grants, reading tours, publication with prestigious houses, and an endless stack of fan mail. And as long as I held on to these views, writing was a burden. I had forgotten the original joy. I remained stuck in the realm of ingratitude – my own – because there would always be someone better or greater, more talented, more praised by these limited and finite set of conditions.

Writing is an act of one's spiritual existence and for that there can be no other reward than the sense of overwhelming gratitude and appreciation when the poem you have been struggling with resolves itself in a moment of clarity. This poem, the one you have been writing all your life, is not the poem that will bring you fame and fortune – at best, it will be read by a handful of readers who have also contributed their offerings to some well meaning journal – but this poem that you have been struggling with all your life is the one that will bring you the deepest sense of serenity. The soul speaking, the message getting through, and you the translator, neither gifted nor special, just fortunate to have hit the right pitch. Be grateful for this poem, the poem you will write all your life. Be grateful for the struggle and the certainty that it will be there again tomorrow, waiting for you to hear it. This poem that you have been writing all your life is just right for you.

## PICTURE BRIDE

She was a year younger  
than I,  
twenty-three when she left Korea.  
Did she simply close  
the door of her father's house  
and walk away. And  
was it a long way  
through the tailor shops of Pusan  
to the wharf where the boat  
waited to take her to an island  
whose name she had  
only recently learned,  
on whose shore  
a man waited,  
turning her photograph  
to the light when the lanterns  
in the camp outside  
Waialua Sugar Mill were lit  
and the inside of his room  
grew luminous  
from the wings of moths  
migrating out of the cane stalks?  
What things did my grandmother  
take with her? And when  
she arrived to look  
into the face of the stranger  
who was her husband,  
thirteen years older than she,  
did she politely untie  
the silk bow of her jacket,  
her tent-shaped dress  
filling with the dry wind  
that blew from the surrounding fields  
where the men were burning the cane?

– CATHY SONG

## THE WHITE PORCH

I wrap the blue towel  
after washing,  
around the damp  
weight of hair, bulky  
as a sleeping cat,  
and sit out on the porch.  
Still dripping water,  
it'll be dry by supper,  
by the time the dust  
settles off your shoes,  
though it's only five  
past noon. Think  
of the luxury: how to use  
the afternoon like the stretch  
of lawn spread before me.  
There's the laundry,  
sun-warm clothes at twilight,  
and the mountain of beans  
in my lap. Each one,  
I'll break and snap  
thoughtfully in half.

But there is this slow arousal.  
The small buttons  
of my cotton blouse  
are pulling away from my body.  
I feel the strain of threads,  
the swollen magnolias  
heavy as a flock of birds  
in the tree. Already,  
the orange sponge cake  
is rising in the oven.  
I know you'll say it makes  
your mouth dry  
and I'll watch you  
drench your slice of it  
in canned peaches  
and lick the plate clean.

So much hair, my mother  
used to say, grabbing  
the thick braided rope  
in her hands while we washed  
the breakfast dishes, discussing  
dresses and pastries.  
My mind often elsewhere  
as we did the morning chores together.  
Sometimes, a few strands  
would catch in her gold ring.  
I worked hard then,  
anticipating the hour  
when I would let the rope down  
at night, strips of sheets,  
knotted and tied,  
while she slept in tight blankets.  
My hair, freshly washed  
like a measure of wealth,  
like a bridal veil.  
Crouching in the grass,  
you would wait for the signal,  
for the movement of curtains  
before releasing yourself  
from the shadow of moths.  
Cloth, hair and hands,  
smuggling you in.

– CATHY SONG

## BEAUTY AND SADNESS

*for Kitagawa Utamaro*<sup>1</sup>

He drew hundreds of women  
in studies unfolding  
like flowers from a fan.  
Teahouse waitress, actresses,  
geishas, courtesans and maids.  
They arranged themselves  
before this quick, nimble man  
whose invisible presence  
one feels in these prints  
is as delicate  
as the skinlike paper  
he used to transfer  
and retain their fleeting loveliness.

Crouching like cats,  
they purred amid the layers of kimono  
swirling around them  
as though they were bathing  
in a mountain pool with irises  
growing in the silken sunlit water.  
Or poised like porcelain vases,  
slender, erect and tall; their heavy  
brocaded hair was piled high  
with sandalwood combs and blossom sprigs  
poking out like antennae.  
They resembled beautiful iridescent insects,  
creatures from a floating world.<sup>2</sup>

Utamaro absorbed these women of Edo<sup>3</sup>  
in their moments of melancholy  
as well as of beauty.  
He captured the wisp of shadows,  
the half-draped body  
emerging from a bath; whatever  
skin was exposed  
was powdered white as snow.

A private space disclosed.  
Portraying another girl  
catching a glimpse of her own vulnerable  
face in the mirror, he transposed  
the trembling plum lips  
like a drop of blood  
soaking up the white expanse of paper.

At times, indifferent to his inconsolable  
eye, the women drifted  
through the soft gray feathered light,  
maintaining stillness, the moments in between.  
Like the dusty ash-winged moths  
that cling to the screens in summer  
and that the Japanese venerate  
as ancestors reincarnated;  
Utamaro graced these women with immortality  
in the thousand sheaves of prints  
fluttering into the reverent hands of keepers:  
the dwarfed and bespectacled painter  
holding up to a square of sunlight  
what he had carried home beneath his coat  
one afternoon in winter.

– CATHY SONG

1. Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806), a Japanese printmaker whose sensuous portraits of women were among the first Japanese art to attain popularity in the west.

2. Utamaro's pictures were "called 'pictures of the floating world' because of their preoccupation with the pleasure of the moment" [Song's note].

3. "Present-day Tokyo" [Song's note].



❖ *Honorable Mention – Poetry* ❖

**BIORAP**

Businessman  
2 busy 2 play  
with a  
generation of  
procrastination  
lingering in  
coffee shops  
across the  
nation.  
Waiting around  
4 something  
2 happen sometime  
like rocks  
that can talk.  
Stanford graduate  
2 lazy 2 play  
with a  
son of  
his own  
he rather  
be on  
his.com  
Making bills  
2 pay the bills  
2 Bill Clinton  
2 Bill Gates  
2 let the eagle fly  
on Fridays.  
Businessman  
2 busy 2 play  
baseball on Sundays  
with son  
rather play  
2 mistresses  
and a wife like  
2 whores

4 bills with  
feathers.  
Businessman  
2 BMW M3  
4 2 mistresses a wife  
and a son  
but son rather  
be  
bus rider paying extra  
25 cents  
than have a  
Bio like a businessman  
2 busy 2 play  
with a  
generation of  
procrastination  
lingering in  
coffee shops  
across the  
nation.

– CESAR GALDAMEZ

❖ *Honorable Mention – Poetry* ❖

**BEALE STREET**

In the birthplace of rock,  
In the birthplace of blues,  
People leave their work,  
They've paid their dues.

They don't head home,  
They head to the street.  
Crazy Johnny on guitar.  
On drums, One-eyed Pete.

The sun goes down,  
The lights come up.  
They put out a hat,  
Or sometimes a cup.

It's busy for a Friday,  
But the hat is bare.  
Some walk by,  
Others just stare

Pete told me,  
Later that night,  
It's not about money,  
They'll do alright.

There is no question  
Where I want to be  
Life on Beale Street,  
Memphis, Tennessee

– RICHARD CRUNELLE

❖ *Inscape Poetry Award* ❖

**FLOATING...**

In the palm of your hand,  
In the center of your soul,  
I lie naked, deliberately, staring into the moon

Hoping to be the first to confuse you.  
And complicate Hale Bop's overrated

Glory:

"In a while," you say, "You'll become a star!"

"Any day," I say, "I'll become your only constellation..."

– RAHIMAH HERD

❖ *Honorable Mention – Prose* ❖

**STAGES**

*(Alzheimer)*

I have been so depressed lately. I know my dear sweet Jake is watching over me from up above, but it's not the same. I miss him terribly. There is no one of my generation left. A person needs someone to talk to, someone who cares, and someone who knows about the memories one accumulates after so many, many years.

*Sitting before the mirror she studied her reflection, concentrating on the face before her. Those eyes, she thought, do not belong to me. They are so sad and pathetic. She stood, still looking at the eyes, mesmerized by their depth. It was like a tug-a-war, trying to stop searching those eyes. Each time she would attempt to look at the full reflection, her eyes were pulled back up to meet those now accusing, penetrating eyes in front of her.*

Foolishness! Who is in control here? I squeezed my eyes shut, lowered my head and only then did I dare to look at the body that belonged to the head which harbored those mysterious eyes. My first reaction was to turn away in total disbelief. The body I had glimpsed was completely foreign to me. Fear gripped my heart. Weakness overcame me. Dropping down on the chair, I instinctively covered my face with my hands in the hopes that this intruder would disappear.

Moments passed before I was able to able to regain some of my composure. Somewhat shaky but determined, my hands still before my face, I spread my fingers apart so that I might peer through them. In this way I was able to see if she was still in the room. It finally dawned on me that this was the only explanation. This woman had very quietly entered my room and was at this very moment standing behind me. Yes, that was it, she was actually here with me. I know that now because she was also peering through her fingers and looking straight at me. This person actually had the gumption to be mocking me. I gave her my look of pure disapproval and do you know she gave me the same look. Her expression was so comical that despite my apprehension I had to laugh. Being as to how she seemed to be no more

than a mocking bird, I was not in the least surprised to see her laugh right back at me. This lady was not so frightening after all. The poor thing, she had to be well into her eighties. Maybe, just maybe, she wasn't one of them. I am weary of this silliness. Whoever this poor old lady might be, she may as well go off to bother someone else. I have too much on my mind to be bothered with her peek-a-boo nonsense. If they sent her in here to try to scare me, I am determined to make them fail.

I do wish my Jake was here. I know if anyone can make sense of all this tomfoolery, he certainly could. My poor sweet *bethrothed*. Jake has got to be frantic with worry about my kidnapping. He is probably with my parents even as I sit here thinking of him. Mom and Daddy say we are too young to get married. They do not believe we are old enough to know what true love is all about. Oh, but they are wrong. I mean after all they were married when they were only sixteen and eighteen years old. We have finally graduated and I can hardly wait to elope. It's so romantic. We've been going together since the sixth grade, and I love him more and more everyday. Why, we even sat in the back seat of his father's car one night. We held hands and talked about all the things we would do after we get married. Yes, we even talked about making love and having children. He wants a boy and I, of course, want a girl. We agreed to disagree, for the time being, on what their names would be. The best times we had though, were when we would go to the corner drugstore and sit sipping a suicide, out of two straws while staring into each others eyes. Boy, Mr. Amos may have been old, but he sure knew how to mix a killer suicide. He would mix every flavor of pop he had into one fantastic coke.

I wish someone would find me. I am getting a headache trying to figure out where I am and why I am here. I know these people that have taken me are not too terribly clever. The woman of this house keeps calling me mom. My God, she is much older than I... now that would be something to beat all. I can hear the report on the radio, "Young girl has baby twice her age." Enough already, I have got to think this through seriously. I've never seen these people before in my life. I really don't recall how I became their prisoner. But then, that really doesn't matter now. Why? Maybe they have me confused with someone

else. They certainly couldn't hope to get a worthwhile ransom for me. My goodness, my daddy had to give up his Garrett snuff for a whole month just so he could buy the material for my graduation dress. Why an outing for our family is to pile into Daddy's old Mercury, drive out to the airport, park and watch the planes land and take off. We certainly do not have money laying around the house. I mean, we don't exactly live high on the hog, although daddy did raise a sow or two in his time.

Where is my mommy and daddy? I don't like these ole baby sitters. Why couldn't my sister stay home with me? She's old enough. I like to play with her. Sometimes we have water fights. Daddy puts the bathtub under the pump and fills it up. We get empty cans and put water in them and throw it on each other. But we can only do it when it gets hot.

Oh, look at the pretty mirror. I'll look in it and see if Alice is in there like in the book mommy read to me. Uh uh! You're not Alice, you're somebody's old granny. Go away and tell Alice to come out and play London Bridges All Fall Down. I'm sorry, I'm supposed to be nice to old people and I never said please. Please.

I'm tired and I'm scared but I'm not going to sleep till they come home. I will just lay down a little bit. Oh my, this bed is too big for me. Ha ha, like Goldilocks in the three bears house. I'm not going to sleep. I'll just fool the baby sitters so they'll leave me alone. I think they locked the door so I can't get out. I don't feel good. I want my mommy. I guess that makes me a scaredy cat 'cause I want my mommy to come and get me right now. I tried to get out the window but it was locked. If only I could get out, maybe a nice policeman could tell me how to find my house. It's on a street with lots of trees and my tree has a swing in it. Daddy made it for me.

I tried to get out of the house but they keep me locked in. What did I do to these people to make them treat me like this. I just want to get away from them. I have to find Mommy. But I think I waited too long. They tricked me. They told me we were going for a nice ride but they took me to this really big building with lots of people in it. It was kinda fun riding in the tall box that goes up and down when you push the buttons. But they left me there. Now I don't think anyone will find me. When it gets dark no one comes to tuck me in and tell me a story. Sometimes

I fall asleep and when I wake up it is daytime. Then those people come in my room. They stick me with things and make me hurt more. Sometimes I cry and they get mad at me and tell me I'm not a baby. One day a man came and told me if I didn't act right he was going to feed me in my arm. I know he can't put food in my arm. They all think I'm silly. Everybody wears white around here. Mommy said white was for angels but I don't like these kinds of angels. They're not nice and don't sing music like they do up in the sky. My little red wagon is there too. I give my dolly a ride all the time. Teddy bear likes me to pull him too. But best of all I miss my rocky horse.

I wish I could get out of this bed. No, I fooled me, I don't want to get up. I'll just lay here and not talk to anyone till mommy comes. They can't make me talk. Even if they stick me when they change my diaper I won't make a sound. Though, sometimes the top part of my body hurts too bad, where daddy said my heart is, that's what hurts. At first I tried to scream for someone to come but then I remembered, babies can't talk. I won't tell anyone, even if tears come to my eyes, I won't cry!

I'll just curl up right here. That way I'll be ready to return to that warm safe place inside my mommy and I won't be scared no more. I'm gonna sleep now.

– JOAN CRAWFORD

❖ *Honorable Mention – Prose* ❖

## **WORK**

To the other customers at the cafe, it was a peaceful day. They sat at their outdoor tables, drank their coffee, commented on the warm weather, and turned to the sports section of their newspapers.

One of them knew that appearances could be deceiving. 'If it's sunny here, it must be stormy somewhere else,' thought the man in the black business suit. He ignored the sports section, and studied the front page. "Bill to Reform Gun Control Defeated in Congress," he read. "Are they out of their minds?" the businessman screamed. "I'm almost drowning in the blood of the innocents who've been killed by illegal firearms, and those idiots refuse to take action!" The other customers tried to ignore the screaming businessman. "So, they treasure the gun lobby's money more than their constituents' lives, aye? I should start up some more furnaces to roast their souls. As soon as I get some help." The businessman turned to the international section. "Massacre of something something Refugees by something something Soldiers... Mass Grave Discovered in somewhere... Somewhere Tests Nuclear Weapon..." he sighed. "What a mess."

A customized motorcycle drove up to the cafe and parked beside the businessman's table. The rider was a bearded man in denim pants, a Hell's Angels T-shirt, and a leather jacket. A waiter walked out of the cafe and approached the biker. "What do you think you are doing here!" screamed the waiter. "This is a respectable establishment, and we will not tolerate..."

The biker took off his sunglasses and stared into the waiter's eyes. The faces of one thousand of God's creatures, human, and animal, looked through the biker's eyes and cried a cry than no human could understand. Shocked into silence the waiter turned around and walked back into the cafe.

"Gabriel!" greeted the businessman. "How are you doing?"

"I've been busy," answered the biker. He sat on the opposite side of the businessman's table. "You'll receive fifty new angels to serve you."

"What!?" screamed the businessman. "That's only one percent of what I requested!" He threw the newspaper into the air,

where it transformed into a white dove and flew away. "Haven't you watched the news!? Everywhere you see, there's arsons, homicides, rapes, and lootings! I can't handle all the damned souls coming in with only fifty new recruits!"

"I'm sorry Lucifer," said the biker. "But remember, we're an army of volunteers. If an angel won't sign up for damnation duty, we aren't going to force him or her to perform damnation duty."

Defeated, the businessman slumped over the table. "When the Big Guy asked me to watch over the damned, I had no idea how hard the job would be. Not only do I have to deal with the criminals' obnoxious personalities, I also have to deal with the true believers' ignorance." He sighed, "maybe I should transfer to nature balance."

"You won't want to do that," warned the biker. "Uriel is up to his shoulders in human wastes. He's having trouble creating enough bacteria to clean up the sludge, and that's after he mutates them for greater efficiency. And while he's trying to repair the damage that the humans have caused, the imbalance that resulted from his emergency repairs is causing damage to marine biology and other forms of wildlife." He smiled, "Cheer up. The Big Guy just signed a deal with Buddha. We're sending the lesser criminals to him to be reincarnated as insects. That should lower your workload."

"And the resulting explosion in the insect population would raise Uriel's workload," added the businessman. "Soon, he'll be up to his eyeballs in the pesticides that humans use." He sighed again. "The Big Guy must be asking himself, 'Why the hell did I give them free will?' and kicking himself for not finding the answer." He laughed at his own joke.

"It's not as funny as you think," warned the biker. "The Big Guy is drafting plans to melt the polar icecaps and start another great flood."

The businessman stood up as if he had sat on a nail, "What?"

"As a last resort," added the biker. "Michael convinced the Big Guy to stay His hand. He's now trying to grant salvation to one billion humans, which would save their race from extinction. Raphael thinks that humans are too screwed up to accept salvation, and that their extinction is inevitable because it's self-inflicted."

The businessman sat down. "Well, I give Michael my blessings. I certainly don't want to handle the raise in workload that would result from the sudden deaths of eight billion humans." His eyes widened, as if he remembered something. "By the way, has the Big Guy chosen a Chosen One? Someone to build an ark, collect two examples of every kind of plant and animal, save a group of true believers, and all that?"

"An ark may not be necessary. The Big Guy plans to create new and different species of flora and fauna to replace the species that may become extinct."

The businessman laughed. "That will make Uriel happy. He won't have to work while the new species are evolving according to the new plans. A million-year weekend. And the Chosen One?"

"The Big Guy has asked me to look into that," answered the biker. "I was looking. I better continue looking." He stared at a Danish pastry on the businessman's table. "Do you want that Danish?"

The businessman smiled. "Be my guest."

"Thanks." The biker put the whole pastry into his mouth, chewed, and swallowed. "It's good."

"That's why I come here," said the businessman.

"Have a nice day," said the biker. He got on his bike, started the engine, and left.

The businessman shook his head. Then he stared at his empty coffee cup. "Hey, waiter!" he called. "More coffee!"

– LONG TSUN

## GETTING OUT

As I sat at my regular table at Starlights, the local coffee house, I couldn't help feeling that something was wrong. Did I forget something at home? No... I know I have my journal and my phone in my purse 'cause I saw it in my bag when I paid for my mocha. It wasn't the music either. The soft jazz coming from the speakers was the usual music that they played here.

Dismissing the nagging thoughts as paranoia and the workings of an overactive imagination, I sat and got started with my writing for the week. But it wasn't my imagination and it wasn't paranoia. The uneasiness wasn't just in my head; it was in my gut, and I learned a long time ago to trust my gut. The hair at the back of my neck was prickling, and I realized that I was being watched.

With a cursory glance around the room, my trained eyes spotted the two men that were out of place. They were dressed casually and would have been nondescript if you didn't consider the habits of the locals. Both were wearing t-shirts and cargo pants; one in jeans and the other in khakis. In a sense, they were too nondescript. Unlike the other young males who frequent this town, and especially this coffee house, they were not walking billboards. Also, there were only a handful of whites in this area, and they are not part of that handful. The one in jeans had aviator sunglasses on, and I was in his direct line of view. Fuck. I was right; I was being watched.

Nonchalantly, I took my seat and flipped through my journal to a new page. As I doodled, questions ran through my head. Why was I being watched? Who hired them to watch me? The musical ring from my phone jolted me from my thoughts.

"Hello?"

"Jen. It's me," said a deep, unforgettable voice.

"Lurele. What's up? I never expected to hear from you again."

"You made it apparent that you didn't want to hear from me."

"So why are you calling now? And how did you get my number?"

"Remember who I am, Jen, and remember who you were. Do I really need to answer that question?"

"I have a new story. Why don't you come and read it?"

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Lurele seated himself across from me twenty minutes later, with-

out as much as a by-your-leave. When he did so, most of the eyes of the patrons in the room shifted toward us. We must have been a sight – a young Chinese woman dressed in leather and a relatively older black man in a sweater and slacks seated together over coffee. We couldn't have been any more conspicuous if we tried.

"Is that coffee black?" I asked, indicating the cup in his hand with a nod.

"You know it is."

"Good," I said as I reached over and took a sip from it. The caffeine gave my system a jolt almost immediately. We both hated the taste of black coffee, but drank it black for the same reason.

"Your coffee got cold, huh?" He asked with a knowing smirk. He knew how much I hate drinking black coffee.

"Yeah," I said, not knowing what else to say. *No, I'm afraid the new Barista might have slipped something extra into my mocha.* No, I couldn't say that. "Here, take a look at this and tell me what you think. It's only the opening paragraphs, but I want you to take a look at it anyway."

The two white men sitting near the door are probably operatives. For who, I don't know. They aren't locals, and the Barista that mixed my mocha is new. I need you to watch them for me, and to follow the one that doesn't follow me when I leave.

"Interesting. You have a real eye catching opening." He commented, keeping up with the pretense.

"Hey, I've got to run," I remarked, glancing at my watch without looking at it. "Why don't you stop by my place later tonight for dinner? And we can play catch-up?" With that, I gathered my belongings and left Starlights. I didn't have to ask if he knew where I lived, even though we have not had any contact in 2 years, just like I didn't have to ask if he'd tail the men. This was part of the business. I had thought I had left it for good, but someone wants me back in, and I want to know who and why.

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My gut feeling was right. Not only was I being watched, I was being followed. As I was making my way to my car, I got out my compact and pretended to check my make-up. I was able to see Jeans with the Aviator hop on a conspicuous motorcycle – it was the same cherry red as my Accord. His partner was nowhere to be found.

The doors on my Accord unlocked with a beep-beep of the alarm

seconds before I reached the door and smoothly slid in. Knowing I would be followed, I couldn't do anything out of the ordinary to tip them off. I pulled out of my space and glanced around, failing to spot the motorcycle. Undaunted, I continued on my way, knowing that one or the other was going to follow me.

I made my way home, but took a route with many detours and stops. I might as well do some errands and get my nails done. It wasn't long before I noticed the silver Integra that would always be a few cars behind me. The Integra followed me on my errands for most of the day, and I had the perverse knowledge that I was leading him on a wild goose chase.

I jumped at the sound of my Nokia ringing. Fuck. Why now? It was just getting interesting.

"Hello?"

It was Lurele. "Lose your tail and get home. We'll debrief there."

"We? I don't – *lick*" He had hung up on me before I could tell him that there is no *we*.

\* \* \* \* \*

I entered my secluded home in Bayside Park, knowing that he'd be there. He was better than Houdini when it came to locked doors, and he knew me well enough to figure out my security codes.

"You know, my birth date isn't a good pass code. Anyone could get in," he commented, as a way of greeting me.

"Why are you here Lurele?" I asked. "And why now?"

"You really thought I'd let you leave me like that?" He always did have a bad habit of answering questions with other questions. "And don't give me that shit about leaving me to protect me."

"Fuck that!" I snapped, my voice raising significantly. "That's not why you're here. Nor is it why you picked today to reenter my life."

"What's your theory then," he replied, in a low growl and knowing eyes.

"You've been watching me. You tracked me down almost immediately after I left, and since then, have been following my activities for quite some time, watching me like some God damned guardian angel. It's too damn big of a coincidence that you called me on my cell phone – a private, undisclosed number – just when I needed help," I said, my voice rising in anger with each word uttered. "And it's another big fucking coincidence that you already knew where I lived, isn't it?"

Instead of backing down and withering as any other man would have done, he grabbed me by the neck and kissed me, reminding me of what we had two years ago. Without words, he conveyed to me why he appointed himself as my bodyguard.

"And you know why," he whispered, once I broke the kiss. No! I don't! And I don't want to know! I couldn't find the will power to break free from his embrace.

"Don't," I whispered, shaken from the kiss.

"Fine. I'll let you bring it up next time."

"There won't be a next time."

"Yes there will be. Don't lie to yourself."

Infuriated, I shoved him – without much success. "Let me go dammit!"

Releasing me, he changed the subject, "Dinner's ready, by the way. You didn't have much in your fridge, so I improvised."

All I could do was look at him with a raised eyebrow.

"Chinese," he added.

I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. "You never could cook Chinese for shit," I said as I made my way to the kitchen, reminding him of his only weakness in the culinary arts.

I stopped in my tracks when I saw what he had done. The dining room table was set with candles and fine linen, but there was no silverware, nor was there china. What was on the table were several unopened cartons of Chinese take-out.

"I never said I cooked," he said. "I said I improvised."

"Why are you doing this, Lurele?"

"You know why," he whispered in my ear. He'd sneaked up behind me and wrapped his arms around me. I instinctively leaned back, into his embrace, as memories flooded me. This couldn't continue; it had to stop.

"Lurele –," he didn't let me finish, but stopped my words with the softest of kisses. I had no intention of letting him be my weakness again, but he always went against my best intentions. Fuck dinner.

\* \* \* \* \*

Groggily, I woke from one of the deepest sleeps I have had in years, with the remnants of the most wonderful dream in my mind, and then I realized that it wasn't a dream. As I tried to disengage myself from him, he tightened his arms.

"Not this time," he growled, his voice barely audible next to my ear.

"Lurele –,"

"Dammit!" he shouted, not caring if he lost his patience. "You don't make love to someone like that and then turn around as if nothing has happened. Even you can't be that cold hearted."

"Will you for once shut the fuck up and listen for a change?!" I cried. For some reason, I could never stay calm with him. "Don't you get it? The problem is that I DO care. I cared too damn much. I can't deal with it, with us. For what we do, caring can get us killed. You should know; you were the one who taught me that. I wasn't about to let you die for me, and I wasn't ready to die for you."

Whether you want it or not," he said, evenly and calmly, his voice a gravelly whisper, "you know I would."

"Don't. Just don't."

"Jen –,"

"Don't say it dammit!" I cried, "I don't want to hear it." As if not hearing the words will make any difference. In an abrupt attempt to change the subject, I added, "Tell me about the guy you tailed today."

"Why don't you ask him yourself?"

"What?!"

"He's in the garage basement, sub-level 2. Along with his ride. I tailed until he met up with someone who gave him an envelope. After the exchange, I made sure he noticed me. He took the bait and tailed me here. I doubled back on him, and caught him. He's been bound and gagged since we arrived."

I glanced up at the clock and realized that he's been in the basement for at least 6 hours without food or water. "Great. He should be ready for questioning now. Bring the food and wine for us, and a bottle of beer for our guest," I said, as I got out of bed and got dressed. "I'll get the drugs."

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"Computer, activate level four security."

A low buzz sounded as the integrated system responded to my voice command. "System activated," responded a monotone. "Compound is secure. Grounds scanned and three presences found on sub level two."

"Lights, 60% power." Voice activated systems were the best.

Once the lights came on, I saw the operative in a chair a few feet away from his motorcycle. He was bound and gagged in Lurele's signature – duct tape, rope, and fishing wire. It was obvious that he had been knocked out for at least a few hours. He was calm as we entered, trailing us with his eyes.

Lurele had set two tables in front of the stranger – one with the food and drinks, and the other was left bare for my use. While making and maintaining eye contact with the stranger, I strode over to him and ripped the duct tape off of his mouth.

"Now talk," I demanded, keeping my voice cold. "Who are you and who are you working for?"

There was nothing from him but silence. I knew it was going to be hard to make him talk. If he was properly trained, then he wouldn't talk unless his mind was at the breaking point. Either that or I didn't look intimidating enough in a black silk robe. Lurele and I took turns questioning him. While one of us was flinging question or inflicting pain, the other would calmly grab a few bites of mu goo gai pan and sip some wine.

"Tell me, bastard. Who sent you to kill her?"

Silence was the only response to Lurele's question. I took a sip of my wine and interjected. "You might as well save yourself some agony and us some trouble." Still, there was no response from him. The only thing that betrayed him was his gaze, which darted between Lurele and me.

This continued for almost two hours. Lurele and I were done with the wine and dinner, and we were beginning to lose our patience. This one was well trained. He had not succumbed to the pain nor the thirst and hunger he was suffering. The untouched beer we had brought to offer him had grown warm on the table.

"Ok, this is enough," I sneered, losing my patience. "Talk blondie. Make it easier on yourself."

"What are you going to do?" he gasped, with a sardonic chuckle. "Kill me?"

Without a word, I got up from my seat and went to the other table where I had left my kit. I could feel his gaze on my gloved hands and on me as I reached into my bag and pulled out my tools in front of him. With calculated movements, I slowly took out my bottles of Chloroform, Morphine, and vials of Sodium Pentothal – truth serum. Next, I took out the sterile syringes and needles, still



wrapped in plastic.

"Why don't you make it easier on yourself and answer me? Who the fuck are you working for?"

"Fuck you bitch," was all he said.

Before I could move or make a comment, Lurele had backhanded the guy, toppling him and the chair onto the floor.

"You really shouldn't have don't that, you know."

"Sowwy. But only I can talk to you like that."

"Shut up and pick him up," I said, motioning towards to stranger. "Is he still alive?" The fall had apparently knocked him unconscious.

"Since we can't do anything with him now, let's look through his things."

We moved over to his bike as Lurele put on surgical gloves. Under the motorcycle's seat was the envelope and a small satchel. Lurele and I were just about to rummage when the stranger woke up.

"Darling," Lurele chuckled, "Our guest is awake again."

I looked over my shoulder to see the stranger glaring daggers at me. "Good. Let's see who the fuck he thinks he is."

"Well," Lurele said, as he flipped through the contents in his hands. "He has five passports on him. So he is either Ryan Forgerson of France, Ian Herrero from Spain, Adrian Savini of Italy, Ian Smythe from down under, or Brian Forge from Great Britain. My guess would be that he is an American and that his name is really IS Smith, as generic as it sounds. All of his last names are translations for 'smith.'"

"Well Mr. Smith, it IS Mr. Smith, isn't it?" I asked, only to be further acknowledged with silence.

Without a word, I made my way to the syringe and prepared the injection in front of him. With calculated movements, I inserted the needle into the vial of sodium Pentothal and extracted several CCs of the drug. I carefully squirted the syringe, making sure that there was no air and that there was precisely 3 CCs of the truth serum. With the filled syringe, I silently made my way over to him. His silence continued as I applied a tourniquet to his arm, making his veins more visible to me. He clenched his fist as I purposely missed his vein. Digging through his flesh and finding a deeper vein, I slowly injected the drug into his arm. Once the syringe was empty of the sodium Pentothal, I left it in his forearm.

"Now answer me. Who do you work for? I will not ask again."

His silence continued, and I continued to administer the drug. I knew he would be hard to break since he was trained, but I hadn't anticipated this much resistance. People in this line of work do not hire fuck ups. The only mistake that my adversary seems to have made was underestimating me. After the sixth injection of the Pentothal, I leaned over him and whispered in his ear, "Who are you working for?"

Finally, in the barest of whispers, he answered, "D.D."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Call Eddy," I told Lurele. "We need him to get this over with."

"I don't think that would be such a good idea."

"I didn't ask you what you thought. Just do it. I know what I'm doing."

"We can do this without him."

"Not if we want to get inside without detection."

"Jen –"

"Just do it!"

Even though we were all partners once, Lurele never liked Eddy and vice versa. There was no denying the fact that Eddy was the best security expert we, and they, knew. That was why he worked with us once before. The animosity between them was strong, but I don't know why. They have know each other long before I met either one of them.

"He said he'll be here in an hour. I told him that we were here," Lurele said as he hung up the phone.

I turned back to Mr. Smith, who was barely conscious under the Pentothal. I went back to the table where my supplies were and prepared another injection for him. Once the syringe was filled, I moved to him and injected more than enough morphine to kill him. I waited a few moments for the drug to take effect, and then I checked his pulse to make sure he was dead.

"Lurele, please get rid of the body. I'll meet you back upstairs."

\* \* \* \* \*

Eddy was punctual as always.

"Ko ni chi wa," Eddy greeted me in Japanese.

"Can't you ever say 'Hi' like normal people?" I asked as I gave him a warm hug. "It's good to see you again."

"Likewise. I'm sorry I can't say the same for Lurele," he said, looking over my shoulder. I turned and saw Lurele glaring at Eddy and

me. The cold silence only punctuated Eddy's words and their resentment of each other.

Uncomfortably, I stepped back from the door, letting Eddy in. As he stepped through the threshold, he fingered the shirt I was wearing – Lurele's, and looked at me with disapproval. Eddy was the first person I met when I was brought into this business; he taught me what I know now, the martial arts, marksmanship, weaponry. My first mission was with him in the far east. Since then, he deemed me his little sister, and he protected me like any big brother, even though I never needed his protection.

My choice to pursue a relationship with Lurele was the only disappointment to him. He would have been much happier if I had chosen to be with someone like us – Asian.

"Ok," I said, before the tension got thicker. "Eddy, we need to get into D.D.'s compound."

"So what does that have anything to do with me? I haven't been within a hundred feet of that place since you left."

"But you know how to get in. You can bypass his security system."

"He could have upgraded since I left. Two years is a long time."

"Don't give me any of that bull shit, Eddy. You and I both know you're the best hacker in the world. If you were able to create a system more sophisticated than NASA's, and create havoc with the CIA's and Interpol's files, then you can hack whatever D.D. has."

With a hearty laugh, he relented. "What do you need me to do? And when do you need it done?"

"We need a layout of his compound, specifically his office. We need you to guide us through the building, giving us the element of surprise over D.D."

"Haven't I taught you anything?"

"Yes. That's why I called you."

While we were talking, Lurele had finished his kata exercises, fighting against invisible enemies, and was making his way towards Eddy and me. I braced myself for the inevitable conflict. Lurele was going to be civil to Eddy, unless Eddy provokes him, which he will.

Before either one of them could utter an insulting remark to each other, I blurted out, "Behave you two. The sooner we get this over with, the better, for all of us. He came after me first, but we all know that he'll hunt each of us down so no one can spill his secrets."

When I left D.D.'s organization, I had not wanted to go back again. After working with Eddy, and then Lurele, I had developed a goddamn conscience, and I had lost my taste for taking other people's lives.

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Cloaked in darkness, Lurele and I made our way to D.D.'s desert compound. The trek to the northern wall of the building was perilous for there was no cover for at least 200 yards. We were lucky that the new moon was tonight, otherwise, we might have had to wait a few weeks to end this, for good. Slowly, carefully, we made our way across the hot sand. Our night vision goggles allowed us to avoid any animals, and the special filters allowed our eyes to see the multitude of laser trip beams. As we picked our way towards the building, we listened to Eddy through our earpieces as he instructed us from my house.

"Ok gang," said Eddy. "You are clear of the primary sensors."

"Check," I said, letting him know that I've heard. Lurele did the same. As I motioned to Lurele to start the ascent as planned, he grabbed my wrist and quickly kissed me, not allowing me to forget, even for a moment.

Without a word, I turned from him and started the twenty story climb to the roof – where the vents were. The ascent was swift and silent, taking only ninety seconds to complete with the aid of our equipment. Once we reached the top, we rewound our cords and put them back into their small packs with quiet efficiency. With precise movements, we made our way to the vent, and crawled in on our stomachs. The few minutes it took us to wind our way through the maze of air tunnels seemed like hours as we followed Eddy's directions. "Left, ok, now make a right."

The closer we got to our target, the greater the feeling of dread was in my stomach. This was D.D.'s home, his life. I'm going to burn in hell for this; what I'm preparing to do, I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

The seclusion of D.D.'s home was elaborate. It was a set of buildings, with a lab and offices as well as living quarters, much like my own home. His rooms, where he did his business were on the west side, and the east side was devoted to the training of his "children" – his proteges. I remember those rooms well.

We had called them dorms, but they were more like a luxury suite at the Hilton, adorned and furnished with leather, silk, and satin. It might have been his way of showing us what this life had to offer. The temptation was there for all of us, and a goal that many of his proteges aspire to. Only the best can have it all – the money, the power, the life. Unfortunately, the cost of learning was more than monetary.

Lurele stopped suddenly and indicated that we were there. It was nearly three in the morning. D.D. would be in his office, calculating the millions people paid him to snuff out lives that day; he only found the hits for us. He would never kill them himself. He paid us a large majority of the hit's price, and kept the rest himself. It's more profitable that way.

D.D. was always a man of habit. From the grill of the vent, Lurele and I could see D.D. behind his desk, counting and calculating his money. Lurele, on the other side of the grill now, held up his middle and index fingers, indicating that there were two people guarding D.D.'s door. One man was at D.D.'s back – the same one who had followed me earlier today – or was that yesterday? The hours had begun to blur together.

Slowly, carefully, we raised the grill, opening the vent. If I didn't do it now, I would lose my nerve. Taking what could be my last look of Lurele, I somersaulted into the room and drew out my weapons, a thin blade and an automatic, in one smooth move. Lurele did the same, only pulling out two guns instead, training them on the two guards at the door as he landed. I landed facing D.D.

"Well Jenny girl. What a pleasant surprise," he said. His voice told me it was anything but a surprise.

With my 10mm trained on him, I asked D.D., "Why are you coming after me D? This was supposed to be over when I left."

"Show some respect –"

With the slightest wave of his hand, D.D. silenced the lackey standing behind him.

"Zee. This is Jenny," D.D. introduced me, nonchalantly. "She was one of my best and brightest. Show her some respect."

"Yes sir."

"Why D?" I asked again. Even though I knew, I couldn't, wouldn't believe unless I heard it from him.

"It may sound too much like a cliché, but you know too much. You have two options. You are either with us, or you are not, but I must warn you, you will not leave alive."

"It's not up to you to decide my life, D. You aren't my father, nor are you God. Stay out of my life D., and I'll stay out of yours."

"I look after what's mine."

"I quit being part of what was yours when I left. You know that."

"Tell me, Jenny," he commanded, switching tactics. "Why did you leave? Didn't I give you enough? Provide you with what you needed and wanted? Taught you how to survive? Without me, you would have been nothing; you would have still been caught up in that fucking bureaucratic red tape."

"I left because I couldn't live with THIS any longer."

"This is what I get for all of my troubles," he sighed, exasperated. "This is what I get for getting you out of foster homes and the streets, for taking you in. This is how you repay me?"

"Repay?! The only thing I've been doing is paying. While I was here, I did everything you wanted me to do, learned everything you wanted me to learn. I'm paying now, with the blood on my hands. I don't want anything more to do with you or your life."

"You are just like your mother, beautiful when angered."

"What do you know of my mother?" I said, barely audible as shock immobilized me. *My mother's dead. I don't even know her.* Before I could say another word, I felt air and heard gunshots behind me. Blocking the initial dread that tried to flood my heart, I reholstered my gun as I flipped through the air towards D.D. I landed on the edge of his desk and was then able to use it as a platform to somersault behind D.D. and Zee. Before anyone was able to blink, I had the edge of my knife against Zee's jugular. Using him as a shield, I looked at where Lurele and I were standing, and met Eddy's eyes.

Eddy had Lurele from behind, like I was holding Zee. He looked me straight in the eyes, and all I saw was coldness. He must have seen the questions in my eyes. *Why is he doing this. He was my family, my brother, not by blood, but by spirit, and that should have been stronger. How could he betray me like this?*

"Edward. Glad you could drop in at such an opportune time," D.D. was not phased by Eddy's entrance, nor was he disturbed about the two bleeding bodies now blocking the doorway.

"Eddy. What the fuck do you think you are doing?" I asked,

barely able to contain my anger.

"Jen, this has nothing to do with you. Stay out of it. I don't want you to get hurt." *Too late.*

"I'm in here, with a knife to a man's throat, and you have the nerve to tell me to stay out of it? It's too late to stay out. Some motherfucker decided to put me into this game."

"Jenny –"

"Shut up and let him go."

As we were speaking, Eddy and I were slowly shifting our positions. I couldn't let him get a good angle on me, and I needed time to figure something out. I must have lost my touch because before I knew it, Eddy was next to D.D.'s desk. Now I had to divide my concentration between the two of them.

"We'll make an exchange," I proposed. "My man for yours. No one gets hurt."

Without a word and with unbelievable speed, D.D. drew a gun from underneath his desk and shot in my direction. Instead of feeling the impact of the bullet, I felt something warm and wet splatter against my face. Licking my lips, I tasted blood that wasn't my own. Relaxing my hold, I let the fresh corpse slide to the floor, and I simultaneously launched my knife, which cleanly sliced D.D.'s jugular, spurting blood over his desk, his money, and himself.

"He WAS your father Jen."

"Don't talk to me, Eddy. D.D.'s dead. It's over. Let Lurele go."

"You should not have killed him so hastily. There was a lot you didn't know."

"It's over."

"No, it's not. He was already dying. He wouldn't have lived another ten years. You were his daughter, and the man that married you was to get all that was his. I was supposed to be that man. Your father had promised you to me."

"Stop calling him my father."

"And stop denying what is fact."

"They are this: my father left my mother before I was even born, my mother died in childbirth, and since before I could remember, I've alternated between foster homes, orphanages, and the streets. I've never seen a picture or knew their names. I have no mother, and I have no father.

"Then how were you conceived?"

"Those who conceived me are long dead in my eyes."

"Do you honestly think a man like D.D. would let his family suffer? When he found out about you, he searched for you. Then he took you in, made sure you would be well off –"

"With murder."

"Dammit woman!" he exploded in a burst of anger. "Let me finish."

"Fine. Then finish."

"You were his daughter and I was his intended heir. His sense of family mandated that we marry so that his self-made empire will stay in his family. Before he was informed about you, I was the son he never had, and he was the father I wished I had. I knew my real father, and I saw him kill my mother. You were mine, but Lurele here," he said, punctuating his words by digging the muzzle of his gun in Lurele's neck, "took you away from me."

"I'm not some fucking piece of property!"

"Do you know how hard it is? How it feels to see your woman with another?"

"Don't delude yourself. I was never yours. I never loved you and I know you can't say you loved me."

"You were promised to me. That made you mine. Love is only a part of it. He also took my honor when he took your innocence."

Before I could reply, Lurele spoke up for the first time since we entered the room. "Prove your damn honor, Eddy. You attack a man from behind and you talk about honor. Face me like a man."

"Damn it! This is crazy! It's not the middle ages, for Christ's sake!"

Lurele then looked me in the eyes. "Eddy and I have many things to settle. This goes beyond you and me."

"But –"

"This is the only way," he said. "Neither of us wants you hurt, so you need to step aside and let us settle it."

When I looked at Eddy, he nodded in agreement.

I then shifted my gaze back to Lurele, and he looked into my eyes. I saw why he was doing this. And I knew he wouldn't shoot to kill this time. He closed the distance between us and bent his head to kiss me. As his lips brushed mine, my heart felt his goodbye. It took all of my control to keep from breaking down.

"Ok. Enough," spat Eddy. "One shot, one bullet. If we both live, then we'll live in peace. If both of us die, then so be it."

“Deal.”

I silently, dumbfounded, watched as each man emptied his gun of all but one bullet. After checking each other’s weapon, they went to opposite sides of the room with their guns holstered. The tension thickened as they appraised each other, preparing to draw and shoot. In a final attempt to stop them, I went into the line of fire right before I heard the two guns go off at the same time.

Searing pain through my right side and left shoulder. My knees buckled as the room spun. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor, reclining on Lurele. They were yelling at each other. *Why are their voices so distant?* Groaning, I slowly lifted my eyelids and looked up. For the first time in my life, I saw fear on Lurele’s face. I tried to speak, but all I could manage was a croak. “Lurele?”

“Shhh baby. You’re going to be ok.”

*No, I’m not going to be ok, otherwise, you wouldn’t be so concerned.* I felt the sticky wetness of what I assumed was my blood. I tried to move, but that only triggered a wave of pain up my side and shoulder. As each second silently ticked by, I felt my head getting lighter. *I don’t have much time left.* I looked at Eddy, who was trying to staunch the flow of blood.

“Jenny,” he said, his eyes apologetic. “There aren’t any exit wounds.”

*They weren’t going to kill each other, otherwise, I’d be dead by now.*

I shifted my gaze to Lurele, and looked him in the eyes. *So tired.* It was getting harder to breath and my eyes were getting so heavy. *Sleep. Just for a moment, sleep.* As my eyes drifted close, I mouthed, “Love you, too” to Lurele. I couldn’t find my voice. Just as I felt the slightest of butterfly kisses, the darkness overwhelmed me.

– JULIA WONG

## VOWS SAID

Mom, when was your marriage?  
You’ve never celebrated it.  
Have you forgotten, or are you just too busy  
Like you say you are? Either way,  
It doesn’t sound important.  
You say you love him but  
You’ve never been a good liar.  
You never could tell me how you met him  
Or why you really married him.

I crept into your closet one day and  
Found your wedding pictures.  
A whole photo album of them.  
I touched the white gold-rimmed cover.  
The pages stuck together when  
I tried to open it.

The first thing I saw was how beautiful  
You were. I wouldn’t have known it was you  
But I recognized that look on your face.  
That look of lost hope.  
I never thought I’d see it as you walked  
Up the aisle with grandpa.  
Neither of you smiled.

You were so full of life.  
You keep telling me about all your  
Adventures in all parts of the world,  
Yet you look at the ground as if  
There was nothing else to see.  
I see in this other picture that your  
Head is no longer held towards the future.  
It’s just so sad to see you doing that  
As you walked down the aisle with your  
New husband.

Mom, please tell me that it’s not going  
To happen to me.

– A.W. BENING

## **ANOMALY**

– for Sue

Your mind  
works sometimes as an Anomaly  
moving you  
forward      backward  
in Time  
Until reality brings you back to the Present.

In a boring classroom, your mind drifts  
into the Anomaly.  
Back  
in Time...

To when you were truly happy  
Or you wished the world would end  
To your first experience with  
Death      True Bliss      A Romantic Kiss  
To your realization that your Mother was only human,  
same as you.  
To recall that day in high school when  
You had just finished being Petruchio from “Taming of a Shrew”  
and a Certain Someone applauded for you and no one else

Remember that?  
Those were the Times...  
Back then  
Back...

to the Present.  
You’re being called on in class.  
Mrs. Krenninger wants to know what the capital of Vermont is.  
Can’t she look it up in an atlas?

You catch the eye of that Certain Someone, with whom you have  
a date tomorrow.  
Your mind drifts once again  
You wonder what the future hold for both of you  
the Future...

You eat lunch, watch a movie.  
You place your arm around your date and your date likes it.  
A kiss  
You enter into a relationship. Long-term.  
The relationship blossoms. Years later: small, intimate wedding, white  
picket fences, two kids? No, three –  
And a cat named Muffy.

*“The capital of Vermont?”*

Time slams you in the face with the Present once again;  
you’ve violated the space-time continuum.  
The Anomaly spits you out; the change in temporal scenery  
is jarring.

You’re Back...  
in the Present.

That Certain Someone is silently mouthing something to you.  
You can’t make it out. is it, “I love you?”  
“I want our genetic information to merge into one,  
forming a new entity that we will cherish and adore?” or  
“Sorry, but I can’t make it Saturday?”

Mrs. Krenninger looks angrily at you and awaits your response.  
that Certain Someone holds up a piece of paper  
with something written across it.  
Time’s running out.  
You look at that Certain Someone’s sign.  
In big block letters,  
**MONTPELIER**  
and in parentheses, (*Call me*)

– GABRIEL GARCIA

## **CASUALTIES OF WAR**

“To all those left to bleed, who died with no need,  
fighting the war, but never setting the score, for my soul  
still missing in action, giving only the enemy satisfaction, I  
hope, you can cope.”

This is the time of war,  
And everyone wants to score,  
And they gladly ignore,  
All of the real gore,  
The families who have a father no more,  
The blood spilled,  
The children trauma filled,  
The bodies coldly chilled,  
But they get thrilled,  
Not knowing how many were killed,  
They don't understand,  
They just demand,  
They vote and raise a hand,  
Not seeing the real man,  
Putting psycho killers in command,  
And they all pretend,  
That they comprehend,  
Not knowing the laws they bend,  
But until they meet the end,  
They won't know that they defend!

– JESUS MARIO JIMÉNEZ

## **L.A. CHRIST**

The Son shines brightly and mercifully  
Upon the concrete organism of the City of Angels  
Hell rules with its iron fist,  
but the West Coast savior perseveres  
As the combat underground rages on,  
so does the angelic architect-peacemakers  
While the Towers of Babble-on illuminate the L.A. cityscape,  
the Father's architectural marvels transcend above  
From the Valley to Downtown,  
San Pedro to East L.A.,  
The Heavenly Cross envelopes the megapolis  
Light and Darkness battle on for supremacy  
As Hell and Heaven face off  
Masses blind to the double reality  
Await the unpartisan rapture  
Deliverance will not come in chaos  
but in the revolution of the people's Messiah

– DAREN LOUIS

## **STUDIOS**

If I painted you a picture...could you tell me what you saw?  
no  
color and texture  
form and line  
a jumble of nothing made out to be beauty  
but that is how you want it to be  
snarled and matted amongst ourselves  
picking apart ideas in hopes of finding reality  
betrayal is set into motion by your brush  
screw it  
a blank canvas is much more promising

– JENNIFER GILLINGHAM

## A WEIRD TEACHER

Hi, my name is Josie; I am attending one of the universities in Los Angeles. I live in Pasadena, but my campus is near Santa Monica. I have to drive at least 25 minutes to get there, and I have to spend about 5 minutes finding a parking space. Fortunately, it is not extremely difficult to find a parking space early in the morning on campus.

I am taking a Biology class there. My professor is a blond haired fat white man who graduated from UCLA. His name is Dr. Sharp; he is so mean and strict. His class is difficult for everyone because he will usually put some tricky questions in our exams. We are not able to get good grades in his class. Sometimes, some of us do not know how to answer all of his questions on the exams. So, we will just return the paper to him without writing anything on it. Every Tuesday and Thursday, I am afraid to go to his class. His class starts at 7:00 a.m. through 9:00 a.m. I am the kind of person who cannot wake up so early in the morning. I am late so often for that class, because I am not living near my campus, and I cannot wake up right after my alarm has rung. Every time there is somebody who is late to Dr. Sharp's class, he will get mad at that person. He will shout at that person in front of the class, and sometimes he will lock the door right after the class has started. I have experienced this several times, but I still cannot arrive there on time almost every day.

One day, I could not be late, because we were having an examination. That was why I woke up at 5:30 in the morning, and arrived there at 6:45 a.m. I was sitting in the classroom waiting for the professor to come. At 7:01 a.m., Dr. Sharp came with a bird cage with a black towel covering it. He passed out a piece of sheet to everyone of us. He told us to write down where the bird came from, name what kind of bird it was, and write down the habits of that bird. It was impossible for us to write down those things without taking a look at the bird. We started asking him some questions. He said, "I am not going to tell you anything about this bird. You guys can see the legs of the bird. So,

you guys should be able to answer all of my questions by just observing it. I am sure all of you have seen it before at your laboratory."

During that time, almost 200 students were discussing this in the classroom, and we tried to figure out what kind of bird it was. After ten minutes, one of the students came up and wanted to turn in her paper. We were surprised because none of us were able to answer those questions, but how could she have finished it so fast. When the professor took a look at that paper, we could tell that he was mad because his face had silently turned red. He shouted at that student and asked why she had turned in her paper without writing anything on it. Dr. Sharp asked that student for her name because he wanted to fail her. That student held up her pants and showed her legs to Dr. Sharp. She answered, "You guess what my name is by yourself."

– EMILY YEUNG

## THOUGHTS #14

i want to be somehow  
lost in you.

like limbs of crab  
upon a plate.

like tangled hair.

like boxes of tangerine.  
too many of them.  
i want to be lost like that.

– BORY CHUNG



### **A BED'S GIFT**

Sinking center  
Moulding form  
Restful waking  
Passing dreams

Warm protection  
Fuzzy stacks  
Layers waiting  
Body wrap

Tearful sighings  
Quieting laughs  
Mystery muffles  
Downy sleep

In between from feet to head  
my saving grace  
and faithful bed

I keep all your tears  
for a rainy day  
I pluck up your laughters  
and tuck them away

Your dreams I wrap  
up in my golden scroll  
and the prayers that I gather  
Keep my chambers full

The bouncing and pillow fights  
I don't really mind  
So long as in night time  
my comfort you find.

– RYANNE CARROLL

### **PAINTING WITH FAERIE DUST**

You and I sat on the edge of it all,  
Looking down on the cars we couldn't drive.  
You had your legs bent under you,  
Like you were modeling for a painting.  
Of course, you didn't know that  
I was painting you the entire time.  
I recall the way the sun enhanced your eyes,  
Your lips, your fingers; they glimmered  
Like a mirage. Refreshing me in this desert waste.  
And all I did was talk and talk,  
of what I can't remember now,  
but the reason why, shall always be clear..  
We were younger than we would ever be again,  
and more together than before,  
but falling apart as time went by.  
We were just trying to hold on.  
And all along, I've been making sense of you,  
and painting with the colors you showed me,  
with that sun shining off of your body,  
like the mirage that it was slowly becoming.  
Fading into what it is today.  
A memory.

– CHAIM DAUERMANN

## **RED TIDE**

(A Sestina)

When I am feeling melancholy, my love  
Says let's go. We drive to the ocean,  
My Shangri-La where I find peace  
And tranquility. We stroll along the pier  
Looking down at those who enjoy the sand.  
Today the water has changed due to the Red Tide.

Such a depressing color. Please disappear Red Tide.  
This is a first for me so I query my love,  
Where are the sparkling diamonds? My beautiful ocean  
No longer shines in the sun nor calms me with peace.  
My emotions are in turmoil as we walk the pier.  
It looks as though someone has filled it with sand

And red clay. I really don't see how those on the sand  
Can walk in that water destroyed by the Red Tide.  
Why even the exquisite sea gulls that I love  
to watch are soaring above the ocean,  
Hesitant to dive. The barnacles once at peace  
On the pylons that hold up the pier

We're falling into the water beneath the pier.  
Yet the children still build their castles of sand  
Using water discolored by the ghastly red tide.  
It disturbs me greatly to see this place I love  
No longer resemble my majestic blue ocean.  
Even the pelicans floating atop can not find peace.

I search the faces looking for signs of peace  
On the fishermen as they cast from the pier.  
How hilarious. He's caught seaweed from the sand.  
He'll toss his line again. Fish from the Red Tide  
Doesn't bother him. The sport is his love.  
Standing, casting, waiting and watching the ocean

I listen to the rhythm of waves in the ocean.  
Don't look, close your eyes and find peace  
In the sound of the waves beneath the pier,  
Which are calming and soothing as they break on the sand.  
My worries are for naught despite the Red Tide.  
Fear not, I will never forsake thee love.

For the ocean is forever be it Red Tide or blue  
Water. It will always crash beneath the pier,  
Tease the sand, and give me the Peace I so love.

– JOAN G. CRAWFORD

## **SNAKE OF THE SOUL**

Sleek scaly cobras slither 'round  
spectres of malicious moribund scenarios  
scheming life's warp speed pace  
toward a hurried nowhere reality  
Where it slides on the scabby linen  
of unsymphonic souls  
casting motley visions of evil  
Villainous and treacherous mutilated  
sirens sound to sardonic souls astray  
Twisted strata of motley minds  
knowing none else, slip into an amorphous  
existence of silence

– MICHELLE ANGELINI

A spider crawls inside my  
head and makes a nest.  
I feel the prickly legs walk around  
until my head explodes in bloody fury.

– RICHARD RUVALCABA

### **UP MY SLEEVE**

Today I accelerated the bloom of a flower  
just by looking at it  
I tied a cherry stem into a knot with my tongue  
just to see if you'd notice  
I've manipulated light  
and the electricity of winter,  
The pheromones-and-lighter-fluid smell  
of juicy summers  
I've bribed you with promises of superpowers  
and afterlife rewards  
I've secretly tempted you  
with fatal apples  
and unheard-of kisses  
I'm running out of tricks

– ARIELLE CECI

### **RECIPE: A LA POET**

Ways of insuring your poetic work:

Step one) become an "eccentric" jerk  
Step two) have a wild adventure  
(perhaps a war or cross-country venture)  
Step three) try to have some fashion sense  
Step four) rebel against the status quo  
Step five) spend time inside an institution  
(prison, asylum, rehab or some substitution)  
Step six) a dramatic end!  
(suicide, exile, execution - it all depends)  
Seven) if 1 through 6 still fail to compel  
- write well

– ALESSANDER

### **SHORTCUT TO MY HEART**

Bumping teeth  
Keep you runnin'  
Finding no relief  
Wash me clean of sins

Free range humans  
Junkies on the half shell  
See through lens  
They can't see you too well

Clouded misconceptions  
Manic exchange  
Toilet bowl reflections  
Left hand lane

Broken kaleidoscopes  
Call box  
Tighten your emotional rope  
Forever I'll close the lock

– ALEXANDRA BURNS

## CARSON PALMER IS SHRINKING

A noisy home. A domestically  
bred splay-legged Indian.  
His southern-fried voice  
preferred to be stroked,  
sprinkled with vitamin-  
mineral supplements.  
“Too bad you’re dying.”

Head lodged  
between bars...

ho  
ping to  
    L  
      A  
      N  
      D

Some critics sniffled —  
“He’ll be pining away  
in bed with a different  
woman every week.”  
Hissy-fit in the lily pond,  
sand-in-the-swimsuit  
rawness.  
Just how twisted?  
Decelerating Junk.

– RYAN SMITH

## MATHEMATICS INTERNATIONAL

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have  
your attention. Please remain seated  
and stay with your original sum totals, differences,  
products, and quotients.  
Apparently, our exponents and like terms  
have been evaluated without following  
the order of operations.  
Integers have been solved  
without applying the principles  
in obtaining the rules for  
positive and negative signs;  
the same with converting decimals  
to fractions, or percents to decimals, etc.  
Incidentally, a reciprocal is lost from its  
dividing fractional problem.  
There will be a brief delay with grasping  
concepts and grading tests.  
For all less than or greater than symbols  
please meet at gate N where your variables are waiting.  
Thank you commutative, associative, and distributive  
properties for using: MATHEMATICS INTERNATIONAL.  
Have a pleasant flight and always remember to show your work.

– THOM GARZONE

## FISH

I was struck with a toothache in President K's office. On top of being extremely shaky with the kind of anxiety that goes along with the lack of knowing, I was in pain. I kept picking at my gums with my nails, because I felt the obsessive compulsion to do so. I'm the editor of the school newspaper, and I had written an article on sex. President K didn't seem too happy with my choice of subject. I wish my toothache would stop.

I live alone. The electricity was out, because I didn't pay my electric bill. I cannot pay the electric bill, because I have no money. I live alone. I've lost fifteen pounds since I've moved out. I want to transfer to the University of California of Los Angeles, and I want to major in journalism. President K doesn't think I will succeed. I write what I think about, what goes on in real life. I wrote about sex, because I knew that once people see that word they will become interested. I think I wrote too much, because I wanted to write forever on something so provocative, yet so beautiful. I wrote every aspect, every aspect on sex. I took polls, had statistics.

I left President K's office feeling well accomplished, because I had an influence on someone whom I've never known. My toothache grew more intense, and I felt the aching, so I tried to pull my tooth out. I shook my tooth back and forth, up and down, round and round. I walked home: I have no car, so I walked. I went inside my cold, lifeless, dark, and gloomy apartment.

I forgot to feed my goldfish. I bought my goldfish for a dime. I went over to feed my goldfish only to discover it's a floating carcass. I opened my mouth to say goodbye only to find that my tooth fell out. My tooth fell into the fish bowl dying the water a rich dark red. I took the bowl to the toilet and dumped out its contents. Bye fishy, bye tooth, bye pebbles. The pebbles, fish, and bloody water went to the sewer. But, my tooth stayed behind for weeks, I left it there. The tooth changed colors. First yellow, then brown, then white with Clorox bleach for the toilet, the yellow, green, brown, and black. Until one day, I awoke to find my tooth decayed. Bye tooth, bye editing position, bye electricity, bye pebble, bye President K, bye fish, bye-bye, oh, and bye bloody water.

I decided to take a shower, you know, a nice warm comfortable one. I was dirty and smelly. My armpit hairs were long and shabby. My hair had turned into dread locks. I was afraid, afraid that like my

electricity, my water would disappear also. Like my fish, my tooth, like everything, my water would vanish. I turned the knob hot, then cold. I felt the warmth, I felt the comfort, with my eyes closed. I opened my eyes after the soap drained away. I opened to find a fish bone in my hair, some pebbles below my feet and my tooth stuck in the drain.

It was time to hunt, like a proud beast, a fearless warrior. I dropped out of school to work more hours. I dropped out. But, I went job hunting, like a wild beast. I needed my teeth, some light, a car. The lack of having has left me knowing how deprived I was of comfort. That night, I dreamt I was a fish inside a toilet bowl. I once flushed a live fish down a toilet bowl. I was six, my family had tons of fish, but this one fish I wanted to kill. I once also stuck a small stick inside a caterpillar. I enjoyed it for a moment, the feel of the stick through a squirming creature. I was a black fuzzy caterpillar That I had killed. So, I dreamt that night of caterpillar and fish, of my tooth falling out, and job interviews. I awoke from the sound of my phone, my pink phone. I had a job, a good job that paid a good amount, so that I could keep my teeth from falling.

– TALEEN GEUVJEHIZIAN

## GRAVITATIONAL DEFIANCE

Why do people jump from bridges?  
Maybe they think they'll get away with it,  
That they'll leap off and go onwards, not downwards?  
That they'll soar on the will of Icarus  
Then land somewhere far away from their problems,  
on a distant beach –  
The one Amelia Earhart's been secretly living on all this time.

Most scientists believe  
Those who longed to fly all had a final reckoning with terra firma  
And ended up not above ground, but six feet under it.  
Three-second-long freefall to realize their mistake.

But isn't it possible their atmospheric gamble beat the house?  
I can see those visionaries finding some long-lost iota of truth  
Discovering the unknown wings on their backs  
(the ones we all have but never acknowledge)  
And sailing away to a higher level of being.  
Transcending past freeways and faxes  
to a realm of airstreams and angels.  
Discovering how soft and puffy white clouds are  
Making falcons and Lear jets jealous  
Getting a front-row seat to aurora borealis  
Truly being able to catch a falling star  
Asking Gabriel for his tips on avoiding turbulence  
And wishing that You could be there, too.

I prefer to think their  
Gravitational Defiance  
Paid off.

– GABRIEL GARCIA

## THE NIGHT

"The night was dark and stormy..." I stopped. That didn't sound right. I hit the backspace key; I typed a new line. "It was a dark and stormy night..." That didn't sound right, either. "In the night..."

Boom! I cried with fright when I heard the sound. Then, I saw raindrops hit my window. "Thunder and lightning. Nothing more," I told myself. I stared at the computer screen, and sighed. It was 9:00 pm, the deadline was tomorrow morning, and writer's block was getting the better of me. My eyes were sore, because I had been staring at the screen for hours. I shut off the computer; I turned on the radio. Some music may restore my inspiration. The radio was playing classical music, something by Bach. I reached for the dial to change the station...

"Don't." A talon grabbed my hand. "I love Bach," said a disembodied voice. I turned to my side. The talon had extended from my office wall, as if the brick had been given unholy life and was taking on the form of flesh. An arm and a shoulder followed the talon. The bricks lost their red color, and resembled the bloodless color of a corpse's skin. Two slits opened in the brick, revealing red eyes, like a demon's gaze...

I screamed. The monster emerged from the wall. Its skin was patterned red and gray, like brick and mortar; it became black and white, like a shirt and a jacket. 'Like a chameleon,' I thought as the monster dropped its disguise. The monster smiled, revealing his fangs. "Listen to the instruments; they have a voice, they are alive. Feel their heartbeat."

"I have to go pee," I cried. Still smiling, the monster released my hand. I ran into the restroom; I barely avoided the humiliation of pissing in my own pants. As I flushed the toilet, I saw a gray mist appear on the bathroom mirror. Then, I felt the monster's breath on the back of my neck. I gasped; the monster was now standing beside me.

"Good evening, Sir. I am Dracula." He extended his talon, as if he wanted to shake my hand.

I stared at the monster's claws. I could almost see the blood

that had soaked these claws when the monster took a life. "What do you want?" I asked.

The monster smiled. "I admire your work. I would like you to write my biography."

"Why me?" I asked. "There are other writers out there, ones with better credentials. Stephen King, Anne Rice... Besides, Bram Stoker wrote..."

The monster roared when he heard Stoker's name. As I held my hands over my ears, the mirror shattered. "Stoker was ignorant and incompetent!" he shouted. "His view of the history of my kingdom was distorted by the views of that fool, Marx. His judgment of my life was perverted by the judgment of that whore, England's Queen Victoria. He had no respect for my battle against sin, my struggle against crime, poverty, starvation, disease."

I was too scared to point out that Dracula's methods of dealing with crime, poverty, starvation, and disease was to kill all of the criminals, the beggars, and the lepers in Transylvania. His solution to sin would make Hitler dance with sadistic joy. "Okay, so you didn't like Bram Stoker's biography of you. Why do you think I can do a better job?" I asked.

The monster smiled. "My mistake with Stoker was that I failed to exercise my authority, my right of approval over his work." He drew a sword. "I will not repeat that mistake." Something gray, a liquid or vapor, poured forth from the sword. I saw blue points appear and disappear within the vapor's depths, blinking like little eyes, shining like the gas flames of a Bunsen burner. The vapor assumed the forms of human faces and human hands, reaching for me, pleading to me, crying my name...

I realized that the vapor was the spirits of all of the people whose lives were taken by Dracula, whose pain was witnessed by the sword that slew them, and whose minds were now imprisoned by the sword. And I knew that if I failed Dracula, I would become another one of the sword's prisoners, that I would be screaming the name of Dracula's next victim. Unable to handle this knowledge, I fainted.

When I awakened, the sun was shining on my face. Morning had come. I sat up on my bed. "Was it all a dream?" I asked myself. Then I remembered what I was supposed to do. "Oh, crap!" I ran into my kitchen to grab a snack. Granted, something I had eaten may have caused my nightmare, but I cannot work on an empty stomach. I opened the refrigerator...

I screamed. A human skull rested within the refrigerator, besides the milk carton. The skull sported sharp fangs, like a vampire's. "One of his rivals?" I thought. "Lestat?" I noticed a note that was nailed into the skull's forehead, and read it.

*Dear Sir:*

*I have confidence in your abilities as a writer. You will do an excellent job on my biography. If you feel that you lack the inspiration you need to perform your duties, simply stare at this skull and remember the consequences of failure.*

*Sincerely,  
Dracula*

– LONG TSUN

A life  
is like  
stairs  
Going on forever  
Struggling upward  
Searching inward  
Walls  
Like stairs  
In front of you fall –  
– never...,  
Forgetting who you are  
Looking for who you're not  
Arms tied  
To a wayward soul  
Unwillingly caught  
Think maturity  
At last attained  
Only to find another  
Step needs gained  
Levels of comprehension  
Like layers on the brain –  
– shoestring pension  
You fathom  
Only upwards  
– RYANNE CARROLL

## **WATCHERS OF THE WOODS**

A glistening of frost crystallizes on the breeze  
Needles float as their burdens settle softly.  
Herein lies solitude, none disturb these woods.  
The tranquility of pearly down crushes under padded feet.

Silence steals forth as ghosts of grey flicker amongst the trees  
warmth of steaming breath lopes through wooded vale.  
Tranquility driven forward as fleetingly as deer.  
A specter lingers to point its muzzle high.

Twin green orbs pause to sweep their gaze  
as the earth glows opalescent with the darkness sprinting in.  
The wraith whispers on to dip over passing crest.  
Voices howl to herald in the watcher of the night,  
she who oversees all with her own unblinking stare.

– CRAIG MYLES

## **NAKED**

a hole returned  
we ended and wept  
found along walls of  
rotted stumps  
pieces of our childhood  
in between

– CHAIM DAUERMAN



## TUESDAY MOURNING

Marla Tanner ate a razorblade sandwich. Besides the warm taste of metal, mayonnaise, and even perhaps mercury, everything was normal: the husband away at his nine to five, the children gone to school until three, the nosy neighbor in his crimson Jockey underpants with olive green binoculars in hand – constant behind a broken bay window. The voices in her head quieted down. They listened to her susceptible heart become fixated on the ideas of comfort through suicide. They listened attentively as if they could somehow rescue her from the internal chaos they often ignored, but invoked.

Marla Tanner ran a scorching hot bath, then filled it with the melted snow which had engrossed her tiny back porch just outside her desolate bedroom window. Most of the snow had been discolored by the stray tabby, Tabby, whom she unconsciously loved every now and then, even buying the cat its own hairbrush. The tabby which often kept her company while she watched the clouds in full view from her desolate bedroom window. The tabby who was as unafraid as herself of the shoutings down below, all around, in between, and left of the middle. The same tabby she feared would tread the thinning fish pond, absent of fish, the children used to skate on this time of year. The same tabby that scratched occasionally at the thick black bars placed on her desolate bedroom window, the ones her husband “found” from the local insane asylum, or Alcatraz, or Italy, or someplace. That exact tabby she wondered about, unconsciously, when he or she wouldn’t come around in the mornings, as she would cry from fear of it being mauled by Cujos or skinned or hung like that man was outside of Baton Rouge...the tub remained scorching hot with melted-discolored snow.

Mrs. Tanner’s thoughts begin to permeate aloud and soon, she felt, the voices inside would be awakening soon. Soon. Real soon with a plethora of questions, comments, inquiries, and banter. They’d want to “talk things over,” “discuss things,” “analyze both this and that,” but they would only confuse and ignite more pain because they were capable. And they made her feel naked each time, more so than her husband’s sadistic touch, her children’s wayward behavior, or the sight of her neighbor’s binoculars peering endlessly at her forty-two-year-old buttocks.

She was still... she froze beside the melted-snow-filled scorching tub which had appeased her, briefly. She had thoughts of nothing, but “they” knew it all very clear. She thought about how filthy Tabby’s hairbrush was. And how the house chores were all done. And that dinner would be ready at seven. And the clothes were in the dryer. Her skin had become frozen.

It’s Tuesday afternoon at 12:05 p.m. Mrs. Marla Rose Elizabeth Tanner ate a razorblade sandwich. She never liked the warm taste of metal, mayonnaise, or even perhaps mercury. But everything’s worth trying, at least once before you die.

– RAHIMAH HERD

## 102 IN DOG YEARS

Snoring blue hound rules peripheral worlds  
atop a worn throne of  
nappy wool plaid

as militant mice march in midnight’s disguise  
pilfering crumbs from an  
old dog’s dignity

but stubbled lips smile, tired paws twitch with pace  
dreams unlock freedom to  
dust mocking rodents

while carefully stashed, not-quite-consumed bones  
surface to memory between  
begonias and thyme.

– ANITA PHILLIPS

## MAGENTA

Dancing on a swaying petal and  
Skipping along its fluorescent veins.  
A drop of rainwater flows swiftly down  
The silken curve of the petal,  
Sweeps me into an effervescent  
Bubble that arches through the sky,  
And splashes unceremoniously on the  
Muddy ground below.

Wet and humorously befuddled, I drag  
A wayward leaf to a nearby muddy river.  
Climbing aboard, I am gently carried  
Down the chocolate river.  
I lie on my back and watch the green  
Grass framed sky steal across my vision.  
The picturesque clouds dancing stories  
Before my eager exited eyes.

Sliding onto land I sleepily drag the  
Loyal leaf atop a flat stone.  
Climbing underneath, I close my tiny lids  
And fall asleep below the color stained  
Petal from above.

– A.W. BENING

## THE SWIMMING LESSON

The water was cool and refreshing. The long drive out to the river had been hot and dusty. The gunnysack felt coarse against my skin as the heavy rock pulled me down to the muddy bottom.

I struggled to open the sack, but my fingers weren't clever enough to undo the wire holding the neck closed.

I was beginning to run short of air and I wished I had taken a big breath before I hit the water, but Dad never gave me time for that. He just picked me up and threw me into the river. Sack, roll and all. Kersplash!

By now I was getting real anxious about breathing some fresh air. I was all doubled up in the sack so I was able to shove my feet against the rock, put my shoulder at the opening on the sack, and shove.

I was free!

I splashed to the surface and started to gasp in some fresh air, then I stood up.

Heck!

The water was only about shoulder deep, so I waded over to the bank and sat down. I took my soggy shoes and socks and wriggled my muddy toes.

"Where's my sack?" Dad demanded.

"Out there." I said, pointing to the water.

"Get it!"

Dad caught me up again and threw me back in the water.

I splashed right down onto the sack again. I was lucky that I didn't have to hunt for it in all that murky water. I took a good tight grip and pulled the thing after me as I waded out of the water again.

"Venus reborn," Dad said, but I didn't get the joke until years later. "Let's dry you off and get something to eat."

– GEORGE ST LOUIS

## **CAN I BUM ONE OFF YOU...**

sure, why not

let me spread the wealth  
let me share death

what's that old adage? – the giver should be thankful  
better to give than to receive

for each one you bum off me  
that might be a year of my life you're saving

oh, well yeah, I mind the money  
especially nowadays that prices went up

but when I give them away  
ironically enough, it's an investment

perhaps not monetarily, but from what I hear, health  
is priceless, so let me spread the wealth –

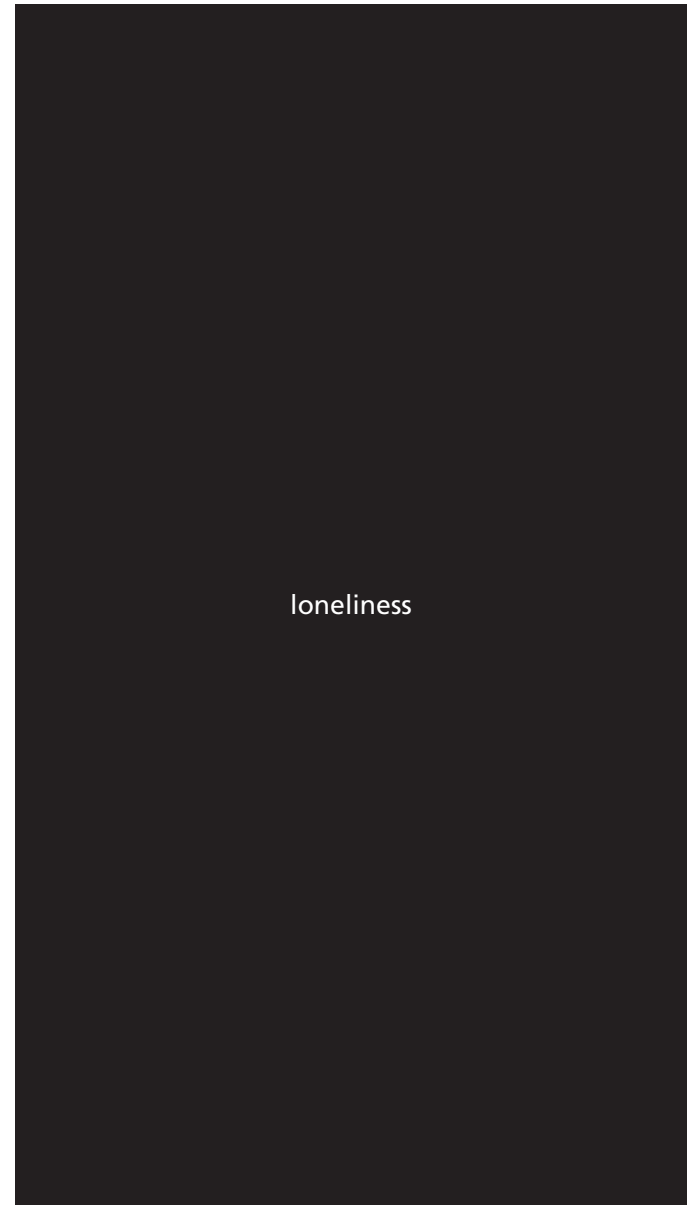
– ALLESANDER

## **STOOD UP**

I look at the time  
and I ache.  
The seconds fall  
as my soul's chords  
crumble in colored reeds  
in winter  
uniting time.

I look out to the street.  
There one girl fades in my memory.  
She loses my touch  
and my starlit image  
of her  
to shine.

– THOM GARZONE



loneliness

– ALESSANDER

## SCOTTISH MIST AND ROB ROY

Despite the grey dreariness hanging overhead, the day could not have been more perfect. Sitting on the tour bus, I dimly registered the light pitter-patter of the drizzle on the roof or windows, simply because I was looking too intently out the windows at the scenery. Already my neck was beginning to cramp from the uncomfortable angle at which it was stuck against the window, as though sheer force of will would allow me to penetrate the glass and place my head outside. I shifted in my seat to a more awkward position that would allow me to observe the environment without the future aid of a chiropractor.

My girlfriend and I had been on a tour of the British Isles for over a week now, and today was the day I was perhaps the most eagerly awaiting – the Scottish Highlands. Even before having come to Great Britain, I had had a strong affection for the Highlands, which had only been enhanced by the breathtaking vistas portrayed in the movies *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*. Would it be like what I had seen, I wondered? What were the Scottish moors really like? Did the fog truly become that thick?

Having grown up in the suburbs and living a short while in Israel, I never completely understood the power that greenery can have over you. It's almost a spell that's cast, a siren's lure that calls you ever-onwards, deeper into the forests, through the valleys, up the mountaintops, to stand at still waters with your heart aching from such beauty. How many others had succumbed to that same lure?

As the bus turned the corner, thick forests passed in a blur on the left. I was fascinated by the dark recesses hidden amongst the thickly spaced trees. I had never quite understood what it must be like whenever an author described the interior of a forest as dark. I knew they meant shady, but never had I quite understood how dark they meant it could be. One could easily lose his or her way through the tightly spaced, thin trunks. Once again I imagined what it must have been like for the various Highland clans to live in such surroundings.

Now the waters of a lake became visible, and I turned back to listen to the guide. We were arriving at Loch Lomond, which contained within it a small island that had once been home to the legendary outlaw Robert Roy Macgregor himself. I felt a small thrill of excitement swell within me. The same surge had come upon seeing Stonehenge, the Tor of Avalon, and the grave of King Arthur. Now,

the hideout of Rob Roy himself. I wished at the moment that I knew more about the man. Movies are nice and all, but I hardly rely on them for an accurate portrayal. At the same time, the haunting tune of a song I had just recently learned came to mind.

*"You'll take the high road, and I'll take the low road, and I'll be in Scotland before you. But as for my true love, we'll never meet again, on the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond."* I hadn't known until it was explained that the song was the farewell of a dying Scottish warrior. Looking out at the mist-shrouded waters, I could understand the allure of the loch, nestled in the arms of surrounding mountains. Tapping my girlfriend on the shoulder, I gestured for us to leave the bus with the others.

It was cold outside as we exited the confines of the bus to stand on a small knoll that bristled with wildflowers. A rocky dirt path led towards the knoll and then split, one path taking you to the top, the other around the knoll itself. I took a moment to orient myself and look around, noting with awe the cloud banks that hovered low across this valley. I turned back out to the loch, letting my gaze sweep across the waters into the fog that hovered beyond. I have never understood why colors are more vibrant on overcast days, but I didn't plan to start hypothesizing now. I was too entranced with the near riot of color that threatened to explode as bright pinks, violets, yellows and reds sprinkled the small hill path. I sniffed momentarily at the air letting the moisture gather on my face, the smell and taste of water in my mouth. Grinning wildly, I trudged down the rocky path listening to the pebbles crunch under my feet.

What must it have been like to live here? I tried to envision myself standing here over three hundred years prior, with only the loch, the valley, the greenery and those with you for company. A lonely group of highlanders clustering around a small fire for warmth, shrouding in their full kilts, hiding from English forces that sought them. You could truly feel like you stood out on the edge of the world, looking out into the mist. It must have been a lonely existence. Spotting my girlfriend by the edge of the Loch, I trudged down to meet her. She stood watching the clear waters of the loch lap against the rocks, and I blinked in surprise at the clarity of the lake. As I turned to speak with her, ripples began to dot the surface

of the water, followed by the soft patter of droplets falling on the leaves. Despite the umbrella grasped in her hand she darted laughing out onto the trail once again surrounded by wildflowers, letting her head go back to stand twirling the rain.

I momentarily frowned as the rain began to increase. Another glance up at the mountains showed their tops wreathed in mists and cloud, like evershifting crowns. Dark patches signified groupings of heather, not yet in blossom. I had been told that when the heather bloomed, entire regions gave way to small purple-pink flowers, looking like someone had spilled watercolor on the surroundings. I looked out again at Rob Roy's island before looking to my girlfriend, then smiled and ran out to join her in the drizzle that had now become a steady downpour that washed the land with a grey watery tone, as if it were trying to melt away like a dream from which you awaken.

We prepared to head back to the bus when I spotted the bronze structure on the hill top. Despite the muddy trail, I rushed to the top to get a better view. Up there, I found it to be a compass. Marks showed the nearest towns and lochs, but I was drawn to one that pointed out towards the island. An arrow pointed to Rob Roy's hide-out. Squinting, I looked closer until I could make out the dim recesses of a cave located halfway up. Why would the man have chosen such a desolate place to take refuge?

But as I looked around, I wondered if Rob had not chosen it for the same reason I stood in awe. Here, amongst the forests, the valley and the mist, he was free to gaze out at the land, and to be overtaken by the greenery. I gave a quick smile toward the direction of the cave before dashing towards the bus. Inside I sat down, hoping to dry off as the rain increased to a steady pour. Soon after the bus started up, and the road began to curve, heading into the highlands, the moors, the lochs, the mist filled with the proud histories of clans and the politics of a country. Later that night while talking with my girlfriend, lying in the hotel room, the song came back to me once again and I realized that like the song, we too had left part of ourselves on the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

– CRAIG MYLES

## **FARMER'S WIFE TURNS HUBBY INTO SCARECROW**

Abandoned by side of  
gravel road Ohio  
state troopers discover  
scarecrow fits description  
"America's Most Wanted"  
serial corn-killer.  
Tell-tale red plaid shirt,  
hair like straw, tattooed eyes,  
"That's him."  
Full moon,  
covered in crows,  
neighbors remember  
those two never got along,  
he always said and  
now everyone agrees,  
what a witch!

– MARY TORREGROSSA

## MIRROR TO THE PAST

I see him walking towards me,  
his appearance as foreign  
to me as the man I once loved.  
Gone is the long hair through which I ran my fingers  
as we lie entwined on a tie-dyed bedspread,  
amid the Day-Glo green hanging beads,  
coconut incense and black lights.  
No more Deadhead tee shirts  
or ragged blue jeans over dirty,  
well-worn Nikes.  
I see him walking towards me,  
a familiar face yet updated, with  
designer hair cut, three-piece suit –  
complete with pocket hankie –  
and spit-polished leather shoes.  
I see him walking toward me,  
So I peek in my internal mirror, and  
quickly inventory my appearance –  
my gray hair, my weight, and my attitude.  
As he passes me, I  
wonder if I should smile  
Or let the past remain buried.

– MICHELLE ANGELINI

## A SKEPTIC EYE

It is summer time.  
She plies us with donuts, sweet muffins and bagels  
with cream cheese  
Subtle bribes for her scholars.  
Urging us to forget our pasts and peer at the next level.  
Into the worlds of Marxian intelligence  
and pithy literature, trips on UFOs,  
obscure movies and Seattle tyranny.  
She always keeps a skeptic eye.  
For some dumb down their intellect.  
Hide behind notions of middle class euphoria.  
Waiting for a bright future that will never come.  
A house on a hill, a big car bearing the cross of God,  
a shining Knight or a winsome  
Princess, quest for the pure nonsense of the American dream.  
But, if you don't get this, there might be another path.  
A quiet academic existence along a flowery road.  
But beware of the treachery for your mind might explode.  
Trying to find the grain of truth, the magnificent metaphor.  
But always the skeptic eye, watching over and wary of the flock.  
If you ask her a question, she delivers the right answer  
But then gives you layer, upon layer, upon layer, upon layer,  
upon layer of more...  
She dares you to eat the donut.

– STEPHEN ROBERTSON

## A KISS GOODBYE

I think someone once said: "A kiss is just a kiss."

I cannot remember where or when I heard it, but somehow it has become embedded in my mind, as a sand crab might burrow in a beach. After a few waves, you can't tell it was ever there at all. Many things attach themselves to our consciousness in this way; things you are told, things you say, things someone tries to sell you on, words on a sermon board at a nearby church, things your parents told you never to do. These all sink themselves very deep, sometimes so deep that it takes a weary and self-centered session of self-analytical bullshit to bring them to the surface.

So is the case with me.

I was thinking to myself of the little differences between the early years of life, the time in the middle, and the life being lived within the hours that are passing by as I type. If I look at it in little steps, it seems like I have not changed one bit since infancy. However, if I walk the path of memory in great strides, I can't seem to shake the idea that I have never been the same person twice.

When I was a child, I had friends of all kinds. A British kid, a mean fellow Jew that no one liked, and the Mexican next door. And there were girls; lots and lots of girls. Males, in fact, were never much a part of my friend base. I never understood them. But girls were an entirely different matter. As a child, I enjoyed a sort of kinship with them that I found nowhere else. An understanding, a sweetness, and kindness. I felt like I could understand them and they me. With females, I had a bond.

And yet, in these latter days of childhood, with maturity looming eerily on the horizon, I cannot help but fear the years ahead. Because, for the life of me, I can no longer understand most females in any significant capacity. It's as if while I wasn't looking, they defected to the other side. It must have been they who defected, because I understand males no more now than I did before. I am lost without a side to call my own.

So now, here I am, adrift in a sea of misunderstanding and confusion, and I wonder: How did I get here? When was it that I began to fall away from those closest to me, like a bad swimmer stolen by a riptide? The change happened without me knowing, and by the time it was able to affect me, there was no turning back. I keep thinking, if I could only find the key. If I could only unlock the door.

Then: A gift from heaven. A phrase that was cryptic and plain

creeped into my head like an uninvited cat through the dog-door, or an unannounced guest at a party. There the sentence was, standing in the threshold of the front door of my mind.

"A kiss is just a kiss."

It was as random as it ever could be, with seemingly no reason to be there or be invited inside. But the idea intrigued me. I believe the little guy on my shoulder had offered me a riddle. Which shoulder it was, I am not yet sure. Not that I care now.

I regressed. Went far back, walking mind paths I had forgotten of long ago. The filing cabinets in the old cerebral office were rusty and disorganized, there was little light to see by, and cobwebs clung like cat-burglars to the walls. The smells of recently smoked cigarettes masked by many mints and toothpaste, and the odor of stale coffee I had never enjoyed drinking, mingled to create a sludgy air I could remember smelling.

So, this is what it's like to remember this... I thought. This is what it was like at thirteen.

I remember...

It was a quaint country town, a few miles west of the Sierra Nevada. Late afternoon had submitted to evening, and the light had clicked into that sacred hue when all the colors seem to bleed together into a palette of yellow and red. Even the breeze felt changed by the light, fleeting, as if trying to escape the heat of the setting sun. Elton John once said Kansas is the only place with golden sunsets. He obviously didn't travel any farther west to test his theory. I've been to Kansas and Coarsegold, California has the only sunset I have yet seen that I remember being solid gold.

We were strolling to the market, which rested by the gas station at the end of a badly paved road that stretched out endlessly along a ridge, connecting the dappling of homes in the town to the small cluster of stores by the highway.

A cricket chirped, and I suddenly felt like there could never be a place or time seeming more like summer than the moment that had me trapped. I was with the Girl.

A stolen moment alone, a trust from the parent, an allowance to leave the house unchaperoned, and a wish to kiss. All these followed us closely, like a stray cat hoping for a handout.

My hands were stuffed nervously in my pockets, my nose pointing due south on the vertical compass, and thoughts raced through my mind, taunting and jeering and making fun. The nasty boys

inside my head had come out to play, and all I had to rely on was the Girl. She led not far off, balancing childishly on what was intended to be a curb, but had since sunk into the fine dust of Coursegold, and become debris like most everything else around it. The golden luminescence of the sun penetrated her very being, shining through her dark curls, setting them on fire. Even her overalls seemed romantic.

It was time, a quiet before a storm. I knew something was going to happen. It boiled in my blood, raced in my heart, and rasped in my lungs.

I can still clearly remember the sound that first kiss made. A clicking sound. A hopeless romantic would say it was the sound of two hearts colliding, of two wills giving in, of walls falling down. Yet, all truth be told, I can be sure it was the audible collision of the braces on our teeth, within our awkward smooch.

I will allow my esoteric and analytical side to have a say in all this as well. Reality aside, as a result of this thought process, I will always consider that clicking noise to be none other than the sound of defection. More accurately, of parting ways. Choosing sides. For that was the moment that the lines were drawn, never to be erased. That was the event that sent me unknowingly on a journey away from the island of my youth, and off to the new world. One filled with gorgeous landscapes and bloodthirsty savages, and no kinship with the females as I once had.

Since that day, it has ceased to be “us” and become what it is today: me versus them. It’s a force of nature that is unfightable, that cannot be vanquished, and one I have only just begun to understand. I now know why I cannot feel like I once did. Because of the resurrection of this memory, the past feelings of inadequacy have been banished, and a realization has occurred: I am not a bad friend, I am an adult male.

That sunset seems all too metaphorically appropriate, now. The end of a day, like the fading of childhood. Then night falls; Adolescence. I think only now have I begun to dawn.

Oh, how I long for the simplicity of youth.

I progress.

A kiss is not just a kiss. Whoever said that must have taken Elton John’s word as truth, and never looked beyond the western horizon of Kansas for something... for anything.

– CHAIM DAUERMAN

## TAKE HER AS YOURS

Awaken her soul to the truth  
Give me words inside myself

Don’t let her hide

You’re calling, She’s falling

My heart aches to see her like this

The way she looks, so sweet

But she doesn’t know she’s lost

Without You she’ll be in more pain

More pain that she’s in now

Help her to understand, open her mind

Open her heart, penetrate the wall

Soften the blow to her eternity

Why won’t she admit she needs You

It’s obvious You’re the eternal answer

Keep her here just long enough

For her heart to break so You can enter

Then take her from all the suffering

Deliver her to Your palace

She’ll be a princess, she always should have been

She’ll be an angel, she always thought she was

And even if it tears my heart, take her home as Yours.

– ATHENA STAMOS



## HOW TO GET A GOOD DEAL WHEN BUYING A NEW CAR

“Who do you think you are?” she demanded. “That’s not the price we were given last night!! You can keep your car!!” she shouted to the sales manager as she drew up her 4’ 11” – 102 pound frame and turned to storm furiously out of the showroom. As my feisty little wife passed me she paused and said, “Let’s get out of here, we’re wasting our time,” in a voice loud enough to be heard by anybody in the showroom. I thought to myself, “Sweetie-pie, you’ve really lost it this time.”

My wife and I had been shopping around for a new car for me. My old decrepit Mazda GLC had finally given up the ghost after many years of faithful service. My favorite aunt Angelina had died a few months before, leaving me a tidy little sum of money. My wife insisted that I should buy myself a new car with part of it.

Having been satisfied with the service that my old Mazda had given me, I started out by checking the stock of some of the local Mazda dealers. I first decided on the features that I wanted on my car, the key ones being air conditioning, a good FM radio/cassette player, and a 5 speed manual transmission. Since we planned to do a lot of traveling, I felt these were a minimum. After making the rounds of the dealers in the San Gabriel Valley, I had narrowed the field down to two cars at two different dealerships. An entry level model with all of the important extras I wanted and a more deluxe “loaded” model. Both were demonstrators with less than 10,000 miles. The entry-level model was a sporty little Protégé SE with a “high performance” engine (the SE designation harkened back to the Mercedes that I had once owned). The “loaded” model was a 626LX, which had power windows, power door locks and deluxe upholstery in addition to the desired features. Each had its advantages, but I was still undecided and needed some advice. It was now time to call in my helpmate and chief negotiator, my wife.

Having been born and raised in Brazil, she had at an early age learned the finer points of negotiating prices. It is common knowledge that just about anywhere in South America, you never pay the asking price. It is almost expected that the buyer make a ridiculously low offer as a starting ploy, which the seller bemoans that it will put him out of business, and comes back with an equally ridiculous counter offer. Then the negotiating starts in earnest in a cat and

mouse game of give and take, eventually reaching a price agreeable to both buyer and seller. I was depending on my wife to negotiate a good price for our new car.

I had initially leaned toward getting the sporty little Protégé, possibly a manifestation of an impending mid life crisis. After thinking it over, I finally decided that I really didn't need the temptation to “hot rod” around town getting traffic tickets. My wife had finally convinced me that we should go for the “loaded” model so on a Friday evening, we drove over to that particular dealer in the “Crown City” to begin negotiations. We found an agreeable young salesman who said that he was a French exchange student working his way through college and was taking ESL, and general education classes at Pasadena City College. He was a clean cut college student type, not a stereo-typical high-pressure car salesman, so we liked him right away. We showed him the car that we were interested in and asked for a demonstration drive. I liked the car so when we got back to the dealer, we told the salesman that we were ready to talk business. He led us into one of those stark cubicles so common in car dealerships and offered us a seat.

The car had a sticker price of over \$16,000 but since it was a “demo,” and “last year’s model” (and this was already February) he assured us that we could get a very good deal. He pulled out one of those sales contract forms all auto dealers have and started filling in the blanks, starting with buyer’s name, address, etc. Then we got down to the important part, the price. He started by entering the prices directly from the window sticker, explaining that the discount would be applied on the total price. The total came out in the high \$16,000’s plus tax and license. I had done some homework and had discovered that the wholesale bluebook price for this particular model was right around \$11,000 so we were looking for a final price in the \$11,500 to \$12,000 range. We asked if something in that range could be worked out. He said that he would have to talk to his manager and disappeared for a few minutes. When he came back, he said that the manager said that a price in that general range would be possible. We then thanked him and as a bargaining ploy, informed him that we still had one more car to look at, and that we would probably be back on Saturday morning, depending on the

deal that the other dealer offered. We did go to the other dealer and had a price offer in the \$9,000 range for the plainer model, but by this time my heart was already set on the nicer model.

The next morning, we went in at about 11 AM to close the deal. We purposely arrived a little later so as to not appear too anxious. We hunted down our salesman and told him that we had a tempting offer at another dealer but would, of course, prefer to buy from him if we could agree on an acceptable price. After reminding him of our conversation the previous night, we then asked if a final price in the \$11,500 to \$12,000 range was indeed possible. He then led us back to the same cubicle where we had talked the night before, and said he would have to talk to his sales manager again.

After what seemed like an eternity, he reappeared with a different manager than had been on duty the night before. After introducing himself and making some small talk, the manager announced, "the best I can do for you is about \$15,000." At that, my wife launched into her tirade and stormed out of the showroom, headed in the general direction of our car. The sales manager hastily disappeared into his office with a rather surprised look on his face. I was in shock. I thought, "there goes my dream car." The young salesman also appeared to be a little taken aback. He had probably never come across a customer like her in his short sales career. We both sat in the cubicle not knowing what to do or say.

About 15 minutes later, the sales manager reappeared holding a revised sales contract in his hand. In the meantime my wife had quietly returned. He then announced, "the best I can do for you is \$11,369.49 plus tax and license, take it or leave it!" with a look on his face that implied, "and not one penny less." My wife's academy award winning performance had paid off. She calmly said, "we'll take it."

Later as we drove home after taking care of all the paperwork, she confided to me that the reason she stormed out of the salesroom and disappeared was that she was afraid that she would break out laughing. That sales manager was no match for her.

– JOHN J. VASCONCELOS

## **INSCAPE – POET OF THE YEAR**

1975	JEAN BURDEN
1976	MAXINE KUMIN
1977	HENRI COULETTE
1978	PHILIP LEVINE
1979	THOM GUNN
1980	No edition
1981	J.V. CUNNINGHAM
1982	DENNIS COOPER
1983	RON KOERTGE
1984	MARK STRAND
1985	JOHN ASHBERY
1986	LINDA PASTAN
1987	MICHAEL HARPER
1988	DENISE LEVERTOV
1989	WANDA COLEMAN
1990	PAUL ZIMMER
1991	KATE BRAVERMAN
1992	JOY HARJO
1993	“1A 1OCA” - PAMALA KAROL
1994	MICHAEL STEPHANS
1995	SEAMUS HEANEY
1996	ELOISE KLEIN HEALY
1997	SHARON OLDS
1998	OCTAVIO PAZ YEVGENY YEVTUSHENKO
1999	GARY SNYDER
2000	LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI