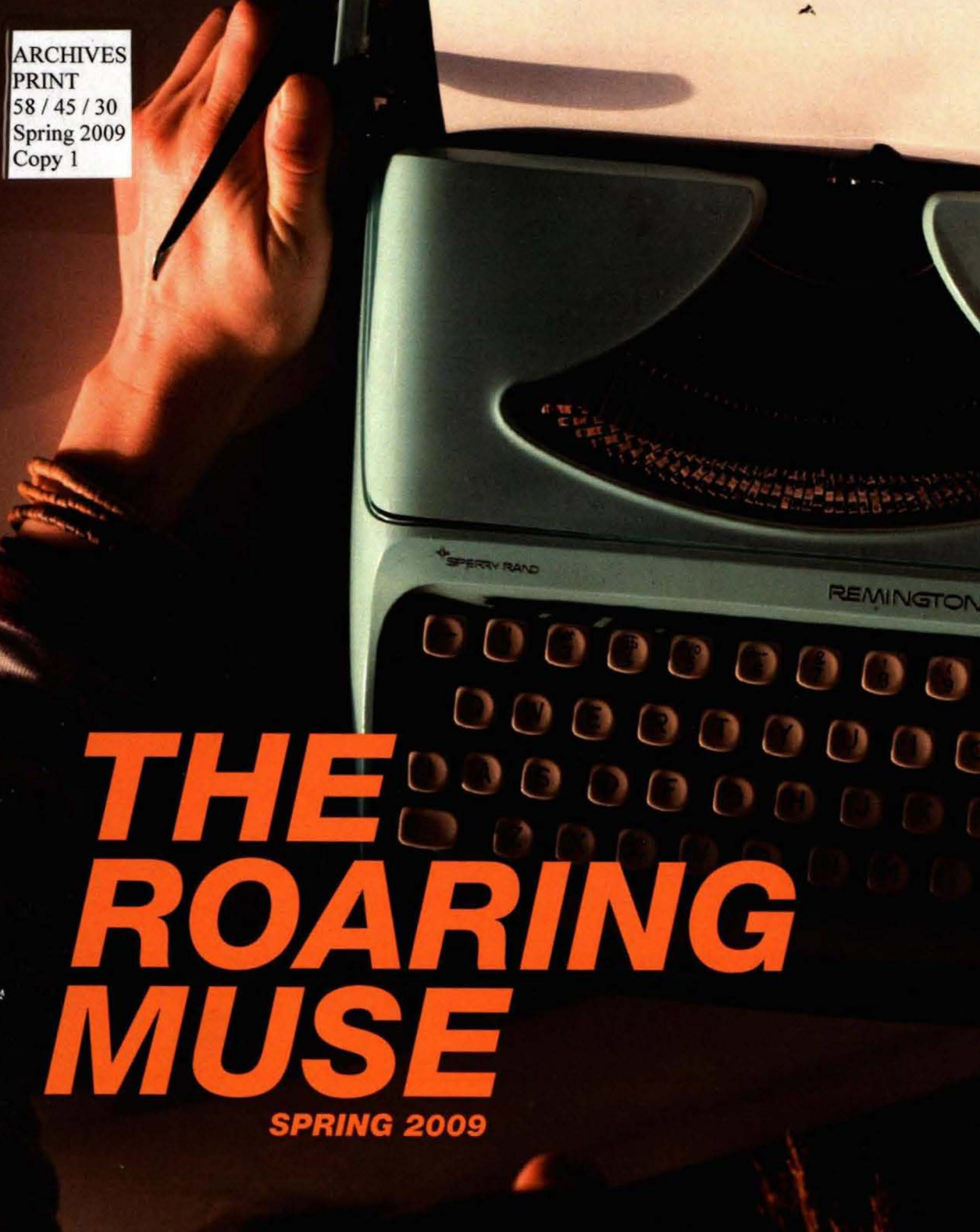


A close-up photograph of a vintage Remington typewriter. A person's hand, wearing a dark sleeve and a beaded bracelet, holds a black pen over the typewriter's carriage. The typewriter is dark-colored with a light-colored keyboard. The brand name 'REMINGTON' is visible on the right side of the keyboard area, and 'SPERRY RAND' is visible on the left. The background is dark and out of focus.

ARCHIVES
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Spring 2009
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THE ROARING MUSE

SPRING 2009

*Where flowing ink and snowy paper fuse,
Eternal truths — behold,*

THE ROARING MUSE

Cover art by Trent Waterman

Title poem by Joe Conaway

UMD Literary Guild
410 Humanities Building
10 University Drive
Duluth, MN 55812

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The University of Minnesota Duluth Literary Guild

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Published 2009

EDITOR IN CHIEF

NATHAN GRAVES

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

RUTH KNEZEVICH

ANNESSA KEMNA

KENDRA RICHARDS

STEPHANIE THOMPSON

CAYLA DeGROAT

JOZEF CONAWAY

TRENT WATERMAN

DON IRWIN

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

TRENT WATERMAN

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SARAH LONETTI

THE MACHINE

The machine spins. Each of us running the wheel.
We dance, skip, and stand horizontal on our strung out heads on command.
It beckons us all times of day and night.
We play, patronize, succumb, and bow to the madness.
Peace is a fleeting breath in this world and solitude is even harder to catch.

We are the ants that mine the earth and scurry about in compliance.
We are a colony of worker bees and capitalism is our Queen.
The world taken hostage by the monarch and given gifts of playstation and ipod.
Common sense is hijacked by the fear of terrorism.
Paralyzed into submission we allowing the monarch to grow like a menacing beast.
We fuel its greed.
We feed on its greed.

NICOLE BIRCH

BREAKFAST

I like breakfast.
Especially the taste of the word.
Break.
Fast.
I have a habit I can't break
And a secret:
I would love to fast.
Your food only slows me down, until
My stomach rejects the lard cement. Suck down your
Fluffy, syrup painted hotcakes and bacon.
(A heart attack served on a platter)
Coca-Cola,
Dark and acidic sweet,
Is my only sustenance.

TRISTA KESSLER

ALICE IS A CARD

I won my first poker game the night my sister died. I couldn't tell you what happened to her; that's the funny part. Or maybe it's just funny to me. But I could tell you every card, every pair, every flush. I could tell you that David bluffed, and that he was bad at it. And I remember the straight flush that won me the pile of plastic chips, and the beer from the fridge. The details of my mother's phone call are a little fuzzier. I remember my cell phone ringing and a lot of crying. I comforted and I consoled, and when she was done, I hung up my phone and drank my beer. Then I drank another, and a few more. David sat next to me, rubbing my back, telling me I was just in shock. I thought maybe he was right, but it just didn't seem to be that important. When I was having trouble standing up, he finally said he was taking me home, and he helped me to the car. He drove, and I sat with my head against the window and couldn't understand why the car rolled down the highway on its side.

**Her finger-
nails were
red, and
they sliced
through the
cards as she
shuffled,
and they
bled hearts.**

David helped me to bed when I got home, and I fell asleep with my shoes on. I dreamed that night, for the first time in years. I sat across from my sister at an old dirty card table, but she wasn't really my sister. She wore skirts, and had long hair, and there was a grin plastered in the air above her head. She held a deck of cards in her hands, and she was shuffling. I watched, transfixed, as her white hands curled around the deck, cutting, reshuffling, and cutting again. Her fingernails were red, and they sliced through the cards as she shuffled, and they bled hearts.

"Aren't you going to deal?" I asked her, watching intently as some of the hearts dried to black under her fingertips.

"Dealing is your job now," she told me, and the mouth above her head said it for her, but it was my sister's voice. I glared at her, at it, and watched her hands spin the cards, once, twice, *weave a circle round me thrice*...

"Hurry. I've got a funeral to go to." She looked at me disapprovingly, but then nodded with a long suffering sigh.

"You're always in a hurry," the mouth said, still in her voice.

"Speak for yourself. Now deal. If you make me miss it, I won't give your eulogy." She considered my terms, lips pursed, then lifted the cards to her mouth and kissed them. Then she spread her hands, and the cards fluttered off her fingertips, tumbling and swirling onto the tabletop. When they landed, they stretched their little arms and legs, and grumbled amongst themselves, though they made no noise. Then they rose from the table and started milling around, all in a jumble. The king climbed on top of the queen, and the jack was in a heated argument, complete with wild gesticulating, with a ten of clubs.

"This looks like a family reunion," I said, disgustedly gesturing at the bickering suits.

"I know," my Cheshire sister said, and she looked regretful as she pushed a hand across the table, knocking the cards down with a sweep of her hand. "But they could have at least had the decency to fall like a proper house of cards."

"Too many pairs," I observed, lightly fingering a five that still shifted like a beetle on its back. "You can never have more than a few of those in a real full house."

"I suppose that's true." She scooped the cards up again and started shuffling them once more. But this time her fingers didn't bleed. The cards twisted and complained, but then they blurred. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." And she threw the cards into the air, letting them settle back onto the table.

"Lots of new suits. Tell me my fortune?" I studied the spread of cards. There was a five of margaritas that half covered an ace of keys, but topping everything was the king, all twisted up in the remains of a Volkswagen.

"You're bluffing," I said numbly after a moment of contemplation. "You'll lose your head for that, won't you?" She gave me a sympathetic smile, picking up the king, gently tapping it on the table.

"I think it's a little late for that, little sister. Sentence first, verdict later." I took a moment to absorb this in silence, then reached across the table and took her hand.

"I'm sorry." She patted our locked fingers with her other hand, and I thought she looked sad.

"So am I. But it happened; it's in the cards already."

"Want to play another hand?" I didn't get an answer. She just flipped mine over, and ran her fingers over my palm.

"You're missing a suit. It'd ruin the game." I watched her fingernails, the ones that bled hearts.

"Which?"

"The heart." My fingers curled up until they were touching the backs of hers.

"Can I have one of yours?" I knew I shouldn't have asked, but what could it hurt? She shook her head angrily at me, putting a red fingernail in the middle of my white palm.

"The gardeners almost got beheaded for trying to paint the white roses red. How could you ask such a thing?"

"You're my sister." The grin above her head gave a mocking little laugh, but for once her face didn't match the expression.

"Not my sister's keeper," my sister's voice said. "You've got to look after your own hearts." She stood up, and scooped the cards back into a deck. "You'll have to excuse me. I have a game of cricket to play," a pause, "or was it something else..." She bit her lip, and the smile quickly started disappearing, tooth by tooth, until it had gone completely, though my sister still stood by the table, still looking troubled, trying to remember where she was supposed to be.

"Croquet," I reminded her gently, and after another long pause she smiled at me, and started to walk away. But as she reached the tiny door at the other side of the room, she stopped, then turned and came back to where I still stood at the table.

"Read me," she mouthed, because the grin had gone away with her voice. Then she flung the cards across the table, and produced a bottle of tequila with a worm at the bottom, marked 'drink me,' and she shrank, then left.

I looked down at the cards where they had fallen. A royal flush.

"She always has to have the last word," I sighed, and brushed the cards off the table. They scampered through the door after my sister, with much more dignity than they had any right to possess. "Who cares what you think?" I called after them. "You're nothing but a pack of cards."⁷ Then I turned, as haughtily as I could manage, and started making my way back up the rabbit hole. And I knew I shouldn't be able to get back out that way, *but so many out-of-the way things had happened lately*, that I simply didn't bother questioning it.

ANNESSA KEMNA

CONSTELLATIONS

Celestial greetings above my soul.
Orion the strong ambassador,
The Hunter, steadily marks his goal.
His pursuit I cannot ignore.

He calls my wonder to the sky.
How minuscule I am.
Even as the billions of stars go by,
I am not as bold as them.

As he watches down on me,
does he even see my glow?
Am I one or barely a part of we
in the stars found down below?

STEPHANIE THAYER



LORI ANN BUOEN



DAVE COSTELLO

TROPHY

She smiles a crooked smile.
Her small, pointed white teeth
a perfect match to the mouth
of the fish she is holding up by the gills.
Her water-splattered shoulders
not much taller than the grass around her faded jeans.

Early gray clouds
the perfect weather for fishing.
Her sunny curls escape from his too-big hat.
You can almost see his reflection in her eyes,
the Master Fisherman
reeling in his trophy
to hang in a frame on the wall.

She smiles a crooked smile
blind to the mesh of the net
covering her dry,
oxygen-deficient world.

LAURA KRUEGER-KOCHMANN

THE INTERSTATE

Guys, I have to piss. Shane announces, breaking the silence of three in the morning. I pull onto the nearly nonexistent shoulder under a massive green sign beckoning us toward Bismarck—only 120 miles from our destination, the Montana border. Parked beneath the glow of the only lights for miles, lights that glow the way Avery's eyes did when I asked if he wanted to go somewhere.

I've got a debit card. Let's do it, he said.

No maps, no plans, just three old friends facing the never-ending interstate. But now, progress put on hold while Shane stands proud in his manhood, a silhouette against the artificial light, a reminder we're not as mature as we think. I relax my foot on the brake, not accelerating, just rolling. The face in the rearview mirror drops as he lifts his pants up—partly. Hobbling toward the car, tightening his belt, yelling *I'm gonna kick your ass, Nate.*

Avery and I just laugh like eight-year-olds as a cool breeze drifts across the prairie and through open windows.

Belt well-adjusted, jogging alongside the car, he dives into the back seat—an uncoordinated dive. Flailing limbs smack the frame of the swinging door. *Damnit you guys,* he cries. Laughter overpowers his mumbled curses and exhausted breathing as we continue—on the road once again. A road across the flattest land on earth, the landscape a reminder we will have to create our own excitement along the way. A distant orange haze of city lights caught by clouds, makes me wonder if Montana is watching, anticipating our arrival, or maybe Fargo is watching us escape its familiarity.

NATHAN HAUGEN

IN THE FALL

Rising as the boy climbed, the sun filtered through the mists of the valley's damp autumns' darkness; gold, bright and cold. He could see it slowly enveloping the shaded woods around him, covering the darkened hills. Everything in the shadow of the horizon was slowly beginning to shine with it; the burning yellow orb still not yet visible behind the mass. The edges of the world glowed gold: Its colors casting deep shadows beyond the boundaries of the giant stones' silhouette.

He could feel the mist on his hands and on his face as he climbed. The wetness of it was cold against his skin. He could hear the sound of his heart in his ears and looked down at the pounding in his chest. His woolen shirt had become damp and heavy in the mist. There was the sound of his feet on the earth; the scraping of rocks, the rustling of fallen red and golden leaves on dark wet roots. He paused, watching his breath rise and disappear above his head.

**He paused,
watching his
breath rise
and disappear
above his head.**

She doesn't run off like this, he thought to himself. Why would she run like this? He stopped then and leaned up against an old cedar tree that was hanging over a small outcropping of black rock. The boy watched the swirling white clouds clinging to the mountain's peak tumble slowly down into the mists of the valley below. Then he looked at the roots of the old cedar tree, watching them cling quietly to the cold rock. He could see that there was a thin layer of soil between the roots of the tree and the rock, but not much. The tree itself was small; thick and strong, but strangely small, he thought. Of all the places a tree could go about growing, he thought, why it would grow here on the tree line, where it's cold and the wind can beat it, he did not know. If it had a choice, it wouldn't grow here, he decided. Nothing's here.

There was the sound of barking then down in the valley. She's chasing a deer again, he thought, and moved quickly back towards it. That's the only reason why she runs, he reminded himself. She only runs after deer. He found the dog at the bottom of a large ravine. She was with a fawn, still with spots; its ears perked, erect, attentive, panicked. He watched her pull it down into the shallow water of the stream and break its leg.

There was no reason for it, but he couldn't stop himself from running down into the gorge. He tried to choose his steps carefully over the wet rocks in the shaded gorge, but his foot slipped and he fell forward and rolled into the stream.

He could feel the icy water move around him. He could not stop shaking as he crawled back onto the river bank. His back was sore and his head was pounding.

The boy grabbed his dog by the collar and tried to pull it away from the fawn, but it snapped at him. He picked up a stick and hit his dog with it hard on its side. The dog let go of the fawn and whimpered, curling itself up into a ball. Blood was dripping from its mouth. The boy could see it staining the white fur red.

He walked over to the fawn then and stood over it. The little deer was partly submerged in the water and very still, besides its shivering. The fur was matted and wet and its eyes looked awfully brown in the shadows, he thought, almost black. He watched them twitch and wondered what it was thinking. He looked at its broken leg too; he could see the bone bent back awkwardly underneath its body. It was very skinny, he thought.

The he walked downstream and picked up a large black rock. It would not move when he pulled on it, so he kept walking through the ravine and found another large black stone that was slightly smaller. It was uneven, which made the stone difficult to carry. When he picked it up he saw that there were dirty strips of white which shone flat and colorless in the golden light of the morning.

The stone cut his hands when he picked it up. He could not carry it very far, so he stopped to rest. He could feel his arms pulsing with the phantom weight of the stone when he put it down.

It was a very big stone, the boy thought. It would work. He looked up through the gorge and could see the leaves moving in the wind, the golden light of the morning raining down through them, softly patting his face.

He looked back down at the fawn then and picked up the stone. As he made to throw it, the fawn struggled to its feet, but buckled over onto its side after putting weight onto its broken leg. The stone struck the fawn on the side of the head, cracking its skull and crushing one of its black-orb eyes. It screamed in a high-pitched whine and began to thrash against the bank of the stream. The boy felt sick.

The shadows had grown around him as the sun had risen, framing the colors of the woods in a vibrant darkness. He then picked up a dead branch and used it to push the fawn off of the bank into deeper water. The fawn was still able to get its head above the surface so the boy walked into the stream up to his thighs and held the branch down firmly on the fawn's neck, keeping its head under the water. The boy did not look down at the fawn but kept his eyes on the shadows of the ravine.

The boy stood in the water for some time; even after he no longer felt the fawn struggling against the branch. When he got out of the stream he could not feel his feet and shivered from the cold.

When the boy got back to his house his mother was sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper. She was drinking tea and the house was warm. He could feel his nose and fingers burning. It was late so when his mother asked him where he had been. The boy said that it had been a very good walk, "The fall colors are wonderful" he said smiling. "It was just wonderful."



DAVE COSTELLO

SADIE

(FORT SMITH CHOCOLATE LAB)

You can't please a man that finds no pleasure.

Sadie you taught me this.

Maybe that is why you were so goofy,

Retrieving twigs, rocks, love,

Anything we threw.

Because once a year we filled a void,

One that needed filling,

More than he needed redemption.

And Sadie we were glad to fill it,

Easy a task it was.

When the heart is full, the mind has no worry.

Sadie you taught me this.

Maybe that is why you slept on my steps,

Through the rain and lightening,

With no distress or anguish.

Because once a year you were cared for,

You did not see it necessary to waste

A single bit of that time,

Come rain, come shine, come anything,

You soaked us up,

And Sadie I am glad you did.

Love ebbs like Montana heat, no matter the circumstance.
Sadie you taught me this.

Maybe because as the Suburban
Rolled away with my face framed in the back window,
You sat still but aware.
Because you understand life,
It's ins and outs,
Its imperfections that project on our senses
No matter how obscure they may be.

When times seem unfair, it's best to be content.
Sadie you showed me this,
But if I were to have returned once more,
I would have taken you away from injustice,
Because Sadie I was not content.

DAVID COWARDIN

I MET A MAN

Show me the black lake beneath
The darkest skies above
And when I see this black lake
I've lost all that I love

Childhood spent in wonderment
Many years have passed since then
The ticking clock is louder
And never knowing when

I met a man, one dark night
Along the lake of lead
Quiet for the longest time
And then he finally said

"I come for all
I make the call
I am the dark
I hold your spark"

And in a flash he was gone
To snatch up all I love
I cried and cried all night long
No gift came from above

Never knowing when he'd strike
Just knowing that he would
Life would keep on with its course
And live the best it could

NICOLE FRANCEN

THE GIFT

The young woman waited.
Watched.
Wallowed in the vacancy.

But when the moue produced itself,
The precipitous movement of her willing hand,

Cupped the chin as it fell.
When the hunger persisted,
She unhinged her jaw to gulp its entirety.
When the vision blurred,
Her eyes bulged and detached from her face,
To accommodate the selfish sockets.

When the pace slowed,
She took a saw to her feet,
Encouraging the sacrifice to sprint.
When validation was necessary,
The arms were removed to provide eternal embrace.
When the heart cried,
Her own was ripped through the skin,

And offered carelessly,
Hopelessly left unattended.
The young woman collapsed.
Cumbersome.
Compressed into a crumpled heap.

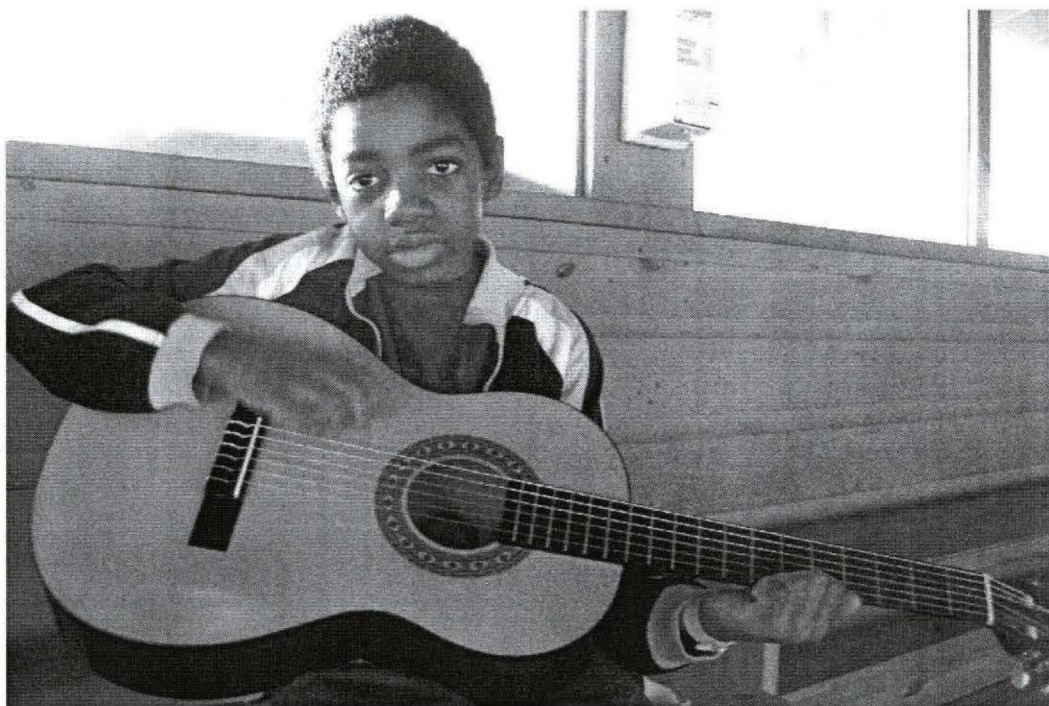
In an effortless moment,
He charmingly bestowed,
An eternally desired glance at her ruins.
She would have paused her breath,
Had there been air to afford.

But he swept by unknowing.
Unrecognizing.
Unwilling to keep.
As there was nothing left to see.

MINDEN JOSEPHINE ANDERSON



SOMBATH TRAN



SKEL'S BLUES

NATHAN HAUGEN

LEGION HEIRS

Shane had spent too much time outside. His cheeks were almost as red as the suns above him and he could already feel his sweat glands waking up, telling him to get inside. Fortunately for him a shelter stood not far in the distance – perhaps a half mile trek through the green foliage around him and he would be safe.

For a moment he thought of crawling to his destination in hopes of being covered by the tall, grainy grass. The pain in his knees, from forced drills less than a year ago, made the thought of crawling unfathomable. Making matters worse, he forgot his sunscreen at Shiona City two days back and pawned off his polarized contacts to pay for a hotel room, one that he was forced to leave once he was informed that a wealthier and better known guest arrived.

But wasn't *he* well known, even recently? The recruitment camp in his colony gave him that leaflet: "Write your own history. Join the Solar Imperial Legion!" What was his history now? A man who lost track of his family thanks to scammers who doesn't even have a permit to *write* to complete his own history.

Looking to the distance, Shane saw the structure was not far off. Five minutes and he'd be there. Its shape was not unlike that of the grain silo his family kept on the farm back home. What happened to them? he continued to wonder as his feet forced him, staggering and wandering, through the grass. The last he saw his mother she left for the evening to get some seed from Mr. Strass. Even Mr. Strass was gone; taken to a sanatorium because of the gathering spots on his skin. Everybody – even Shane – thought it was just measles, but the doctors wouldn't talk about it. Better for a person's privacy that way, Shane thought. Doctors shouldn't

**. . . perhaps a
half mile trek
through the
green foliage
around him
and he would
be safe.**

feed into people's gossip.

Close enough now to touch it, Shane put his hand on the surface of the building. It was not as warm as it would have been back home, five planets closer to the brighter of the two suns in the system, though he pulled his hand away expecting a brief sizzle from his sweat's contact on the metallic surface. It was about fifty feet tall and likely had a funnel on top for excess rain to flow into the underground irrigation systems. The structure's baby blue hue was meant to blend in with the skies above, though it already began to fade after decades of exposure.

He patted along the wall, searching for a device to allow him entrance. Eventually he found a simple slot that slid part of the wall aside. Inside, Shane heard some squeaking and rustling and the dripping of a leaky faucet. Realizing he had entered a kitchen or a dining room he quickly rushed to the sink, the source of the dripping, to wash his face.

"Some guest *you* are, boy," came a voice from behind him. Shane reached for his hip, seeking his pistol, but found only the empty holster. He remembered selling it for a train ticket just last week.

The voice came from a man, probably of about forty years, sitting at a table against the kitchen's window. He was sipping coffee from a cup he held intently with both hands.

The man's glasses slipped down the bridge of his nose, and he pushed them back up. "Yer could've at least knocked!" He sipped from the cup between his hands, breathing steam as he laughed at his own joke afterwards. "I'm just messin with yer. Have a seat, now." He extended his arm towards the small, empty stool across the table.

He was acting so hospitable in spite of Shane's initial reaction – to kill out of self defense – that Shane felt ashamed and complied. The seat was creaky and off balance, but suitable considering that Shane had been walking without a break for hours.

Reaching for a thermos on the floor, the man cleared his throat and sniffled. Shane wondered, was this man vaccinated against measles? Was it safe to touch whatever this man touched, let alone *drink* something he handled? It didn't matter: soon Shane was imbibing the bitter fluid, devoid of any cream or sweetener (just as they did in the Legion. "Coffee's not candy, it's medicine!" his Sergeant would always say). "Like it?" asked the man.

Shane nodded. He swallowed the last of what was in his mouth, searing its way down to his stomach. "It's delicious. Thank you." He paused, staring at the man's ravaged shoes, before speaking his mind. "I'm sorry for entering your home without permission, sir. I've been trying to find a Legion Veteran's Center for weeks now, and nobody seems to want to help me to find it."

The man nodded. "And lemme guess," the man said, "yer fambly got scammed out by farmers 'n hadda sell all their land fer debts?"

Shane replied that, yes, that's exactly what happened.

"An' yer ain't got a writin' license to find 'em?" The man's lips turned into a creased smile, sprinkled with stubble more in resemblance to dirt than hair.

That too, Shane said.

"I remember when I was young. I was in the Legion fer three years." The man finished his cup and emptied the remainder of the thermos into it – only about half of a cup. "Didn't get far, 'course. Hadda quit cause I was half a system away from my family. When yer in the Legion they give you writin' rights, but yer barely got time to jot more'n a few words down!"

"I know what you mean," Shane said. "Things haven't changed much since then."

"Yer tellin' me!" Anxiously sipping and pointing his finger, he muffled excitedly before he could speak again. "An' soon as I get out...they say my writin' rights are revoked! Buncha bee-ess if you ask me."

Shane looked out the window, seeing an old freighter lying dead on the landscape. "It's like *they're* writing our history for us."

The man smiled at him, his eyes tired. "Hey, everyone gets scammed out nowadays. We just got it from the government. Others get it when we're gone off fightin'. They get it 'cause they need someone protecting them when we're gone cause we're all they had. And when we're fightin', I wonder – who're we protectin'?"

Lifting the cup to his lips, Shane finished the remainder of his drink in one solid gulp, thwacking his tongue against his palate. He began to rise from his seat. "I don't know, sir, but-"

He was cut off. "Dane." The man's tone was adamant, but he seemed glad to divulge this information. "Call me Dane. Not sir. I ain't yer commander."

**"It's
like *they're*
writing our
history
for us."**

"Sure...Dane. I should be going. I've got more ground to cover this week, and I think I'm the one that'll need protecting if I can't find that LVC before..." Shane noticed many dark lesions on the man's wrists. At first assuming them to be liver spots or moles, he realized they did not consist of the normal, *human* color that such marks usually had. They were dark brown, and appeared to be flaking off, as if ashen. He assumed at first that the man burnt himself, but recalled the first warning signs of Lunarian's Disease.

Shane returned to his seat, remembering his old neighbor, poor Mr. Strass, and what happened to him once the government found out about him. The doctors thought he needed protection, *and* that those around him needed to be guarded from him. Strange that they never even discussed the idea of immunization with his neighbors and friends.

Dane tried to read Shane's face and realized what Shane saw. He thrust his hand into his pocket. "You, ah, better get going, right son?"

He realized that by now, after having touched the water, the table, the coffee cup, even sitting at this table and breathing the same air, the cells in his skin were probably already forming the lesions on his skin. "Nah. And please, call me Shane."

With a smile on his face, Dane momentarily forgot his worries and removed his hand from his pocket. "I'll grab some more coffee." He stood and walked across the kitchen, reached into the cupboard and retrieved another thermos.

Shane sighed. He looked out the window again, past the dead freighter, and he saw a smog covered cityscape, reflecting and refracting the light of the suns, where there would always be daylight. He thought, on this planet it was always bright but usually strangely cool, unlike the Sol system, where he'd only been once or twice (it was always dark and cool, or bright and hot).

The coffee gurgled as it poured out into Shane's cup. He looked at Dane, who was once so alone and smiled. "I wonder, if we all need protecting," he said, feeling his skin crawl, "*who's* going to protect us?"

ACHILLES SANGSTER



SHALOM PEACE

ANNA AFFIAS

SWALLOWS

Should the swallow feel bound
When a new forest alas is found
To perch upon a discovered ash
And sing only the songs of the past
That her ancestors knew
And nothing new

Would the sun still rise and offer the same glory
If our little bird forgot the stories
Her mother used to sing
Seeing the moon, the stars, the returning spring
And instead offered not a word
Can a silent swallow be called a bird
And pass on the same respect and grandeur
Of those elated ancestors she was forced to come after
Or is she wrong
To abandon the ancient songs
Let a beloved culture die
Perhaps you say the sun will rise, but cry
When morning glories are forced to shine
On silent woods so less divine

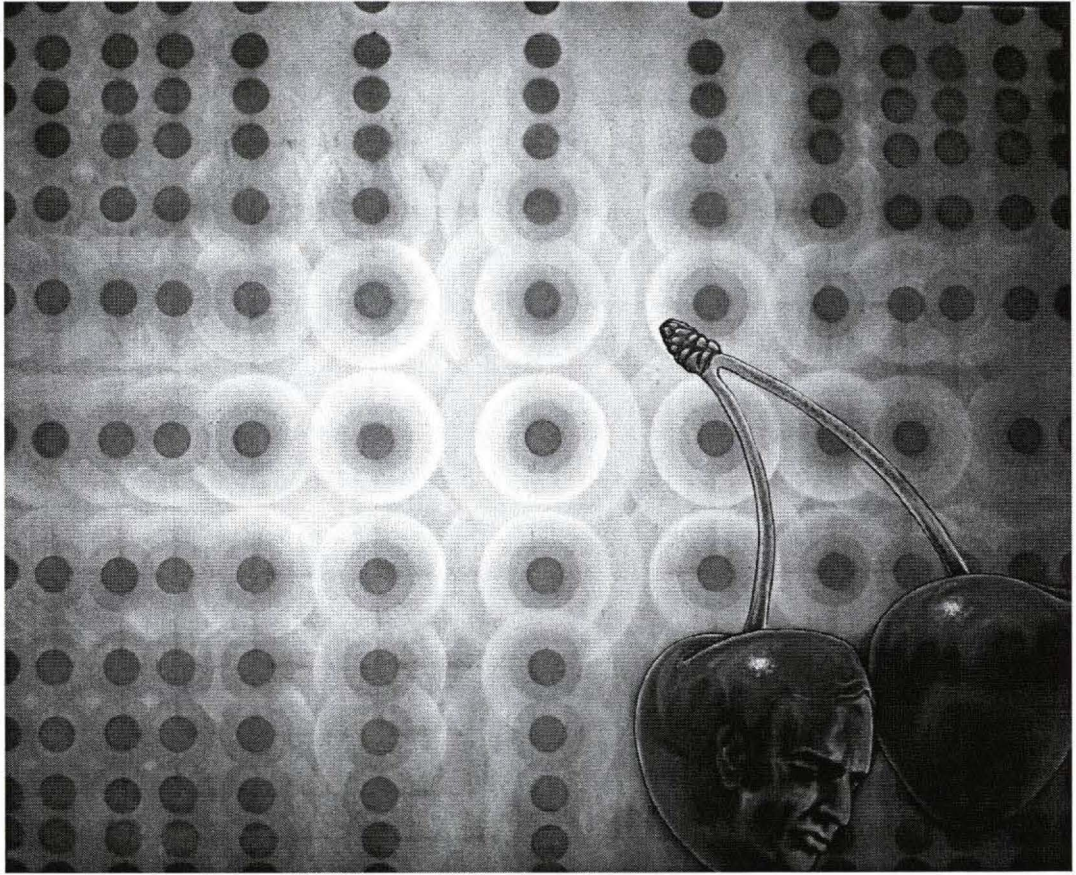
Why swallow, why not sing
What wrong, what evil would it possibly bring
To be a swallow
When born a swallow
Were they, your ancestors, not also bound
When a new forest they had found
To sing their mother's stories

Recant ancient glories
 Back and back to that very first bird
 Who perched alone was forever heard
 Not in silence
 But in thoughts, feelings, aspirations, sung out from her inner essence
 Sister, sing these, one interpretation
 Reader, answer by question

ZACH EUSTICE



SARA ANN SWENSON



MIKE SMISEK

KALEIDOSCOPE

The Mind, The Moon, The
Mood of a Woman,
The Skies, The Earth, The Air
We Breathe,
The Day, The Night, Any
Given Moment,
These All Change, They
Never Remain The Same.
Like a Kaleidoscope, My
World Changes,
Like the Merry-Go-Round of
Life I Am Spinning On.
I Want To Get Off, But
Would Much Rather Stay.
I'll Go Around One More
Time.
My Mind, My Moon, The
Mood Of This Woman,
A Love, A Friendship, The
World I Live In,
These Are The Colors Of
This Life,
Forever Changes , Forever
Challenging,
These Remain,
Like The Kaleidoscope
I Look Through.

LORI SANCHEZ

SUN SONG

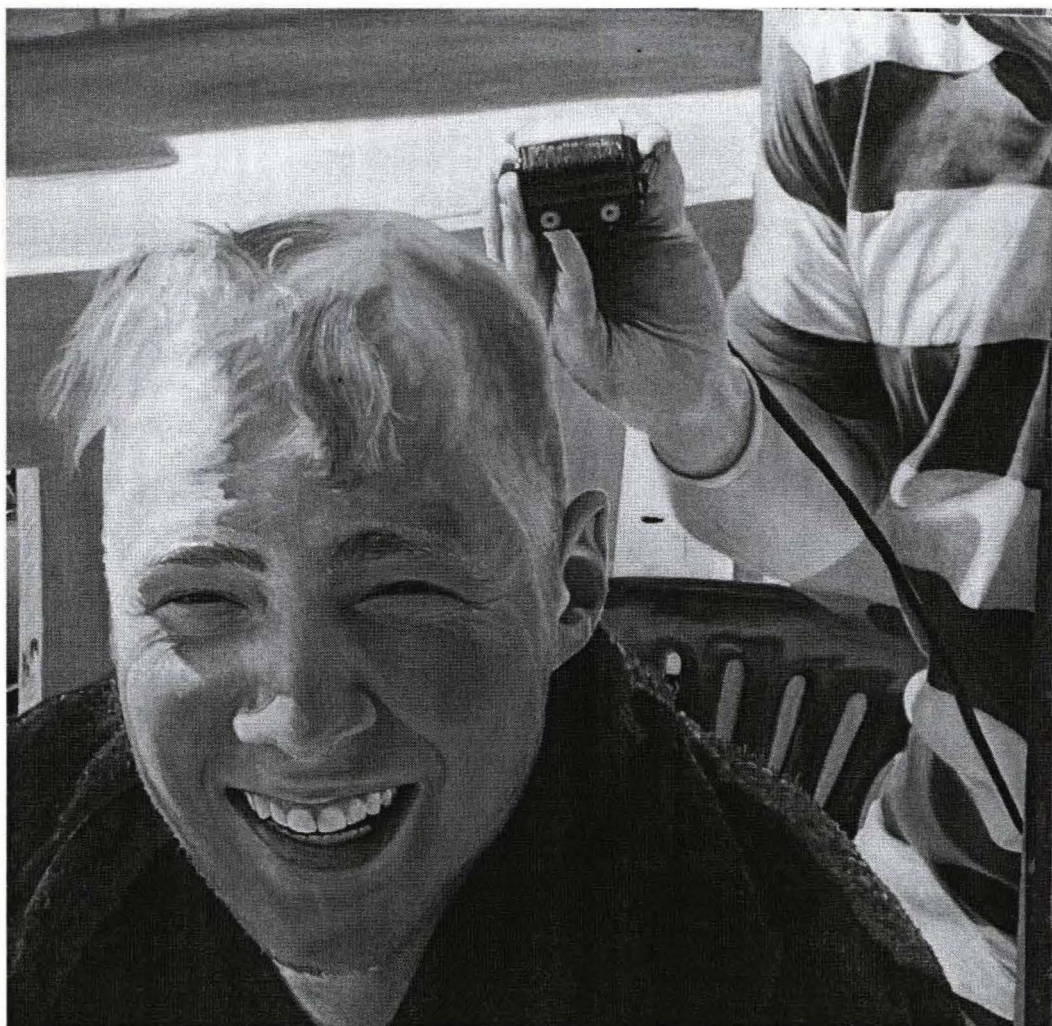
Raisend
A star on shine
Braced, in paid attention
Why.
Why?
Why, should he'sh ask why?
Aren't kaleidoscope shaped colors based against a welting sky?

Raisend
Now raised
Or pounds bound passengers a whisp.
Spilling hot amber golds
Flamed
To burn off their faces

Raisend?
Yes raisend!
Called by other no name
No pious face
No cerebral call
Reflection test remain done, fouled, you, all

Raisend
Just raisend
Gold, marked glory, sight's sea
Raisend
The orange jewel alone
Burns eternity away
Ahhhhhhhhhhlllllllll the way

ZACH EUSTICE



MIKE SMISEK

THRESHING

He had the bags in his hand and was halfway to his car when she stopped.

"Come on, Lila," he hissed, trying not to make enough noise to wake the neighbor's dog – a fat, shaggy brute asleep in his outdoor kennel. "We've gotta catch the three a.m. train if this is gonna work at all."

Still, she seemed reluctant to move. In her simple gray dress – the one with pink rose blossoms the size of pennies stamped all over it – she stood stock still, tall and thin as a wheat. Both the skirt and her long, blonde hair – light as corn silk, stirred with a midnight breeze. Everything about Lila Jean's body was cobweb and lace: her buttermilk skin, her hollow bones, her eyes the color of sparrow down... and now, even her heart was becoming lighter, floating away.

"Come on, Lila Jean, this ain't gonna work if we don't catch the three o'clock." He could hear his own voice shaking. They had put so much thought into this – this running away. But he knew his Lila, and the way she stopped, with her elbows at her hips and her mouth drawn, he knew she wasn't sure.

She glanced back at her house, and forward to Caleb's car. It was a shining '47 Chevy he had borrowed from his brother – black, with whitewall tires.

She knew the plan: they would take the Chevy two hundred miles to Pasanac and catch a train South to Loretto. There, Caleb would get a job in the mines with his uncle. They'd get married, and she'd have a two-story house a yellow kitchen and children, just like she always wanted. Always? Always seemed like such a long word. Lila reached back into the vague stretches of her memory, to summer days of her mother folding laundry over the line behind their house. She and her sister would laugh for hours be-

**"Psst, this
ain't funny;
are we
doing this
or what?"**

neath the drying sheets, playing house, or hide and seek – pressing their faces against the cool linen whenever they'd been running too hard.

Not always, she decided, looking back one more time at the house where she had grown up.

"Psst, this ain't funny, are we doing this or what?" Caleb paused for just a second longer, long enough to expel an exasperated sigh, and then went to load her suitcases into the trunk.

Lila thought of her father, a science teacher at the local high school. When she was younger, he would bring back dusts of metal to toss into the fireplace. She remembered her constant delight at seeing flashes of green flame from the copper. The copper had always been her favorite.

"Lila!" Caleb started the engine – a thin purr, but loud enough to menace the sleeping neighborhood. Brook's Bend had yet to install streetlights in all of the back neighborhoods, and Howard Miller's house was still the only one in town with a colored television set. Brook's Bend was a quiet place to live. By day, it echoed with the sounds of children and chickens. After sundown, the crickets seemed to roar.

"Lila!"

She thought of the day she forgot to latch the back gate, and their own dog – a prize hunter – disappeared away into the woods. Her father had slapped her, then, and she never forgot the sting of it on her face.

"Lila!"

She'd known Caleb as long as they'd both been alive. Their mothers grew up telling stories of how they'd been born into the same hospital – Lila three months early, Caleb two weeks late. They were the only two babies in the hospital, their mothers said, and bound to grow up friends. Their fat pink fingers would curl together as they slept in the same crib.

"We've got to go!"

She remembered the day he kissed her under the apple tree behind Howard Miller's bank. How her skin broke all into goose bumps and her neck tingled. Everything had seemed so right, back then.

"You've got to let go!"

Caleb had never finished high school, and Lila had studied out of home. They were only seventeen, and neither one had any place to go. So they dreamed.

"It's near on midnight thirty..."

Her parents would never have stood for it, and his had enough problems with the farm.

"Lila..."

The kiss, the linens, and the copper fire.

She turned around.

"Leave my bags out." Her mouth was dry. Her eyes were soft. Her voice was cotton.

Caleb's face fell numb. There was no shock, no anger, no surprise. They looked at one another for a long while. She memorized the lines by his eyes, the crook in his nose, the muscles of his jaw, the cups of his collar bones. She saw his body age before her – saw her body age beside it. She saw six kids and a dog and dinners in the kitchen, and beds full of quilts, and rooms full of rocking chairs, and both of them growing old, growing old by the edge of the fire.

Copper fire.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I really... can't... go."

Behind her a light up stairs clicked on, and Caleb's composure broke. No tears, though, just the twist of his mouth, a spark of panic behind his blue eyes.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said hurriedly, level, dark, mundane, tugging her bags back out of the car and piling them on the dewy lawn. Lila looked back at her house, at the light. There were silhouettes in the window. She knew how

much this meant to him. If Caleb didn't leave now, he'd never get the job with his uncle. He'd be stuck forever rolling combines over the dying fields of his grandfather's farm.

"No you won't," she said gently.

His mouth twisted again, his blue eyes shining despite the dark. She wanted to move close to him, to have him hold her, to have all the confusion turned away; but there was something between them, now. And she had placed it there.

"Go to Loretto."

Urgently, now; the house was waking up, "Will you meet me there?" He stepped forward in the dark, stepped back, uncertain. The engine purred on behind him. "Someday?"

"Maybe," said Lila.

"I'll wait for you," he promised.

She smiled again, her tears tucked sharp behind the pearls of her teeth.

"Don't..." she said.

He came to her then. Reached out for the sleeve of the rose printed dress. But she was not there. She was not anywhere, anymore. Her body, like wheat chaff, had blown away on the wind.

Caleb looked around and saw Brook's Bend. He saw Howard Miller's bank, and the apple tree, and his brother's car, and Lila's house with the lights turned on, and the neighbor's dog barking, and a baby, somewhere, crying to the stars. He looked down the road and saw Pasanac. He saw Loretto, and his uncle, and the coalmines, and his own face dusted black except where the sweat streaks melted down his brow. He looked for Lila. He looked out into his whole life; across the fields of time, where the years grew tall and strong, like corn stalks. One by one, so many rows, each with golden ears ripe to harvest. He looked out across his whole life, and looked for Lila.

But Lila wasn't in it. Lila wasn't anywhere to be seen.

He climbed into his brother's car, wearing his father's shoes, leaving his grandfather's farm to work for his uncle. A whole long life before him, full of unfamiliar women who laughed loudly, and men with arms like logs, and barking dogs, like the neighbor's dog, and children with his face, but none with hers. A long, long life before him, and strong.

He looked across Brook's Bend and saw nothing for him. He looked beyond to the rest of his life, and saw everything ahead.

Caleb climbed into his brother's car, and drove away.

SARA ANN SWENSON



RUTH KNEZEVICH

FINDING GOD

God is a mass of water molecules exhaling down the mouth of a stream.
A place in every corner of the world,
in every space.
Sin does not exist here,
nor time, mortality, life, or death.
This is not the place of living,
but of being.

Place your hand in the heart of life and become its lung.
You are here and I am there.
In the body of flow we are nowhere and everywhere.

We are the breath of wind that moves every leaf
and the misting of dew as the morning sighs,
night and day and decadent display.

NICOLE BIRCH

A SIGN OF THE SEASONS

I pick warm summer mornings with both hands
and eat them fresh off the tree --
The sunlight runs sticky straight to my elbows --
I do not wipe my chin --

Fall afternoons wrap, languid, like vines
lying low to the ground --
I step over them to go walking,
and work to keep them pruned --
my perennials --
I cover them over with blankets at night, to guard against frost,
and keep them as long as nature lasts --

Winter nights I taste the sky
the salty stars,
the richness of the night, thick; I drink deep,
so full, it's hard to breathe --
lungs pressed up against my heart --
the bittersweet taste of aging --

Spring comes and I plant my days twice,
in case one set doesn't take root --
I watch the years land, singing over new shoots --
The hollow-boned years, light, frail, in flocks --
a sign of the seasons to come --

Come summer again, and my seasons roll by --
I pluck hours like flowers,
watch the minutes take flight,
and wave the seconds away from my face.
It is good to be alive

SARA ANN SWENSON

THE WOMAN WITH POLKA-DOT EYES

I couldn't understand less
You must be important because you wear your
throne around like you've got more under your bed

Usually your playful, chubby little arm sways more and
more still until I think it could just flap away
You must not be going home quite yet
Don't worry, they'll wait for you

I've seen your hands before
A man with a confident plaid shirt and wet cement-colored
hair gave you a diamond prize and you humored him
I guess it didn't work out

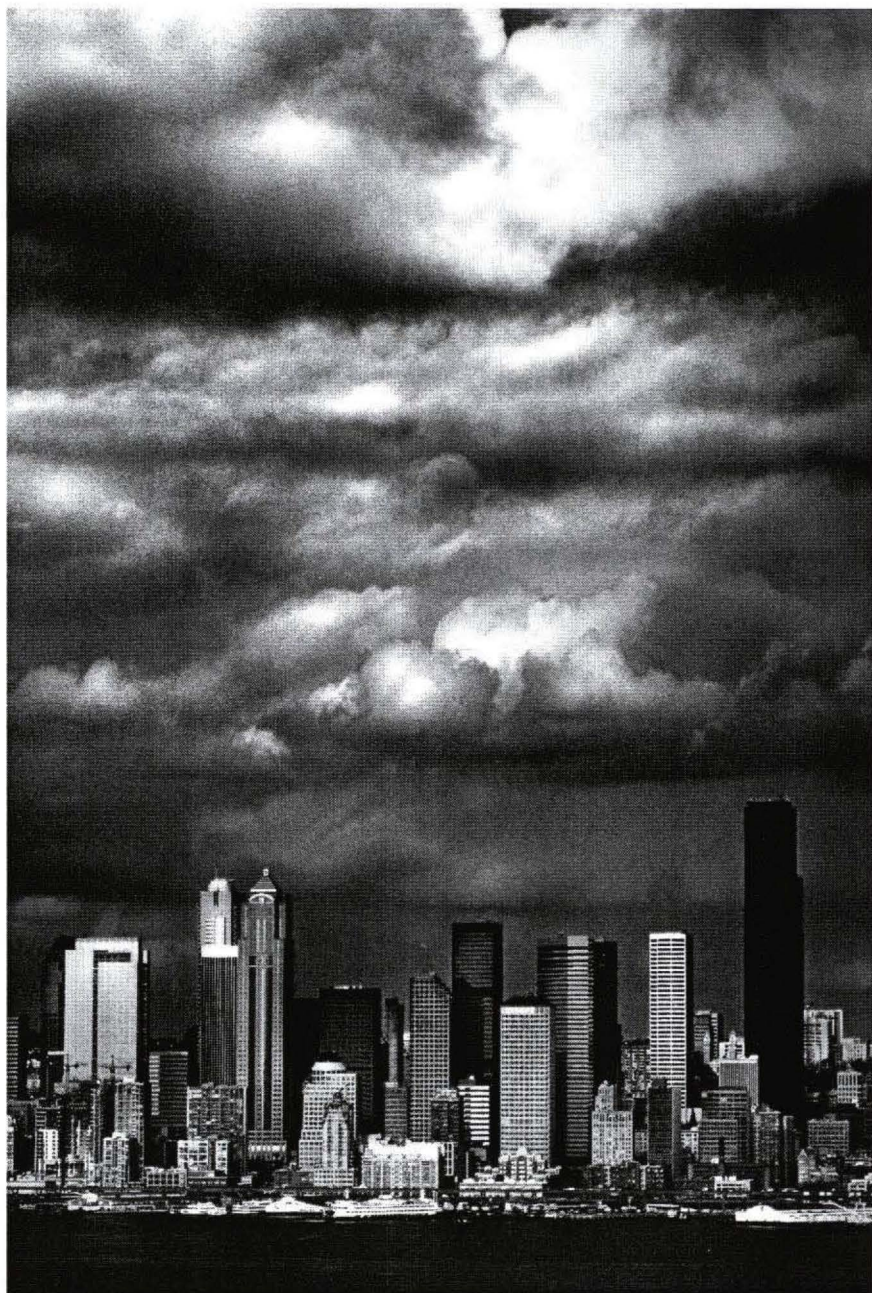
I try not to dwell, but if I ever see someone with a
prettier face than yours I'm going to kill myself
You're the original
Like someone had been keeping your nose and ears and mouth for generations
until they found the perfect baby's head to
paste them on before delivering you to me

I feel like I've known you almost as long as you've known yourself
But I missed the one moment of release just before your pupils started to dilate hysterically
Like I know you by heart and I could recite you with my eyes closed
But you're in some kind of sweet piglet language
I feel exactly like this twice every day
And then twice every day, I never see you again

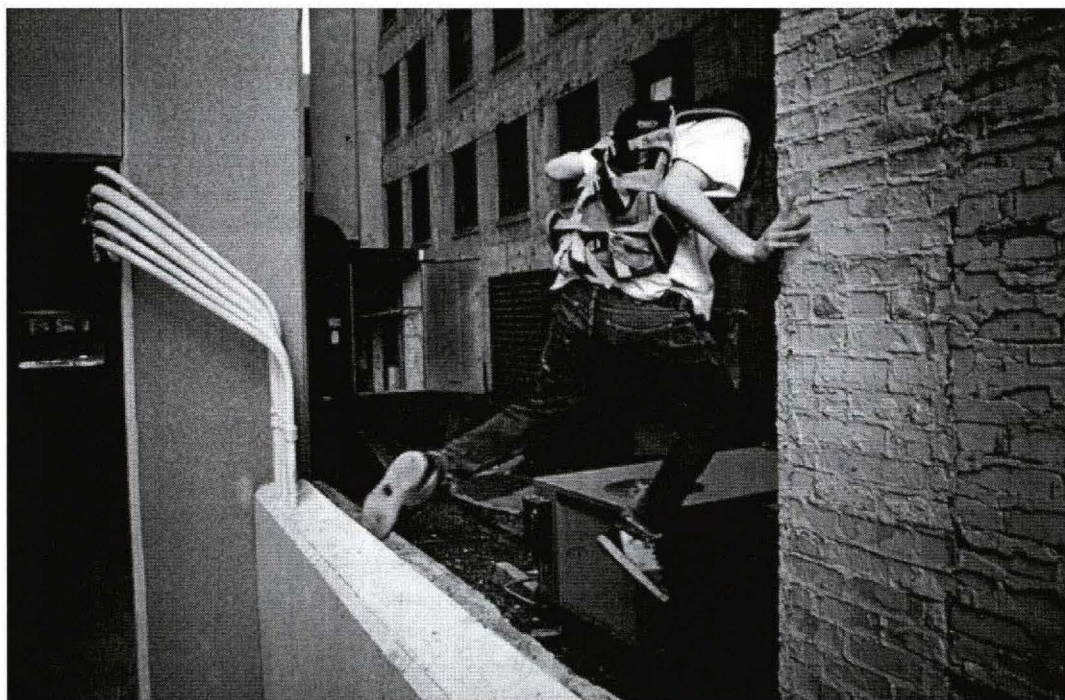
I didn't realize you lived next to me until I saw you moving in
I didn't realize I could reach your balcony from mine until I hosted
a black tie banquet with some friends from back home
I didn't realize you felt the same as me until you forgot to lock the sliding door

I like your purse
Is that real basketball skin?

JEROD LASS



KIMBERLY HALVERSON



DANIEL R. TURNER

RUINS

Graeme squinted at the brightness that was in front of him. He could feel something, but his memory failed him. Whatever it was, it was leaving. His chest pounded. He stepped towards it and held out his arms and took it all in. The stars were outshined, but the sky was still black. It was very warm. The only warmth there was in this February night.

He felt a pressure on his shoulder and heard the word "no" clearly, and with a burst came the churning howls of the flames that drowned out the echoing shrieks around him. The hand on his shoulder pulled him back, away from the warmth—away from what was his and of himself—away from everything and away from the light. He stumbled a little, and slowly forced himself to turn around.

In the fading light were the faces of people he knew, apparitions twisted and gaping and shimmering. Scattered about were solemn, stern faces of uniformed men, staring hopelessly at the light. He saw his wife on her knees with familiar hands clinging to her. She was yelling something desperately to someone, but Graeme couldn't make out the words. Together, the people seemed to be pasted onto darkness, for nothing was visible behind them, simply projections of themselves. He stopped where he was and turned back around and watched the black smoke rise up and fade into space.

As the crowd thinned, Graeme made his way to his car—hoping not to be noticed. He started it and drove down the road and parked, and slept as well as he could.

When the old sun lurched up out of the dark, the new day it brought was grey. A sick, swollen mass of clouds crawled across the sky. Graeme drove back to

**He saw his
wife on her
knees with
familiar hands
clinging to her.**

the remains of the fire. He was alone when he arrived.

The ruins of his home had stopped smoldering. They now lay on top of a small, snow covered hill. The unlucky pine that stood closest to the house had gone up with it and the maples further away had been warmed into thinking an early spring had come and would soon die with them. Footprints and tire treads were scattered here and there and resembled an odd graph of sorts, charting people and directions. He made his way up, following what he believed to be his own footprints.

The roof of his house had caved in and the floor did not fare any better. What lay in front of him was a pool of black soot surrounded by the cinder block walls of his basement. There was an occasional resilient beam that remained upright like a finger or a piece of framework that sat at some strange, unintended angle. Pieces of furniture lie scattered about—ghosts of themselves. His bed sat creased and crumpled in a corner with the center burned through.

He checked the sides of the foundation for a solid part and found a sturdy enough edge at a corner and lowered himself down. It was soft—warmer than the snow. This close, he could see the melted remains of superheroes. Cores and spines of books lay in a heap. The corner of a bright red and blue blanket that managed to escape peeked out from under a pile of ash and caught his eye.

He knelt down in the ash. Around him it had started to snow. He knelt there for a while, staring at the blackness. He tilted his head back until his eyes met the grey clouds that bled their strange dry blood down. There was no sun to warm him. The snowflakes fell carelessly careful down onto his black wool coat. They landed on his face and on his eyes and melted down his cheeks. He looked back down and saw the white snow scattered randomly on the ash. He reached out with both arms and dug into a pile that lay in front of him and gripped what was left of his home—and his blood.

"Are you O.K.?" he heard a man's voice say behind him.

"I don't think so."

The night and most of the following day had passed by the time he left his motel room. He drove with the sun in his eyes and the window open. January was on the winds. He kept the music off and turned the heat on. He had no choice but to squint.

The sun had been bloodied by the time he realized he did not know how long he had been driving. Nor did he know where he had been driving. He pulled the car over and let his hands slide down the steering wheel and onto his lap. He rested his head on his seat and closed his eyes.

He turned off the ignition and got out of the car. The sun was a red pool on the horizon. Jutting out was a tall, lone house led by an unused driveway. A flimsy gate kept everyone out. He could see the slight ruts of the road echoed in the wavering snow. The forest loomed around the hill that the house was perched on. He reached into his glove box and grabbed a flashlight.

He walked up to the gate and rattled the chain. It gave just enough for Graeme to slip through. He treaded uneasily through the untouched snow and slowly made his way to it. As he got closer to the house, he could see a tree hiding behind it. It was the only one that strayed from the forest, and it was just big enough for its branches to form a sort of twisted crown around the old house.

When he reached the front door, the light had become dim. The contrast of white and black was less prominent now—the light seemed to linger, not knowing if it was coming or going. He rapped on the door and as he did, peeled paint was shaken off and fell to the floor. He peered in through the dirty window and saw that the place was in shambles. He turned the knob and swung the door open. It creaked loudly. He took a few steps in. The floor creaked.

He walked into what was probably the living room. Old wallpaper curled and cracked along the sides. The ceiling lamp rested on the rotting carpet. Along the corners were clumps of pillow stuffing. He creaked his way into the dining room. There was a table left in the middle of it, covered in a thick layer of dust

and pieces of the ceiling. He looked into the kitchen and saw the empty spaces where appliances should have been. There were deep, violent scratches in the floor.

He turned around and saw the staircase leading up. He stood at the foot of them and rested his hand on the end of the handrail. He wiped it clean and gazed up.

He walked back into the dining room and opened the back door. The lone maple tree stood in front of him. There was an old rope hanging off one of the branches. It was frayed at the end, and there was a slight mound directly beneath it. He made his way towards it.

There were old two-by-fours nailed to the other side of the tree. He put his bare hand on one. It was cold and worn. He breathed deep and let out a cloud, watched it fade, and climbed. The moon had begun to rise and reflect the cold sunlight down. Things seemed black and white now. He had reached the highest point he could get to and stopped and sat down.

**It filled the
universe with
zero and was
slowly taking
the trees, the
house, and his
entire world
with it.**

He looked up at the blackening sky. All around him, it seemed that the dark silhouettes of the trees were doing the same. There was no sound being made in this cold winter scene, and he made no effort to change that. He noticed a glimmer—then another. Soon enough the stars nearly filled the sky, but that's not what Graeme was looking at. It was the space between them. The nothingness. The emptiness. It filled the universe with zero and was slowly taking the trees, the house, and his entire world with it.

In the dark hills in the distance, he saw a yellowish light. It was very faint, and it seemed to flicker. He stared at it for a while until it was the only thing he saw. It was burning a hole in his pupils.

His eyes were cold. He closed them and rubbed them until they were

comfortable again. There was a light gust of wind. It was gone.

He climbed down hurriedly and made his way towards the woods and where he remembered it glowing. It was quiet. Every quick step he took seemed to resonate deep into space and shadow. There was less snow under the canopy of the evergreens and skeletal birches. Beneath the thin layer of snow, dead leaves from a dead summer crunched unseen.

Graeme stopped and leaned on a tree. The land seemed to be rising slightly. He looked at his footprints and saw them meld into the dark. He turned back around, straightened his back, and walked briskly forward.

The land began to get steeper. His feet started to slip occasionally. He used branches to stabilize himself, shaking the boughs free from their white winter sleeves. He routinely swung his head left and right, keeping his eyes wide as they scanned for any sign.

The top of the hill was in sight when he caught a faint flash of yellow. Graeme stared at it for a while, then, head down, dug his heels into the snow and slowly balanced his way towards it.

It was an opening to a cave. There were large rocks scattered about wearing caps of snow and beards of moss. The opening was grey and narrow. Its parallel sides were just wide enough for him to squeeze in standing up, but once he made it through, it was much hollower.

The light was coming from around a corner a good distance in. He turned back around and looked out the entrance. He could not see the house or the tree. Perhaps it was too dark. He spun back around and crept in. The shadows of the arch of the cave spiraled inwards. He smelled burning wood.

When he turned the corner, Graeme saw an old man sitting near a fire. He had what looked like a grey coat on with a once-white blanket covering him, and he sat on an old bed. He also had on a pair of rough looking leather mittens with old stuffing sticking out from the bottoms of them. A long, grey, unkempt beard ran down his chest and rested on his legs. His hair protruded from around the edges of his black knit hat. In the corner lay a large stack of firewood with an axe leaning on the edge of it.

The man stretched and crossed his leg and mumbled something to himself.

"Hello?" said Graeme, almost in a whisper.

The old man turned quickly and stood up. His pale blue eyes wavered about. "Well, hello." His face seemed to calm.

"What are you doing out here?"

The old man thought for a while. "I keep the fire."

"Why are you so far away?"

"I'm not that far away. You made it here."

"I saw your fire, so I came to see."

"Are you always chasing stars?"

Graeme paused. "Who are you?"

The old man shrugged. "I do not think that matters. Here I am. I am here. Who are you?"

"How long have you been here?"

"I can't remember. Long enough, it seems." The old man smiled meekly and let out a deep cough.

Graeme moved closer towards him. He was much taller than the old man. He gazed around the room until his eyes rested on the fire. It crackled and convulsed around the charred firewood. "Why do you keep this fire going?" he asked.

The old man bunched his blanket back up around him and walked around Graeme, towards the bend in the cave. "I had my reasons. Warmth was one of them. I'm sure you'll have your own." With that, he turned the corner and left.

Graeme sat on the old bed for a while, staring at the fire. The flame had died down. The embers sparkled madly against the charred, spent wood. They formed their own constellations in the darkness. There was an old god. An insect. Faces. Holidays. The sliding glass door leading out to a dew shimmering morning. His favorite chair. A hospital room. Training wheels. A child. A face. His face.

He got up and gripped a piece of the dry wood, dug it into the embers, and breathes the fire to life.

HER EYELIDS OPEN

in a dead stare

always

she struggled

to swim upstream to you

pressing against the current

her nose pulled by your

magnetic lure

why didn't she understand sooner

how easy it would be

to let go

turn tail

the flowing water

sweeping her clean

away

from you

LAURA KRUEGER-KOCHMANN



CITY OF SLEEP

CHRISTOPHER HAGEN

UNITITLED

Comfort simmers through a ceramic canyon,
A steamed sigh from hot reassurance,
Whispered affection inside a cotton fortress,
Safe from the chill outdoors
Seen through the snowy painting on the wall
That we could-we should-
Melt.
Instead, inside, lets stay safe?
And sigh?
And sound?
You'll bring out my glow; Illuminate-
The soft inspiration that was waiting,
For coffee beans, fleece,
And the warm way of your hands.
Our fingertips hold affection
Radiating from our cups.
Breathe in the roasted exhale,
Soak in the simple yearnings
Of us?

MEGAN STROH

CELESTIAL SOLILOQUY

I am an ivory ribbon
Curled around your serrated tongue.
The tales are sweet and rich as they
Wag and wind from your lips to mine.

I sip them like a cup of hot lightning,
As a sea crashes between my ears. Frayed
Thoughts drown in a searing brew like stars
Behind a moist twilight. And disappear.

I am a charcoal ribbon
Curled around your tarnished tongue.
I wonder:
Do you still keep scissors in the mahogany armoire?
(Beneath the Egyptian cotton sheets?)
Snip, snip. A crimson ribbon.

TRISTA KESSLER

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

UMD STUDENT ASSOCIATION

JOE MAIOLO

CONNIE WANER

MICHELE LARSON

UMD ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

LATE NIGHT KIRBY

BIXBY'S CAFE

JOHNSON'S BAKERY & COFFEE SHOP

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PAPER HOG

GET PUBLISHED

The Roaring Muse is seeking submissions for its Fall 2009 Issue.

Poetry, prose, photography, and illustrations are all welcomed. All selection is democratic in a forum-based process. Authors remain anonymous until work is chosen. Material can be returned upon request. If possible, submit literature and artwork via e-mail. Submitted original artwork must be scannable (smaller than 11"x14").

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Duluth, MN 55812

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