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The Mockingbird

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The student arts and literature
publication of East Tennessee
State University

Judges Judges Judges Judges Judges Judges Judges

Fred Chappell served as the poetry judge for this year's *Mockingbird*. Chappell has been called one of the most gifted poets to attain distinction during the 1970's and 1980's, and his work has been widely anthologized. Chappell has written six novels, two collections of short stories, numerous critical articles, a volume of essays on poetry entitled *Plow Naked*, and more than a dozen books of poetry. His work embodies superb story-telling and a "celebration of the Appalachian region's traditional values." Chappell won the prestigious Bollingen Prize in poetry in 1985 for his renowned "poetic autobiography," *Midquest*, a tetralogy which comprises four previously published volumes of poetry. Chappell earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees at Duke University in 1961 and 1964, respectively. He has taught English and Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro for almost 40 years. His newest novel is *Look Back All the Green Valley*, and his latest poetry volume is *Family Gathering*. He wishes all the writers, young and seasoned at ETSU the best of good fortune.

Joseph Dabney, this year's non-fiction judge, has received national attention for his books, *Mountain Spirits*, *More Mountain Spirits*, *HERK: Hero of the Skies*, and with his latest, *Smokehouse Ham, Spoon Bread & Scuppernon Wine*. *Smokehouse* won the James Beard Foundation's top book prize for 1999, "Cookbook of the Year," and was a selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. Beard Foundation awards chairman Nach Waxman called it "the best of the best, a book that makes an important, lasting contribution to food literature and culture."

Dabney is a native of South Carolina, a graduate of Berry College, and a veteran of the Korean War. His early career was in journalism. He served on several newspapers in South Carolina and Georgia, including *The Atlanta Journal*. Joe and his wife Susanne live at Murphy Candler Lake in north Atlanta and are the parents of five children and the grandparents of three. Dabney is now at work on a new book concerning the last days of the Cherokee Nation in Georgia. (*cont. on inside back cover*)

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Mockingbird published
in 2001 by ETSU Press,
Johnson City, Tennessee
TBR 260-127-00 1M

Art & Literature

	Editor's/Art Director's Notes.....1
	Hon. Mention Poetry "Untitled" Nancy Jane Earnest.....3
	1st Place Poetry "Thirteen Views of a Fluorescent Light" Rhonda Richards.....4
6.....	Bonnie Boochard "Striped Donkey" 1st Place Illustration
	1st Place NonFiction "Something Golden" Jessica Brise.....7
9.....	Kevin Stephenson "Two For One Special" 3rd Place Drawing
12.....	Sherri Pugh "Guess What Just Flew Inside My Mouth" Hon. Mention Printmaking
	3rd Place Fiction "Amateur Astronomy" Devon Koren Asdell.....14
15.....	Amelia Stuetzel "Figure" Runner-Up Drawing
17.....	Meghan O'Connor "Chaotic Confusion" Hon. Mention Printmaking
18.....	Tonya Moreno "The Dance of Days" Hon. Mention Photography
	3rd Place NonFiction "Oak Ridge's Forgotten History" Lacey Stewart.....19
22.....	Jessica Heschong "Untitled~1" 1st Place Photography
	2nd Place Fiction "The Great Plains Incident" Craig Bradley Owens.....23
26.....	Meghan O'Connor "Still There" Runner-Up Printmaking
29.....	Donna Wilt "Menacing" 2nd Place Drawing
31.....	Dana Williams "Untitled" Hon. Mention Photography
32.....	Kevin Stephenson "Poor Little Thing" Hon. Mention Printmaking
35.....	Isaac Denton "Ty Cobb" 2nd Place Illustration
38.....	Monet LaClair "Dysfunctional" 1st Place Painting
39.....	Melissa Stallard "Untitled" 2nd Place Photography
43.....	Kevin Stephenson "Burden" Runner-Up Drawing
	2nd Place Poetry "A Tribute to the One-Armed Monkey" Jeanne Smith.....44
45.....	Sherri Pugh "Katydid's Bubbles" Runner-Up Printmaking
	3rd Place Poetry "Goose Hunt" Pam Tabor.....46
	1st Place Fiction "Arrested Impasse" Shanda Miller.....47
49.....	Kevin Stephenson "Wake" Hon. Mention Printmaking
	Hon. Mention Poetry "Invisible" Janina C. Williams.....50
	2nd Place NonFiction "The Bridge That Dad Built" Shanda Miller.....52

Editor • Cate Strain

"It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process." Henry James

Throughout the production of the *Mockingbird* 2001, it has been rewarding to consider the force and beauty of the student art of ETSU, and we at the *Mockingbird* are pleased to present it to the community. To all the students who entered the literature and art competition for the *Mockingbird*, we extend our thanks and encouragement to continue to seek opportunities to create. Congratulations to those of you whose work was chosen for this year's *Mockingbird*.

This year's competition was gratifying because of the harmony between all involved in creating the *Mockingbird*. I especially want to thank David Dixon, Ralph Slatton, Sherri Renfro, and Patty Schmerbeck, of ETSU's Art Department; and Rick Phillips and Susie McLeod of ETSU's University Press, for their diligence and their dedication to the continuing excellence of the *Mockingbird*. We were fortunate in our panel of judges: Fred Chappell for poetry, Joseph Dabney for nonfiction, William Slusher for fiction, and James Smith for art. Their careful consideration of the competition submissions, attention to detail, and speed in responding to my requests made my job particularly enjoyable. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Alan Holmes of the English Department for his support and confidence in all aspects of this project.

And finally, many thanks to the student Activities Allocation Committee, which provides the funds for the *Mockingbird*'s publication; and to the ETSU Foundation and Friends of the Reece Museum, who provided the prize money for the literature and art competition.

Art Director • Patty Schmerbeck

The three things I wanted to convey with the design of this year's *Mockingbird* were beauty, diversity and creativity. I found that through conveying the latter two I created the first. The cover is a celebratory burst of color on top of which is perched a mockingbird. This illustration is symbolic of the diversity of work the publication embraces, for a mockingbird is, by definition, a songbird of many voices. I illustrated mockingbirds in various other positions and stages of life throughout the publication as well.

The string that ties these various elements together is the underlying creativity through which each work was conceived. On the cover, the bird is perched on a rough-hewn pencil, representative of the early stages of the creative process for both creating art and for writing, a common origination point from which evolved. I echoed the divisions of space on the cover throughout the book as a visual clue for the continuation of this creativity that binds them together. These elements together created the beauty I wanted to convey. As a whole, this year's *Mockingbird* should stand as a work in itself beyond the sum of its individual parts.

Being this year's art director was exciting and challenging, and impossible without the help of Kevin Stephenson, who photographed the slides for all of the artwork and labored over the interior layout; Sherri Pugh, who helped get us started; Sam Mays, who showed us how to do things the easy way even when we were determined to do them the hard way; and Rick Phillips over at the University Press who answered each of my 1001 questions with patience and a smile. I hope you often find yourself coming back to this year's *Mockingbird* to experience it again.

Untitled

by Nancy Jane Earnest

Whatever became of the seamless
deep blue velvet cloak of sleep
that wrapped the nights of my childhood?
Where is that magic tailor of darkness
who knitted the hours together
as effortlessly as a spider the threads of her web,
and pulled multicolored dreams, one after another,
from spangled sleeves of starlight?

Who would be so bold as to
snatch my cherished cloak and leave in its place
a tawdry heap of fragmented dreams, a tattered quilt
of frayed stitches and gaping seams
inadequate for binding night's darkness to dawn?

Tugging wretched scraps lying twisted and limp
on my disheveled bed of dubiety,
I chase racing thoughts spinning from pillow to bedpost
until, in rare moments of surrender
I sense a presence,
and, in kicking the quilt aside,
I am soothed by the deep, soft hand of velvet.

Thirteen Views of a Fluorescent Light

by Rhonda Richards

I

Oblong of white light
Specked with the black of flies' bodies

II

Night, wearing black velvet, enters through the window.
A shot of white light is fired and she disappears.

III

The room creeps in slow motion
To the flickering morose code of light.

IV

Flies' spirits have risen and possessed the light.
Day and night it murmurs a buzz.

V

I press my hand against the light, but
It only returns a cold glow.

VI

Eye of a demon blinking with rage.
Spirit of angel caressing me with light.

VII

The light is a street preacher crying out,
"Come out of the darkness. Let me show you
The light of the world."

VIII

Look at the light closely.
I am skating in circles
On the surface of the icy pond
Glowing in the moonlight.

IX

Why rage against the dying of the light?
True light cannot be killed by darkness.

X

In the beginning God made light and
God is light.

XI

A darkness dwells in the brightness
Of the fluorescent light.

XII

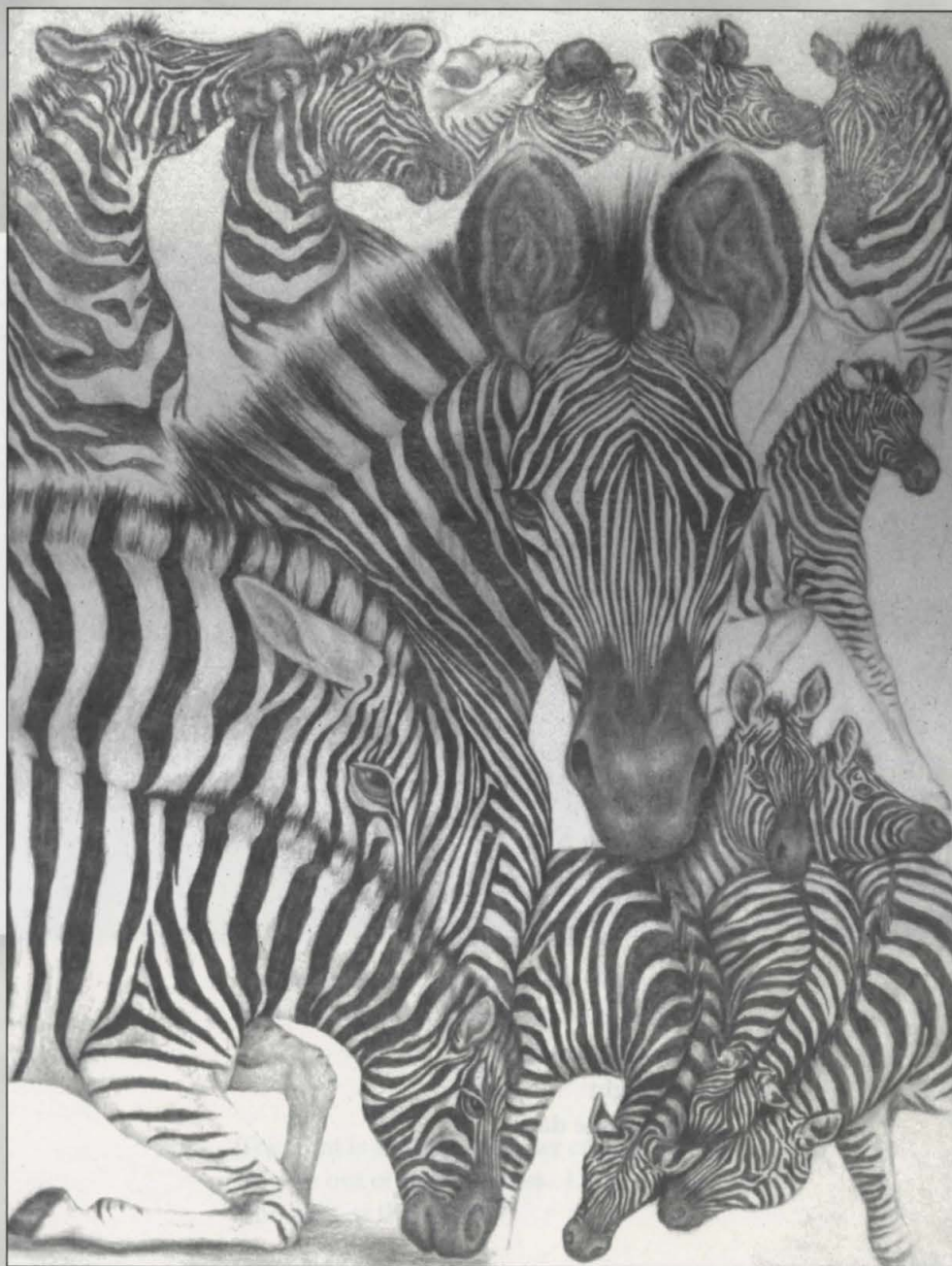
I have seen a light in human faces
That cannot compare to these cold rays.

XIII

Light blinks its last.
Soul's light
Encircles the dark.

Striped Donkey

by Bonnie Boochard



Something Golden

by Shanda Miller

“ Nature’s first green is gold.
 Her hardest hue to hold
 Her early leaf’s a flower
 But only so an hour
 Then Leaf subsides to leaf,
 So Eden sank to grief,
 So dawn goes down to day,
 For nothing gold can stay”
 (Frost, 76).

Swimming in the creek behind my house was always a euphoric experience. As a child, my sisters and I spent entire days swiveling ourselves up like old women. Perhaps it was the hot weather that drove us to the muddy creek bank or maybe it was just another mental adventure to a young child’s reasoning, I really don’t know. But for sure, nothing felt better on those ninety-degree, endless days than to pretend we were crocodiles sneaking up on an unwary victim ready to grab her and pull her into the deep water, thrashing and rolling her over until she suffocated. We had no idea then that the real world could actually do that to a person, and it didn’t really matter at the time. For our legs walked little girl steps, our eyes imagined little girl things, and our hearts carried only little girl secrets, and the world had little more to offer than broad dreams and elaborate plans

for the future in an unblemished world with equally perfect lives.

Often, the neighbor’s grandsons, Mark and Robbie, would walk down to the creek for a swim. For one dollar, they would baptize us and wash us clean of our sins right there in that murky, yellow water – such a miracle. On returning from my daily escapades, Mom asked how my clothes became so dirty. I told her not to worry, God would take those stains out just as good as Tide the next time He washed me of my sins. She just looked at me and replied that I was liable to catch something in that creek and if I knew what was best for me, I’d stay at home. Then, she continued to do what she called “harp”; this consisted of badgering me about swimming with boys. I had never heard an actual harp and probably didn’t for a few years, but she never sounded like a harp to me. The sound held more resemblance to a trombone. My loving father would just tell her to let me be a kid while I could, and she always replied, “Well, I just worry about my kids, what would become of us without them?”

Unlike my mother’s lovingly incessant nagging, summers always end, and autumn imposes her will upon this area like an old whore. Farmers rush to harvest all their crops

before the frost, and leave the fields barren and unemployed until spring. In one of my favorite poems, "The Death of the Flowers," William Cullen Bryant writes, "The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,/ Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sear" (10). I always abhorred the coming of fall – the toilsome harvesting, the long days, the cold nights – but once it finally arrived, I settled into its deadening peace as easily as nature did, even though I longed for the heartbeats of life that summer had to offer. To ease my cornucopic discontent, I walked to our barn to enjoy those stored momentos from summer: the field corn, apples, and alfalfa hay.

The winds whisked the dried leaves against the side of the barn and strew their crumbly corpses along the grass. Their rustling announced that someone was sneaking up on the peaceful shelter. The crunch, crunch, crunching leaves cracked beneath my bare feet and felt like bubbly champagne fizzing on the smooth path to the doorway. Inside, the sweet, thick scent of corn and hay lingered in the air and numerous feathers floated listlessly as the past summer's nestlings hastened from my view. Having climbed the ladder to the second floor, I swung open

the storage door to peer out at the dying farmland. I could see my mother beating the dust out of a rug on the back porch. Quietly, I shut and relatched the trapdoor to hide from her view. I didn't want her to sound the bugles from across the field letting the entire neighborhood know that I was somewhere I shouldn't be. Turning around to climb on some bales of hay, I heard a scampering sound beneath some ears of dried corn that lay on the rickety floor. Underneath, I found a baby mouse that couldn't have been over a couple of days old. It was no longer than my little finger and hadn't even opened its eyes yet. Thinking back, I can see him, when he breathed, his ribs bulged out and his whole body turned purple. It was so pink and delicate, as if it weren't alive but just a secret that I concealed in the palm of my hand. I convinced myself that its mother had more babies and didn't need this one. Besides, God meant for me to find my tiny little son. So many times I had asked God to leave an unwanted baby on my doorstep so I could raise it as my own; this was my aspiration as a seven-year-old. Every night in my prayers I would repeat, "Bless my family, take us all to Heaven, thank you for my home, and please, Lord, send me a baby – just an unwanted little

Two For One Special

by Kevin Stephenson



baby, boy or girl, black or white, it doesn't matter – please let me have a baby so I can love it like Mommy and Daddy love me." Finally, God had seen fit to answer my prayers in some sort of immaculate conception for a young child, and I was determined to keep my baby beside me forever, like any mother would do.

He hid all afternoon in the palm of my hand, wrapped up in a tissue. I even tried to feed his minutely significant mouth milk with a doll bottle, but the drops of milk ended up down his nose. His body wracked with barely audible coughs, and I worried I had hurt him. For this reason, I finally decided I could no longer keep my proud secret to myself and showed him to my mother. She broke my heart when she claimed, "It's a dirty rodent and belongs in the barn, not in my house!"

I begged my mother, "Please let me keep him, you won't even know he's here. I promise." My pleading was futile, and I had known all along that keeping my mouse was impossible.

I was forced to take my son back. I suppose she was too grown up to see this perfection of creation. I cried the whole way over to the barn, trying to explain to my little one that he didn't belong to me, and my

parents wouldn't let me keep him. I placed him back underneath the corn and covered him with his blanket. Between the sobs, I promised him he would be okay until his mother came back for him. I reassuringly whispered, "When you open your eyes for the first time, you will see your true mother and everything will be perfect." I waited until darkness fell on our farm in the valley and turning back to look many times, my little girl bare feet carried me to my home.

It took me quite some time to recover, but in a child's mind, tragedies and dreams can be replaced as often as shoes have to be. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end, even the best thing – childhood.

"We used to believe
In the good old days
We still receive

In little ways
The Things of Kindness...

...We're perched headlong
on the edge of boredom

We're reaching for death on the
end of a candle

We're trying for something
That's already found us"

(Morrison, 198).

The summers of swimming ended some time ago as did my visits to the barn, but the memories are still woven in my mind. The neighbor and his grandsons have moved away. Sadly, the lives of both Mark and Robbie have been filled with pain since they left that old muddy creek bank. Mark, the younger grandson, married a "white trash" girl when he was sixteen, not because he wanted to but because she was pregnant. He was deafened by love and saw none of the consequences of his desires. Now, he works two jobs trying to support his family.

Robbie, the older grandson, fell in love with the prom queen at his school, and they planned to get married after college. Unfortunately, one night after a party the couple was hit head on by a semi-truck. The prom queen was killed instantly and by all accounts from "concerned" neighbors, she was decapitated. Robbie hasn't recovered from the incident; he plunged into a deep depression and attempted suicide. I often plan to go visit him, but I never seem to quite find enough time. Perhaps it's humiliation from not knowing what to say to him or maybe it's my empathy towards his suffering that keeps me away. I am sure he is tired of everyone feeling sorry for him and is too wrapped up in feeling sorry

for himself. I really don't have the time to drive two hours away to tell someone everything will be okay when I face each day not knowing if everything will be okay. So, it's silly to plan to go, and, besides, he probably doesn't even remember me. For now, this reasoning continues to keep me from my childhood friend, and the excuses come easier to solace my troubled conscience. I do think of him often, though, and wonder what it would be like for me to be in his shoes. Could anyone ever completely recover after experiencing such a dreadful tragedy? Does he wish his life had been taken, too? Yet, I value the times we could share as children and hope he relives the memories in his mind.

As for me, I am twenty, unmarried, and without children; that sounds pretty good to me. College and work take up my time; it seems like ALL of my time. The monotonous routines keep my mind occupied, but the little girl inside longs to run barefoot and feel the firm, packed soil of the cow paths as they wind around the hill. Yet, those days of exploration of my surroundings and myself are gone. The values I once held most important – carefree play with my sisters, religion, and having a family – are only distant memories. My busy life has eaten up all those

Guess What Just Flew Inside My Mouth?

by Sherri Pugh



treasured activities and spit work and school back out in my face. Often, I think that once I finish school, everything will slow down, knowing that this fast paced run for maturity will only continue until death. That's the way it goes these days; we only take time to glance at the present, stare at the future, and turn our backs on the past. Childhood friends are only memories and those objects lost in the past, such as my little mouse, are all too soon forgotten as well as the lessons learned.

One thing has remained constant for me: the love I have for my family. Some think family is the key to the future; I could have let the world in on this great epiphany long ago. Even though my mother used to "harp" on me and made me take my mouse back to the barn, I still love her. And even though my sisters and I don't spend quality time together as we used to in that cleansingly muddy creek, we do love each other in our own special self-reserved, grown-up way. Our heavy lives have winded themselves like honeysuckle on a fence – distinguishable stems at the ground but an intricate mess the further one traces the lines. Yet, we are each life-giving trees with our ancestors at the roots pushing us up, holding us up, feeding us with the nutrients from their almost forgotten lives – the lineage

of mistakes, accomplishments, and the sheer will to succeed. We are like newborns reaching for the sky on the shoulders of many proud parents in a world with too many children and too many proud parents. Where are we to go? I guess further into the sky, higher on the shoulders than all the others. Will we ever reach the top? The top of what? There's nothing but air, birds, and substanceless clouds to grab on to and nowhere to go but down. So what's the use? My roots are still in the ground, and I am content being a plain, didactic, hidden girl with hidden dreams and cherished memories, clutching something golden.

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Amateur Astronomy

by Devon Koren Asdell

The bees are silent tonight. We count each toe gingerly; we are afraid of waking them. My footfall is as soft as Death. Donovan told me to climb the highest mountain I could find tonight. He wanted me to understand – making sure I could see everything.

A fist unclenches inside me. I should have brought a coat, I think, as I pick beggar-lice from the hems of my jeans and put an awry shoelace back in its place. Crickets and tree frogs serenade the peach-tinged horizon as it slowly bleeds into the forthcoming night. Thrushes knock at me for invading their territory. The city lights are sprawled out beneath me. A white cat licks its paw and slowly backs away.

“What stars will you name tonight?” Donovan asks, and presses the heel of my hand with his forefinger. It is an intimate gesture – we are left to guess at its meaning as we are left to guess the formation of the city streets below. It could all be figured with numbers, I am sure, but I’m all thumbs with figures like these, and Donovan’s only musically mathematical.

I want to kick off my heels. We ascend this autumn graveyard – leaves and twigs that carpet the stratified mounds of the earth below. Spiders are trying to catch me – their translucent webs get stuck in my hair, cling to my forearms and fingertips. (Sometimes I feel as if the whole world wants to make a meal out of me, but I don’t show it.)

I hover in my loose-weave sweater as Donovan adjusts the wheels on the telescope. We knock on the door of the House of Cepheus to allow for diffraction. I dig into the gravel to find a place to hide – a hole deep enough that light can’t even escape.

“Altair. Deneb. Vega.” Donovan recites the names as if they were an incantation, as if he were trying to resurrect a season no longer celebrated.

“That’s the summer triangle,” I whisper. “We need the autumn markers.”

What are the autumn markers, I wonder? We try to stick orange leaves to the sky, but we simply aren’t tall enough. We sift through the red light for star charts and crossbars, but we come up empty-handed. The change in the seasons colours me confused. We are lost.

Figure
by Amelia Stuetzel



We trace the celestial meridian with our flashlights. At thirty-six centimeters, we slice through Polaris's outline with gloved hands. Donovan plays his guitar and I'm suddenly too shy to speak to him. How is it we can know each other so entirely and still be complete strangers? He shrugs his shoulders. I never have to tell him what I'm thinking.

We confound each other's variables. I try to transcribe his philosophies but my handwriting fails miserably. I pull over to the side of the road, drenched in the smell of skunk and exhaust, trying to paraphrase him, trying to create something worth his attention. One foot dangles precariously out the window. I hook my little finger around a toe, and he smiles at me. A lunar eye winks bloodshot on the horizon.

We are caught in that primeval landslide. I cling to Cygnus's feathers for dear life. There are sirens somewhere in the distant West; we acknowledge them superficially. Our bodies become nothing but honey. We are surrounded by the soft noise of a million tiny wings.

I wake up naked and shivering. Donovan left me sometime in the night, lacing up his cosmic wheels and hitting the road with an outstretched thumb. I am covered in purplish, star-shaped bruises where he kissed me; the morning is covered in silver, star-shaped patches of frost that crunch beneath the footsteps of the sun. And it is everything, though I don't pretend to understand.



Chaotic Confusion

by Meghan O'Connor



The Dance of Days
by Tonya Moreno



Oak Ridge's Forgotten History

by Lacey Stewart

One afternoon, during the summer after I graduated from high school, my friends and I were hanging out in a cemetery next to an apartment complex in Oak Ridge. Exploring the area, I became fascinated with the ages of the headstones and their inscriptions. Although I had always lived there, I suddenly became aware of the individuals that lived where I did before my town existed.

Oak Ridge was built in 1943 by the government for the Manhattan project. Of course, the locals were forced off of their land and paid a laughable sum. The only original buildings that remain are the African-American high school, a church, and a house that was built in 1939. Aside from those, the only historical places that are left are the cemeteries.

On a subconscious level, I think I became interested in Oak Ridge's cemeteries because I had never seen a grave of a member of my family. Half of my family is from the North, and the other half is from somewhere in

Tennessee that I have never been. The people buried in the cemeteries that I visit have almost become family to me. The birth and death dates on the stones fascinate me. Some of the dates go back to the early 1800s. None of the structures in Oak Ridge date back that far.

My favorite cemetery is the hardest one to access. The only route that I know of to get there is to cross an actively-used train trestle that is approximately one thousand feet long and about eighty feet above the level of the lake. Finding the right spot to leave the tracks is tricky, and is made even more difficult by having to keep one's ears alert for the sound of an oncoming train. However, the walk is worth it. The cemetery is surrounded by a wrought iron fence, and is heavily vandalized. One of the graves has been dug up, but its headstone remains. I can't recall the name, but the grave belongs to a young woman who was born around 1800. When I visited her grave for the first time, I was stunned by the

isolation of the cemetery from everything. There were no ruins of old houses, just an absolute dead calm. I have rarely experienced such solitude.

The cemetery that I visit the most often is located next to a main road and overlooks the lake, yet it is virtually invisible from the road. I was not aware of its existence until early last year. Most of the names in the cemetery are Cross, but there are a sprinkling of others. One section has eight graves of children from the same family who all died before ten years of age. There are also two Union soldiers' graves, one of which has a very detailed description of the soldier's life and death. I began planting flowers at the cemetery last fall. I began by planting daffodils at each of the children's graves, and that led to irises, a rhododendron, and an ice plant. One day when I got there I found two elderly men mowing and clearing brush. They were delighted to find out that I was the "Plant Lady" that they had speculated about. I

learned that both of them had relatives in the cemetery and were working to keep it up. They also told me that they were members of a local genealogical group. I was happy to finally meet relatives of some pre-Oak Ridgers.

I find it truly amazing how few pictures there are of pre-Oak Ridge structures and people available, and how little information is



available about what the area was previously like. I did find a book that was written as a survey of all the cemeter-

ies in the county, and that gave me the names of a few more cemeteries to visit. However, most of these are on government land and are only accessible on Memorial Day. People

farmed there, worshipped there, and died there. Of course, they were forced out of their communities without knowing why. Sometimes I feel guilty about living there. I feel like I don't have a right to the land. Some days when I'm sitting in the Cross cemetery with the massive oaks towering overhead, I wonder what the former inhabitants of the area would think if they could see what had been done to the area. Would they be sad or angry, or would they accept the changes?

There is a local story about a man named John Hendrix who lived in the area in the 1930s. He was out in the woods one day when he had a vision. He saw images that he could not understand: images of huge factories being built and of an enormous explosion brought on by a new and extremely devastating bomb. He collapsed, and by the time he was found he had contracted pneumonia and later died. The Boy Scouts have constructed a memorial to him in a subdivision that bears his name, Hendrix Creek.

Oak Ridge's cemeteries serve as a reminder that there were thriving communities of hardworking people before us. When I was a child, my parents were digging a garden in the backyard and unearthed a horseshoe and a very small cane. After that, I would sit on the back porch and picture my whole neighborhood as it must have looked before the government took it over: a large, open farm, maybe with some livestock. Across the street from my old elementary school was a cemetery, but it was rapidly deteriorating. I never understood why the owners of the house next to the cemetery never tried to repair it. Now all of the stones are gone, either crumbled into ruin or stolen. I don't want that fate to befall any of the other cemeteries in my town. I feel like their history is part of my own. Somehow, I feel that the souls of those buried in the cemeteries I visit are pleased that I care. Ignoring the history of my town would be a terrible injustice to those who sacrificed what they had for the greater good.

Untitled-1

by Jessica Heschong



The Great Plains Incident

by Craig Bradley Owens

The scenery is inspiring, the hum of the engine is relaxing, and the object in the rear view mirror is annoying; there he is again. Amanda had noticed about two days ago that her neighbor, Steven, had been following her. Until then she had thought he was just another harmless pervert who liked to stare at her. After she deduced that he spied on her through his peep hole, watching the distorted image of her leaving and entering her apartment, she knew he was obsessed. She was familiar with the type. She imagined that he sat alone in his dimly lit apartment across the hall from her. He must wait there in the semi-darkness for the slightest sound to alert him to her presence. Then he jumps up, brimming with excitement, and he rushes to the door just to catch a miniaturized glimpse of her.

Now he's following on one of her drives in the country. She takes these drives to relax and escape city life. Being born and raised in the Appalachian mountain range, she was still uncomfortable with the bustle of a city. She escapes by driving on the two lane roads that seem to go on forever. With no curves or turns, it is easy for her to clear her mind and relax. But now he is intruding on that relaxation and it is infuriating her.

Amanda slams on her brakes and stops dead in the road. Steven has a difficult time

stopping before he crashes into the rear of her car. He is forced to angle his car toward the ditch and then just barely misses the blue sports car carrying the irate woman.

"What is she doing?" he thinks as his emotions vacillate between fear and anger. Amanda opens her car door and steps onto the pavement. Her long blond hair flying free in the humid Arizona air. She begins to walk toward him. Her long shapely legs striding confidently as her trim waist controls their movements. She had always known she was beautiful, everyone said so. Amanda continues her determined walk as Steven slowly emerges from his own car. The brown of his sedan seems even more nondescript, if that's possible, next to the beauty of the creature approaching him. He runs his fingers nervously through his choppy, unkempt hair and notices for the first time how his hair color seems to match his car. The thought is fleeting, however, because Amanda is just a few feet from him. Her brilliance imposes a dull hue on every thought in his head.

Amanda looks at Steven and she sees all the other geeks who have ever chased her, and there have been quite a few. "What are you doing, Steven?" she shouts, perhaps more angrily than she had intended.

The sound of her voice saying his name startles Steven. He remarks how bright his

name seemed for just the instant that it touched her lips.

"Why are you following me?" Amanda continues.

Steven's knees begin to knock as he looks at the beauty standing just a few feet from him. What he sees when he looks at her is indescribable. His thoughts seem to blur and merge until there is only one clear idea. The idea is dull but getting brighter with each passing instant.

"I...I..." he stammers trying desperately to center on that idea.

"Spit it out Steven" Amanda demands.

Steven's thoughts buckle under the strain of attempted cohesion. Suddenly the one clear thought is there. It is the most powerful idea he has ever possessed. It is a desire. No, it's not a desire; it's a need. He must have her.

"Damn it Steven." She screams, pushing him awkwardly with her long, perfect fingers. "Why do you have to be so fucking weird, huh?"

"I...I'm not..." Steven says weakly, desperately trying to hold onto the idea.

"Yes you are. You are weird Steven." Amanda steadies herself for what she knows must come. The only way to get rid of creeps is to be blunt and well, let's face it...mean. Cruel and ruthless, that's the only way to get through to them. Too bad there's no one around to see this. It's more effective with an

audience. And if the truth be told, Amanda enjoys it even more with an audience.

"B..But I..."

"What Steven? You love me? Is that it? You pathetic little man." She shoves him roughly, she feels one of her finger nails crack from the impact which only serves to fuel her rage. "What on earth makes you think you deserve to love me? You freak, you pervert, you...." Amanda's barrage is cut short by a swift right jab to her jaw. She stumbles back, stunned. She never sees the right hook that takes her consciousness away.

Steven stands over Amanda's limp body. His hand, throbbing from the blow, still shakes from the anger he felt when she... "She was so mad, I didn't mean..." his dull thoughts race. Then a light comes into view in the farthest recesses of his mind. The idea returns with vivid clarity. He must have her. He can see her breasts rise and fall; her nostrils fluctuate with the intake of air. She's alive and she belongs to him.

He strains to put her into the back seat of his car, covering her with the raincoat he keeps there, just in case. Then he hurriedly positions himself behind the steering wheel. Hastily shifting the car into gear he notices her car still idling in front of his, blocking the whole lane. He throws open his door violently and squeals in pain when it bounces back and catches his ankle as it

dangles from the interior. Cursing under his breath, he advances to Amanda's car. Focusing on an idea, he searches the immediate area. His eye flashes to one of Amanda's shoes, sitting upright, almost perfectly spanning the center line of the highway. It's a dressy pump, blue with a spiked heel.

"Why was she wearing heels? She can't have been comfortable" Steven thinks, but stops short as the gravity of the moment returns. He thrusts forward and snags the shoe. Rolling the footwear around in his hand, his plan begins to gain clarity. Assessing his surroundings he notices a fairly dense wooded area just off the highway. "Perfect."

He quickly recovers the second shoe from Amanda's motionless body and hurries to her car where he pins the gas pedal down about an inch and a half with one shoe, using the other as a cross fulcrum to keep it in place. Turning the steering wheel with one hand and carefully grasping the gearshift with the other, he aims the car at the trees and shrubs. Kneeling and leaning awkwardly over the driver's seat, Steven strains to put the car in gear and maintain the angle on the wheel necessary to achieve his goal.

"Damn, she must be strong" he thinks as he presses the brake pedal with his knee. "What? She just didn't want power steering? I mean it's the 90's, everyone has..." The car

suddenly shifts into gear. The lurching vehicle knocks the shaky form of Steven free of the interior, the steering wheel almost immediately straightens, and the car begins to travel at a good pace down the right hand lane of the road. Steven rises and stands transfixed with a quizzical look on his face. He watches the car slowly disappearing in the distance. "It's not stopping" he thinks. "It's not headed for the woods. It's just going."

The blare of a horn makes him jump as if shot. He whizzes around, half expecting to see Amanda behind the wheel of his car ready to run him down. Instead he sees an old model Cadillac with the head of an elderly man sticking out the driver's side window. The enormous car has stopped directly behind Steven's car, and Steven quickly surveys his back seat. Amanda is concealed; he turns his attention back to the man.

"You got car trouble young fella?" the old man asks.

"No...no, just..uh...stretching my legs." The lie strings as it comes out. The man would never believe it.

"Well, I do that sometimes myself." The man smiles, "Course I usually pull off the road first. You mind if I go around?"

"No, of course not. Sorry. There's nothing coming. go right ahead."

The seemingly endless car pulls into the left-hand lane and Steven notices the woman

Still There

by Meghan O' Connor



sitting in the passenger's seat. She is also elderly and smiling warmly.

"Now you take care" she says through the open window as they pass the visibly nervous young man.

Steven finds himself waving after the couple as they start to shrink into the horizon. Then he notices the small speck ahead of them. Amanda's car is still headed straight down the highway. Panic strikes as Steven realizes the couple will catch up to the car in a matter of minutes. He swiftly repositions himself behind the steering wheel, shifts into gear, and wheels around speeding away from the converging dots.

Quentin Struthers and his wife Martha had left their modest home in Kentucky to begin a two week long trek to visit their grandchildren in Arizona. The flat scenery and humongous sky had frightened Martha at first but now she was fascinated by how far she could see in all directions. She notices the car in front of them long before Quentin. His eyesight has been getting steadily worse for the last few months, and soon he will not be able to drive. That had prompted them to take this trip. Martha was never very comfortable driving. They were getting closer to the car; she knew that Quentin never drove over fifty

and so the car ahead of them must be going considerably slower than they were. She liked to puzzle things over in her mind. She began to inform Quentin of their closeness to another vehicle but was stopped short by his exclamation.

"Well, lookee here, two hours of nothing and then two cars in ten minutes. This road has turned into Grand Central Station all a sudden mother."

"Oh, Quentin." Martha snorts, half laughing, Quentin is such a jokester. "Now not so close, you know how your eyes are."

"I'm all about safety Mother."

"You're what?"

"I heard some kids say that back in Tennessee. Of course they were all about the Benjamins. Whatever that means."

Martha began to puzzle over the hidden meaning of Benjamins when she decides that Quentin deserves some recognition for learning something new.

"Why Quentin, you are a happin' dude."

"I think you're a bit behind Mother."

"Well, what should I say?"

"You're the man" Quentin states knowingly.

"Who's the man?"

"You're the man Mother."

"What?" Martha shakes her head confusedly.

"Nevermind. Well, what's going on here?" Quentin is forced to slow as the car in front of them begins to rapidly slow down.

"Are they stopping?"

"You'd better stay well back, Quentin. Be about safety."

"Now you're getting it Mother, but never you worry, I'm all over it."

"All over what?" Martha again shakes her head as Quentin snickers and slowly brings his car to a stop behind the sedan, which has stopped dead in the road. A sudden crash of lightning rips the sky as a downpour begins. Quentin turns on the wipers and headlights as the rain beats against the roof. Quentin and Martha lean forward and peer into the car in front of them. The car sits idling, the brake lights are dark, and the wipers remain off.

"What do you think's up, Mother?"

Quentin asks as he strains to see the interior of the stopped car.

"Don't know Father. Maybe you should check?" Martha says nervously.

"I'll give 'em a couple more minutes."

"Oh, you big chicken. I thought you were the man," Martha goads Quentin.

"I am the man. But this seems strange."

"Go on you old coot. I'm sure it's just car trouble. I'll call for help on the cell phone." Martha retrieves the tiny phone from her purse and begins to dial. She nods at Quentin

and then in the direction of the car. Quentin apprehensively opens his door and exits into the rain. The water stings as it encounters his skin, but then, as suddenly as it began, the rain stops.

"Damn Midwest weather. Now I'm soaked for no reason." He slams the car door.

"Hello, is this road side assistance?"

Martha says into the phone, "O.K. Yes, I'll hold."

Martha strains to see her husband through the foggy windshield.

"Yes dear, I'm still holding." She says as she watches her husband slowly approach the mysterious vehicle. "What? Oh, yes dear. Hold on a moment; let me get my card."

Martha begins to rummage through her purse but is interrupted by Quentin's hand slapping her window. "Goodness" she exclaims as she rolls down her window.

"Call the police Martha" Quentin shouts breathlessly.

"What on earth?" She says as she hangs up on the auto club and begins to dial the police.

"It's happened. It's finally happened" Quentin huffs.

"What happened?"

"We're witnesses. Do you know what that means Martha?"

"Witnesses to what? Calm down Quentin

Menacing
by Donna Wilt



and tell me what happened." Martha again squints in the direction of the idling sedan, trying to figure out why her husband is so excited.

"I told you but you just laughed. I said all those people can't be wrong."

Martha opens her door as Quentin begins pacing in the gravel just off the road. "Hello?" She suddenly speaks into the phone that she had forgotten was pressed to her ear. "Yes, I need help." She listens for a moment and then steps in front of Quentin to stop him from pacing. "O.K. Quentin. You have to focus now. They want to know what is the nature of our emergency. Can you tell me so I can tell them?"

Quentin nods rapidly, "They took her."

"A lady has been taken." Martha says the phrase before thinking and then realizes she knows almost as much about the situation as Quentin, and she doesn't remember a lady. "What lady, Quentin?"

"The lady in the car. They took her right in front of us."

Martha breathes deeply and sighs, "Who took her?"

"The aliens, Mother."

The U-Store-It off of Highway 11E is a small, out-of-the-way self-storage facility.

Steven has been storing his mother's bedroom furniture in one of the metal boxes since she died three years ago. At first he had just piled the furniture into one corner. Eventually he found that if he made some minor arrangements he could replicate his mother's room almost exactly. The dresser is a bit closer to the bed than it was in his mother's house and the floor lamp stands a bit too close to the ceiling to adequately light the room; otherwise the layout is perfect. A year ago, about the time he noticed Amanda, he began to come to the storage room and sit on his mother's bed. He would pretend that his mother was still alive and would soon walk through the metal door with a flourish. Somewhere deep inside he knows his mother is gone forever, which is O.K. because the room is going to be Amanda's now.

He unceremoniously deposits Amanda's groaning body on the bed in the center of the square room. He steps sideways, opens the top drawer of the oak night stand and removes one of the many handkerchiefs that are neatly folded and piled in the interior. His mother had always told him that a gentleman was never without a handkerchief. He always forgot to carry one but he continued to collect them, just in case.

The crisp, white cloth begins to turn pink as he dabs Amanda's forehead, removing the

Untitled

by Dana Williams



Poor Little Thing
by Kevin Stephenson



blood from her wound. He takes a fresh handkerchief and begins to tie her wrists to the bedpost. "This will be much softer than rope," he thinks.

"What? What happened?" Amanda moans softly.

"It's all right. You're safe now. I'll take good care of you" Steven says confidently. Then, bending close to her ear, he whispers softly, "I love you Amanda."

"Who?" Amanda says weakly as he grabs more handkerchiefs and begins tying her hands to the brass headboard.

"I have to go to the store and get some stuff to fix you up." Steven's sweet tone of voice makes Amanda gag. "These ties will make sure you don't do anything foolish." One last tug and the restraints are in place.

"They'll find me." Steven closes the door to the box and darkness engulfs Amanda. Tears burn a trail down her cheek as she repeats, "They'll find me."

"What do you make of this, Jim?" the officer asks his partner as they strike another road flare. "What happened to this girl?"

"Hell if I know Bob." Jim replies while placing the final flare on the highway. "All I know is we need to keep the crowd back. A crowd had gathered, alerted by home scan-

ners announcing the mysterious, and possibly extraterrestrial, disappearance of a young woman. Jim looks out over the two dozen people, recognizing some of the faces. Bill Witley's wife, Mary, is near the front of the crowd. She is in her house robe; her hair is in curlers. She holds up a poster board with the words, "All Visitors welcome." Jim notices that several people in the crowd are carrying signs. He can't help but wonder if they had these signs all ready to go just in case or if they put them together quickly on the spur of the moment. He spies one sign adorned with rhinestones and fringes and concludes that many of his neighbors are nuttier than he suspected.

A young woman pushes to the front of the crowd and starts toward the group of officers surrounding Amanda's car.

"Ma'am. I'm going to have to ask you to stay behind the flare there." Jim points to a road flare about a step and a half behind the lady.

"The public has a right to know, Jim." She shouts so that everyone around can hear. Some in the crowd shout "yeah." and "Amen to that."

"And they will know as soon as there's something to know," Jim shouts over her head and then adds more quietly, "Sherri, I know you want to be a big-time reporter but

can you help me out here and try not to agitate the crowd."

"Are you calling me an agitator, Jim? I'll have you know..." Her rant is cut short by the sudden appearance of a black helicopter in the distance. Switching tracks, Sherri launches into her reporter persona. "Is it true that the FBI is coming? Is that them?" She points at the hovering lights getting nearer.

"Now how would I know that? Please stay back." Jim rejoins Bob, who is watching the copter from a few steps away, and the two begin a slow jog toward a level clearing just off the highway.

The helicopter lands and two women dressed in neat, dark blue business suits step out. They walk purposefully toward Amanda's car. They are only a few feet from the car when Bob and Jim jar themselves to a halt in front of them.

"Is this the vehicle in question?" the first woman asks as she flashes her FBI badge in a nonchalant, yet authoritative way. She motions toward the idling car in the middle of the road. She has short brown hair and tight features.

"Yep. I'm Jim Sherwood and this here is..."

"Yes, well we'll need these people gone. This is an investigation, not a carnival" the second agent chimes in. Jim is struck by the almost identical look of the two women. Both

are medium build, height, and weight. Neither woman is beautiful, but neither are they ugly. Jim thinks that he would be hard pressed to give an accurate description of either of them. They are just too average.

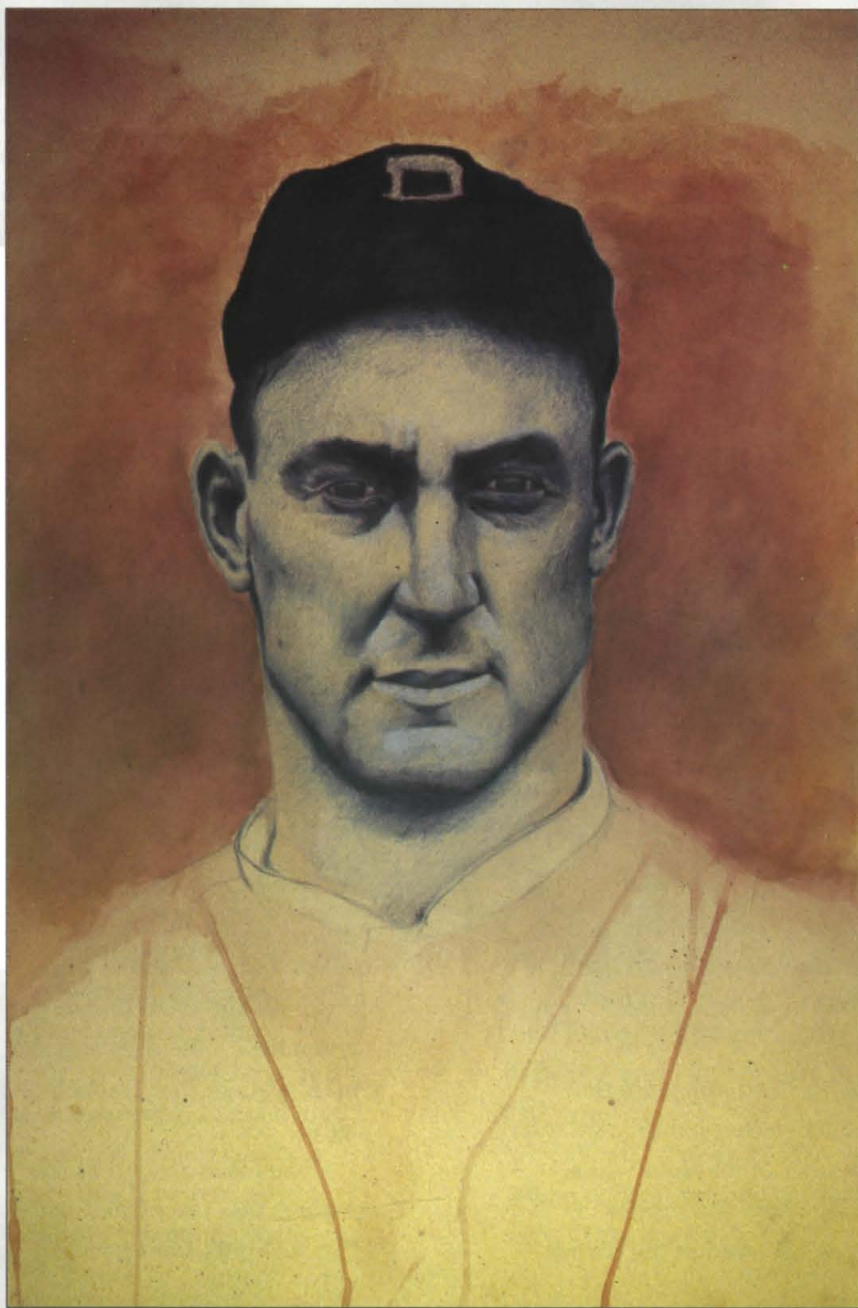
"That'll be hard. The press is here and more are on the way." Jim averts his eyes from the women. He realizes he had been staring.

"Get it done," the first agent spouts. "And get your men out of our way." The two women begin a methodical search of the car as Jim instructs his men to try and disperse the crowd. He can already hear Sherri reciting the first amendment before the last officer is given an assignment.

"You fuck, you sick little fuck." Steven is greeted with a barrage of profanity as he struggles to open the door to the storage unit and balance the grocery bags on his knee. "You're pathetic you little weasel. Untie me now."

"I see you have your strength back." Steven tries to sound strong but Amanda can hear the quiver in his voice. "Its O.K. Amanda. I won't hurt you," Steven soothingly whimpers. Amanda thinks that he may be more afraid than she is.

Ty Cobb
by Isaac Denton



"What? Speak up you fucking loser."

Amanda jerks violently on her constraints. She pauses as she feels one of the ties give way slightly. She has to keep Steven distracted. "Do you know what they're going to do to you when they catch you, Steven?" A hefty pull rattles the bed frame. "Fuck!" she screams, trying to disguise the sound. Steven starts to turn toward her, but Amanda spits in his direction and he withers back to the dresser where he reassumes unpacking the groceries.

"You are a stupid bastard" Amanda shouts at the back of Steven's head. The fact that she was kidnapped by such a pathetic wimp angers her. Another tug and she can feel the knot in the restraint loosening.

"Why are you saying these things?"

Steven asks shyly. He can't bring himself to face her so he looks down at his feet and keeps his back to her.

"Why? Did you just ask me why?"

Amanda is infuriated by his demeanor. Her anger gives her sufficient strength to finally break her bonds. "Why do you think, moron?"

Steven lowers his head, unaware that Amanda has freed one of her hands. Amanda desperately undoes her other hand while continually shouting more obscenities in order to keep Steven cowered in the corner.

"You fucking punch me in the face and kidnap me. You tie me to this fucking bed. And you have the gall to ask me why I hate you." Amanda, now free, scans the room for a weapon. "You know what you'll be in jail, Steven? A fudge packing tail gunner. That's right. It won't matter if you hide in the corner. They'll get you Steven. They'll get you and they'll fuck you."

Amanda grabs the bronze lamb on the nightstand next to the bed and steps to within a few feet of Steven. "Oh Stevie. Look here."

Steven turns, shocked by the proximity of her voice. He doesn't get a clear view of her face before an intense orange and yellow light ushers him into oblivion.

Amanda exits the U-Store-It and sprints for the highway. A little dizziness causes her to stumble. She sits ungracefully on the ground. "11E is the deadest stretch of road around here," she thinks to herself. "It'll be hours before anyone picks me up."

She scans the area and notices some lights in the distance. Police lights. "I can cut across this field and head for the lights. It's only a few miles." She rises and starts a careful but brisk walk in the direction of the flashing lights.

She looks around as she walks and realizes that she knows exactly where she is. "Those lights must be at my car. It's about

time they got their thumbs out of their asses and started looking for me." The lights of the U-Store-It disappear beneath the long grass as she gets further into the field. "That idiot Steven. He kidnaps me and only takes me two miles down the road. God he's a moron."

The crowd stubbornly resists the officers, and Jim is about to aid a particularly nervous deputy when one of the FBI agents taps him on the shoulder. He has no idea which one.

"Never mind Sheriff. You handle this your way. We'll be going now." The two women walk steadily toward the helicopter, retracing their original path. The second agent discards a pair of clear latex gloves unceremoniously in the gravel just off the highway.

"What?" Jim begins as he jogs a step or two to catch up to them. "You're just leaving? What about the disappearance? The girl? The witnesses?"

The second agent stops short and puts her left hand out and stops Jim in his tracks, hard. He thinks she may have bruised a rib.

"It's obvious to us," she begins, "that this is not a professional kidnapping, nor is there anything out of the ordinary about it. We have every confidence that if your men stop looking in the sky and start looking on the

ground they can solve this crime fairly easily. We have bigger fish to fry." The first agent boards the copter as the second finishes her lecture and joins her. The chopper lifts off and is soon disappearing into the night sky.

"What the hell just happened?" Jim asks no one in particular, but he notices that the chopper is not headed back the way it came but it is swinging out over Highway 11E.

As Amanda nears the road she notices a helicopter flying over her and heading in the direction of the U-Store-It. "Wow. I rate air cover. Now that's more like it." Distracted by her own thoughts of self importance and the helicopter above her, Amanda nearly falls over a small child asleep on a blanket just off the gravel beside the road. "What the hell?" she exclaims.

The crowd has steadily grown since the abduction. There were now around seventy people not counting the three television news crews.

"What is going on?" she says out loud.

"Did you just get here?" A lady in a bathrobe and curlers asks her. "Isn't it exciting?"

"What?" Amanda asks as she notices a young college age boy holding a sign that says, "Take me I'm ready."

Dysfunctional
by Monet LaClair



Untitled
by Melissa Stallard



"A poor girl has been abducted by aliens, and this time there were witnesses." The lady gives an emphatic nod of her head to accentuate her point.

"That's right," a man interjects from nearby. "They can't deny it this time."

"That poor girl," another man says.

"Amanda!" an unseen person shouts.

"What?" Amanda spits nervously.

"Her name is Amanda. They just told everyone." A young woman with a sign that reads, "Probe me" is talking directly to Amanda. "Isn't that a beautiful name."

"Yep," Amanda says confusedly as she meanders through the crowd heading in the general direction of her car.

"I hear that one of them tabloids is paying the old couple fifty thousand dollars." She overhears someone talking loudly to her left.

"That's nothing," another voice answers.

"They're going to give the girl one hundred thousand if she shows up again."

Amanda stops. Her mouth drops open.

"The movie rights should get her another half mil or so," a third voice offers. "Don't forget talk shows. They pay big too." Another voice shouts.

"Half a million dollars," Amanda repeats to herself as she wipes saliva from the corners of her mouth. "All I have to do is make that idiot Steven keep his mouth shut." Amanda

turns and sprints for the weeds.

"Where you going honey?" The lady in curlers shouts. "It ain't over yet."

"Damn straight," Amanda says under her breath

"And that's all you can tell us?" Jim asks in his best police voice as he continues to question Quentin and Martha. The couple is seated on one of the many ambulances that have gathered around the scene. Jim thinks that it is overkill since no one has been proven injured but he also knows that everyone wants to be at the scene of a possible alien abduction.

"Yep," Quentin answers. "They just took her. Right in front of us. Right Mother?" He looks at Martha.

"Well..." Martha ponders her answer, "I guess that's right. We were following the car for a pretty fair piece and then it just stopped."

"They make you think it's all bright lights and whistles..." interjects Quentin, "But they do it real quiet like so as not to raise a fuss."

Jim nods his head and takes a few steps back from the couple. "So you both agree that it was...uh...you know, aliens?"

"Now I didn't say that, I just..." Martha begins.

"Yes sir. We sure do," finishes Quentin; he looks Jim dead in the eye. Martha glances

at her husband and then turns to Jim.

"I suppose it's possible. I mean anything is possible, right?" she mutters.

Jim nods again, this time adding an "uh huh." He turns away from the ambulance and discovers that if not for quick reflexes he would have a mini recorder in his nose.

"So what do you think Jim?" Sherri asks as she lowers the recorder in her outstretched hand so that it rests near Jim's lips and not his nose.

"Sherri, I told you to stay behind the line."

"Staying behind the line never gets you anywhere," Sherri states. "Tell me straight Jim. What's going on here?"

"Excuse me Sheriff," interrupts Martha. "I've been thinking and, contrary to my husband's opinion, I'm not convinced aliens were involved. In fact there was this suspicious young man..."

"Alien?" shouts Sherri as she attempts to climb over Jim while thrusting the mini recorder at Martha. "So the rumors are true. Ma'am, were you a witness? What happened? Can I have a quote?"

"Well I..." Martha begins.

"No! Mrs. Struthers don't say another word. Please." Jim shouts as he continues to push Sherri toward the police barriers.

"Sherri, get behind the line."

"But I..." Sherri starts.

"Now," demands Jim. "I'll make a statement later."

"Jim the people have a right..."

"Sherri," Jim says emphatically. Sherri looks into his eyes, trying to gauge how much further she can go. She makes a quizzical face and decides that she has gone far enough. She shuts off her mini recorder and turns. As she slowly walks toward the police line she mutters over her shoulder, "I hope it's a damn good statement."

"You and me both," Jim whispers after her. He is sure that no one could hear. He turns back to Martha. "I'm sorry about that. What was it you were saying?"

Bright sparkles of light begin dancing before Steven's eyes as he slowly opens them. The pounding of his head begins to take a rhythmic feel as he raises himself to a seated position. "What?" he thinks as he recalls the bronze lamp whistling toward his forehead. "Stupid, stupid" he says as he notices the discarded handkerchiefs on the bed. "I should have used rope. But I didn't want to bruise her wrists," he muses as he struggles to his feet.

The repetitive pain in his temple becomes too evenly paced to be throbbing. "What now?" he asks as he leans toward the door

just in time to see a helicopter whiz past the U-Store-It sign. "Oh crap," he exclaims as he jerks his head back from the door.

Amanda crouches in the weeds just a few hundred feet from the U-Store-It sign. "Go away, go away," she chants at the helicopter circling overhead. Suddenly she spies Steven stumbling out of her would be cage. "Shit." She mutters, "He's such a moron."

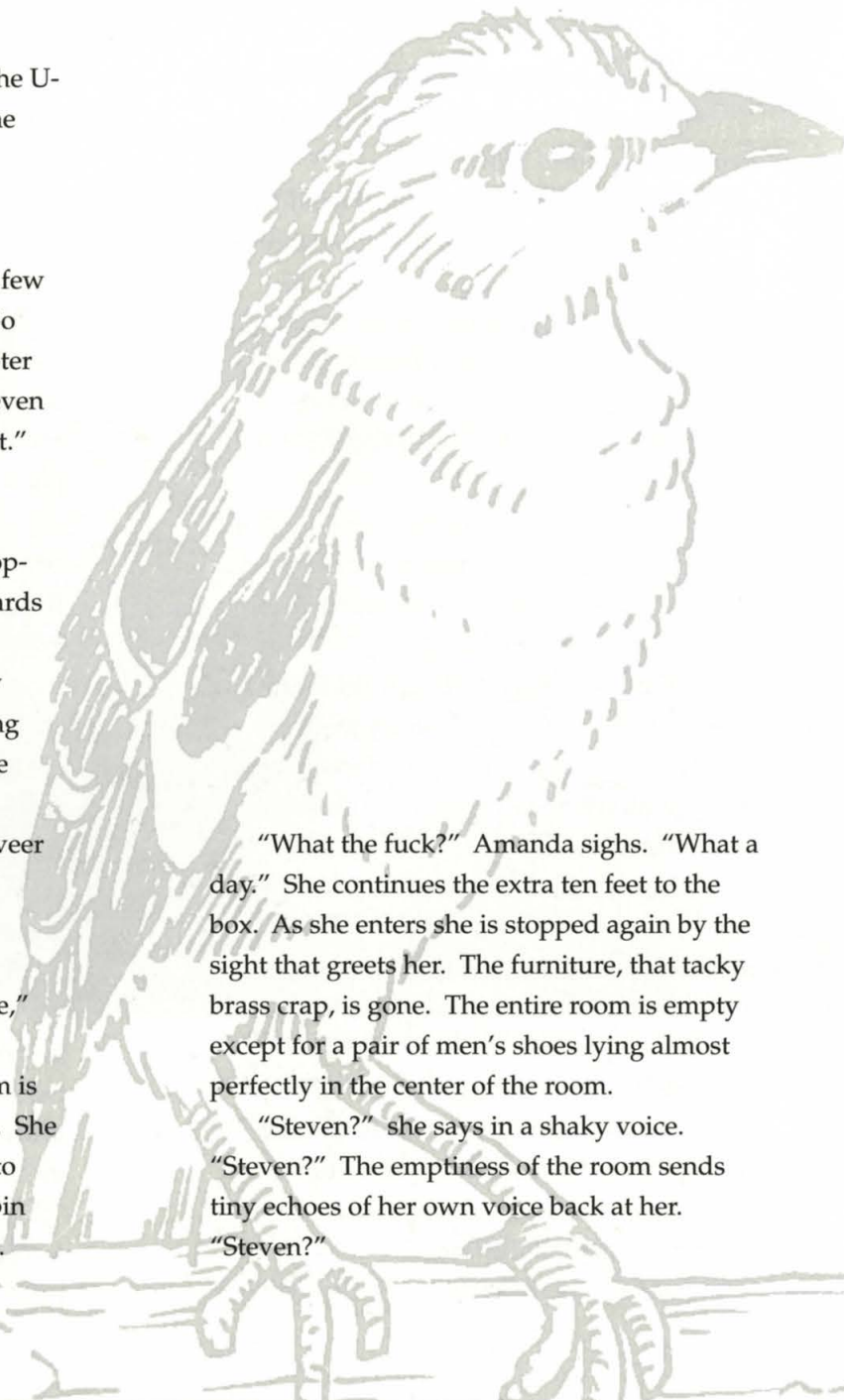
She gestures wildly with her hands, hoping to catch his eye and avoid the chopper. Fortunately Steven stumbles backwards into the darkness of the aluminum cube. "Thank goodness," she mumbles. "Now you." She stares intensely at the FBI flying just overhead as if the power of her desire could affect reality.

Surprisingly the helicopter begins to veer away toward the neighboring town of Donotch. "Yes," she screams as she runs hunchbacked toward Steven.

"Steven, you lucky bastard, come here," she cries as she runs. Then she stops. A brilliant white light engulfs her. The beam is so intense that it seems to possess weight. She can't even lift her head and it is an effort to blink. The light bathes her and Steven's bin for only a few seconds and then it is gone.

"What the fuck?" Amanda sighs. "What a day." She continues the extra ten feet to the box. As she enters she is stopped again by the sight that greets her. The furniture, that tacky brass crap, is gone. The entire room is empty except for a pair of men's shoes lying almost perfectly in the center of the room.

"Steven?" she says in a shaky voice. "Steven?" The emptiness of the room sends tiny echoes of her own voice back at her. "Steven?"



Burden

by Kevin Stephenson



A Tribute to the One-Armed Monkey

by Jeanne Smith

You sat motionless in the tree,
Unmoved by the raging wind,
Gazing at the bananas
That were just out of your reach.
They didn't really matter.
You only had one arm,
And you needed it to hang on.
You clung tightly to the limb above you.
.....so I shot you.
And I feel no remorse.
I put you out of your misery,
You hideous creature of the night!
You got what you deserve!
Now you have no arms,
And you are more repulsive than ever.
I spit upon you.
Spit, spit.

Katydid's Bubbles
by Sherri Pugh



Goose Hunt

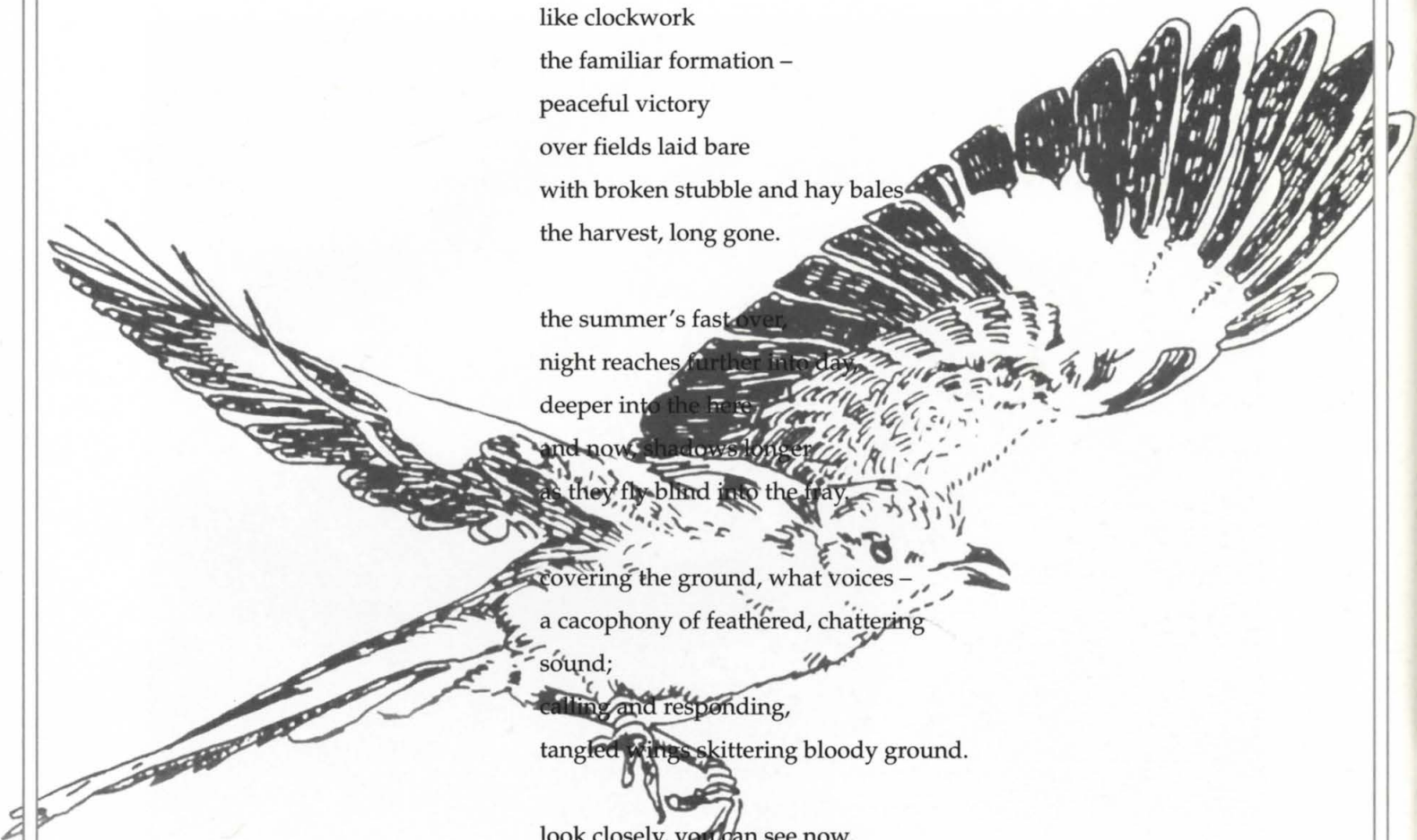
by Pam Tabor

every fall
like clockwork
the familiar formation –
peaceful victory
over fields laid bare
with broken stubble and hay bales
the harvest, long gone.

the summer's fast over,
night reaches further into day,
deeper into the here,
and now shadows longer
as they fly blind into the fray.

covering the ground, what voices –
a cacophony of feathered, chattering
sound;
calling and responding,
tangled wings skittering bloody ground.

look closely, you can see now,
watch the grounded wish for flight –
as they lie beneath the fence row
trapped in the hunter's reckless sights.



Arrested Impasse

by Shanda Miller

The closet bulged with the women she used to be. Faded, outgrown dresses hung like ghosts pressed close together, suffocating. Samara shuddered. James had changed everything. No new dresses, no friends, nothing. Depressed, she left the cramped room for the comparative comfort of the den.

The settling dark called her to the window. Samara searched the pale landscape, pressing her cheek against cool glass. She puffed a barely audible sigh onto the glass, creating a blurry circle. Promptly, she drew a face on the foggy surface. Two uneven eyes and a prominent frown. Imitating her window creation, her mouth plunged downward. She was tired of being hungry and alone so she fled to the kitchen. The room was dim. The bulb overhead spread a diluted amber glow over the table and chairs, casting wavy shadows on the faded paisley linoleum.

Barely visible in the shadows she sat, staring at the cramped appliances. The dusk outside crept further into the room, as the already dim bulb's illumination waned subtly, no longer aided by natural light.

Placing her coffee cup on the bar, she stared with blank eyes at her reflection in the window, unable to see past the glass. Absently, Samara caressed the countertop, gliding her fingertips along its cracked surface. The butter-yellow, time-worn curtains shifted with the sudden puffs of wind. She closed the door, its rusted hinges creaking ominously as she struggled to shut out the night. The air grew chill, sending shockwaves

of goosebumps up her arms.

The wind howled with malicious mirth, mocking her solitude. She shuddered convulsively and tip-toed to the table. The bulb's eerie ember-like glow pulsed weaker, fading the room to colorless shadow.

The solitary darkness surrounded her until she breathed heavily with its weight. Hugging her shoulders, she retreated to the bedroom. Quickly, she undressed and gathered the comforter about her. She was wide awake.

The clock in the den chimed. Samara started and glanced at the demonic red glow of her alarm clock. Noise flooded her ears. The wind rushed by her window, leaving shaking tree limbs in its wake. Creaks and groans sounded in the hall. She sat perfectly still. Another creak. Groping for a weapon, she knocked over a glass of water. Silence shrouded the house. Clutching her nail file, Samara eased out of the bed and tip-toed to the doorway. She crouched, paralyzed.

Suddenly, the creaking returned, heavier and louder, closer and closer. Samara screamed. There in the hallway she saw the outline of a man.

"Well, ain't that a right nice welcome," James slurred and swayed towards the door as Samara hastily retreated toward the bureau. "I only came back to get some more money, babe, not to enjoy your company."

Samara guarded the bureau, arms outstretched to protect its contents. Moving slowly towards her, James brought his face

directly in front of hers. A mixture of cheap cologne and cheaper beer exuded from his sweat-stained clothes. She cringed. He reached for her hands; she tightened her grip. She knew he wanted to hurt her now. She knew it was futile to protect her money. He would get it anyway, with the sure brute force he had always used. She drew back in disgust, repulsed by his dirty, drunken visage. She hated him, wished he would die. Enraged with her disgust, James slapped her twice, deliberately keeping his hand on her face. She didn't lax her grip.

"I hope you die," she spat out, furious with herself for speaking. James raised his hand toward her again. With sudden vim, Samara stabbed at James' upper arm, tearing the faded red work shirt and gouging his flesh.

Caught off-guard he fell back onto the bed. Without hesitation, Samara lunged past him, wielding her weapon with wild, jerky stabs. James stumbled and fell against the bureau. The force of his fall knocked pictures, figurines, and candles onto his head. A once treasured wedding cake topper fell, breaking the plastic union forever. Her foot crunched the remnants as Samara fled to the kitchen. She lurched the door open and ran into the night, knowing her assailant was close at heel.

The woods issued no welcome to the intruders as pursued and pursuer raced along its narrow paths. Samara was dumb with fear. James' slurred threats echoed in the vastness of the forest. She ran to save her life with

strength and speed unknown to her shaking body. She ran indiscriminate through brush and stream until her body stung from the brutal lashing and her feet throbbed, raw and bleeding.

Samara continued her wild flight until she stumbled into a clearing, tripping over a wood block. When she became aware of her surroundings, a small farm greeted her red, bulging eyes. On her knees she crept toward the fence and lay panting. She listened and realized that she no longer was pursued. Overwhelmed with the relief, she collapsed against the rough fence.

The sun escaped in tiny circles from the cloudy haze surrounding the small farm, dotting the scarlet barn like a spotted disease. Samara slumped over on the fence post. A loud baying forced her eyes open. Lifting her head slightly, she peered into the fog that held down the morning. Awareness of the cold dampness spread over her bare limbs. She welcomed its embrace. The shock of the cold made her feel alive.

A barn loomed before her; its awful redness peeling to reveal ugly gray. She stood suddenly, choking back screams, and ran at the barn, tearing paint chips and clawing the bubbled surface until blood ran in tiny angry streams from her fingertips. Finally, spent and crying, she leaned against the barn. Bringing her hands up to her mouth, she sobbed as the red paint chips mixed with blood and tears smeared her face.

Wake
by Kevin Stephenson



Invisible

by Janina C. Williams

Carefully, quietly, slipping aboard.
Blending, without identity into the crowd,
Yet, not one of the suits or pressed dresses.
I walk, a child, with my merchandise
awaiting the movement of my train
my journey, from one reality to another
and the silence of its passengers.

An underprivileged,
born into poverty,
hopelessly, surviving, for nothing.
I parade between the seats
promoting my calculator
I am the product I sell
"It adds, multiplies, divides and subtracts" I say
hoping to add money to my pocket
multiply it by the end of the day
divide it among family
while subtracting monotonous hungry days from my life.

My voice grows louder and firmer
more persuasive.
No acknowledgment of me is made.
Stern tired faces stare straight ahead.
Pages of a book turn by the hand of one
engulfed in another world.
Others gazing through the window
dreaming of a place beyond
the dark dirtiness of the city.

I am. Formless, unseen, an unheard voice
passing between the pews of purgatory.
I begin to pray, silently
between my longings
placing calculators in the laps
of the calculating corpses lost between home and work.
As a ghost, I gather my calculators
questioning my reality, my presence,
my invisibility
against the transitory senseless passengers.

Exiting the train, I walk away,
leaving that which moves between realities.
Glittering gold between the tracks catches my eyes.
Answering prayers, anonymously climbing between the
golden gates
I am on the train tracks, retrieving my long awaited treasure
Hurrying, necessity overcoming risk and danger
Feeling the rumble of the tracks,
Calmness smothers my fear.
Already living a form of death,
invisibility creating immortality.

An unseen bump delays the train momentarily
the thundering metal continues.
Time and monotony end with the passing of a train.

The Bridge That Dad Built

by Shanda Miller

Home is the once-makeshift bridge that crosses the river to my house. Daddy built that bridge mostly by himself, rebuilding it each time the flood waters drowned the wooden planks. I played underneath the bridge, swinging from its metal beams like Shannon Miller; we even had similar names. My sister and I learned to swim in that river. Daddy would toss us miles into the air, and splash! we hit the water flapping arms and legs in excitement and fear, though we could easily stand on the bottom. I fished off that bridge, too, hooking accordion-bodied worms just to show up my brave boy-cousin, Josh.

Granny Bonnie and Pa Herbert were just a couple of skips up the hill from the bridge and I would run up to their house to get a mid-fishin' snack, usually a Faygo peach pop and an ice cream sandwich. Grannie Bonnie had an endless supply of goodies. She saved the best for Josh, because he was her favorite, being a boy, I think. But Pa would sneak into her stash for me and slip me some Nestle Toll House under the cover of the back porch. After scavenging we ran back to the bridge to get our poles and then go chasing crawdaddies.

Even when the bridge was out I had fun. I would sit on the bank, pulling up the weeds

around me and watching Daddy and Skunk Lewis sweating. Skunk was one of the local drunks, but the best worker and the most honest. I loved to listen to him talk when he was drunk. He would hardly speak a few words to me when sober, but get him drunk and he was like Sarah-the-operator on *Andy Griffith*. Once when the bridge washed away, Daddy hired Skunk, who had brought a case of beer along. He was close to flying the third sheet when he spilled the can he was diligently working on. Our dog Charlie, a red chow, decided he liked beer and lapped it up. In a few minutes there went Skunk and Charlie wobbling across the unsteady foot boards from one side to the other. that's the only time I've seen a dog drunk, except on *Soggybottom, USA*.

As I grew older and more academic, I neglected my bridge. Younger cousins took over my perch on its edges, fishing and diving. I would walk down from the mountain to see the river and sit on the bridge, but it just wasn't the same: a concrete bridge, no grandparents, Josh removed from me, me changed, older, more cynical. I haven't sat at my spot for about eight years, but each time I cross the bridge that dad built I know I'm home.

Judges Judges Judges Judges Judges Judges Judges

William Slusher served as the fiction judge for this year's *Mockingbird*. Slusher was a junior at ETSU in 1967, when most college men were clinging zealously to student deferments from the draft, and, by extension, from the Vietnam War. With a GPA in the high threes, Slusher resigned to become an army helicopter pilot and to request Vietnam, lest the war end before he could get there. It didn't. Slusher subsequently served as offshore pilot, police/medevac pilot, father to five, and husband to three (sequentially). He is a native of McMinnville TN, and now lives near Harper's Ferry WV with his wife (a local physician), seven horses, four Welch Corgis, three cats, and a large blacksnake somewhere in the basement. Now retired, he runs the horse ambulance division of a major eastern equine hospital, and he writes. Since 1995, Slusher has published three novels and a short story. He is a newspaper editorial columnist, and he is currently completing a screenplay adaptation of his first novel at the request of made-for-TV film producers. To aspiring ETSU writers, Slusher urges: "If you have the talent, write. If you don't, write anyway, and maybe you'll acquire some. It worked for me."

Mr. James Smith, this year's art judge, describes himself as a local hillbilly, raised in a holler, no indoor plumbing or TV. He graduated from ETSU in 1973 with a BFA in graphic design. Smith worked for newspapers, mostly in Dallas, as an illustrator, designer, photo editor and art director for a magazine that won two Pulitzers for photography, along with many regional and national awards, including Picture Editor of the Year. Smith went freelance in 1985, and has been with his representatives, Friend and Johnson, since the beginning of his career. Smith has illustrated annual reports for many major corporations, and has done work for Atlantic Monthly, Readers' Digest, Boys Life, Audubon, National Geographic, Outside, and for clients like Lexus and Bloomingdales. Smith is currently working on a job for Disney. He also did a job for the White House, a Christmas tour brochure—drawings of the Nutcracker (Smith: "How appropriate"). Smith has two children, Lauren, 15, and Daniel, 12. "The blonde bombshell Michele Warner, a better artist than me, is my beloved spouse since 1984. Actually, SHE should be judging your show."

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Subscription Info.

Mockingbird
c/o Dept. of English
Box 70683
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Johnson City, TN 37614-1709

Printer's Address

ETSU University Press
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, TN 37614

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