

Winter 2009

The
Somerset
Review



The Summerset Review

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The Summerset Review



Editors' Notes

We'll be releasing our second print issue in January 2009, collecting a sampling of works published here in 2007 and 2008. Support us and the literary community by purchasing a copy for \$10 (U.S. shipping price). We are also offering a package deal: Volume One + Volume Two for \$17.

But everything in the print issue is already online for free. What more do I get by giving you money?

O.K., look: If you read the stories online and are happy with that, we're more than grateful. It's all one big happy family. But if you are a reader who likes something in your hands, or you are looking for a special gift for a special someone, or you just admire us for whatever odd, beautiful reason, go for it. Take the print issue with you on a train, a long drive or flight, and fall into these literary pieces we have selected for you. We're certain there is at least one in the issue that will hit you, hard.

But I can just as well see your site on my Kindle or iPod or BlackBerry. The stories read fine there, and a print issue is one less thing I need to lug around.

We can't argue with that, and we don't want to. At the end of it all, what we want, passionately, is to get these literary stories and essays we truly love into the lives of more people. A print issue is just one more way we can do that.

Our Lit Pick of the Quarter is from *Gulf Coast* this time, Volume 20 Number 2, Summer/Fall 2008. Written by Brenda Miller, it is an essay entitled "Table of Figures," with the rather unusual characteristic of being in third person. A girl is growing up, ultimately alone but trying to love her own self. The dreamy prose drew us in completely, and we hope it will do the same to you. Here is the first paragraph -

A girl becomes aware of herself as a girl. She is approximately five years old (maybe six, at the oldest seven). Note the mother instructing this girl that she now must wear a T-shirt while playing in the summertime with the boys on the block. Note the girl's naked torso, her downward gaze onto an expanse of bare flesh punctuated by two flat nipples. Outside the sun bears down, its heat insistent, but the afternoon breeze a familiar pleasure on this skin. Radiating lines from the girl's face indicate a new source of heat: the first inklings of shame. But also—beneath, within, around that shame—something more complex, a deeper pleasure, the first inklings of power.

The Summerset Review

Joseph Levens - Editor
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A literary journal released quarterly on the 15th of March, June, September, and December on the Internet, and periodically in print form. Founded in 2002, the journal is devoted to the review and publication of unsolicited short stories and essays.

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The Summerset Review

The Somerset Review

Where the Glazed Girls Go —————



————— by Kasandra Snow Duthie

After the butter princess wins her title, the other glazed girls who were sculpted and born from a ninety-pound block leave the fairgrounds too. They go to foster care. Butter flows slower than blood. When you eye butter-flesh closely, you can see its transparency. Faint ripples of mustard seed pollinate her shape as a butter girl walks.

Glazed specimens, dollop-breasts, shiny teeth, and grins as wide as the sky, are softer and less protected than regular Minnesota girls. They're odd. These girls will begin a sentence melodically, the way a harpist plays, but as the thought continues, their tone turns deep—the sound a ewe makes when hustling her lamb close, from a hum inside her throat. A glazed girl is the sadness a country songwriter laughs about before he weeps. I know the way dairy girls act. I know both sorts. I've lived among the real girls, and I was a friend of a glazed girl named Wyn who died. The state fair is the ultimate gathering place for us farm kids. We come from families who teach us to control a heifer with a stick before we can read.

Unlike us, the glazed girl is fragile and weak, her soul and body parts born piece by piece from a chisel. Each year, the real dairy princess poses to be sculpted from butter in a temperature-controlled observation room, tiara on her head, parka worn over her pink dress. Created to look like the fair's real dairy princesses, the ruined butter copies fail. When a glazed girl forms, something goes wrong in her enzyme construction. Her DNA is not like our own. She has bad genes and runny chemical compounds. Heartless want grows this cold block of butter into a damaged waif whenever a Frankenstein sculptor works her business. Then, when she arrives, the curdled baby girl rises from a hideous dark place, crying all feral and sheepish, and singing. And if she sings long enough to survive, the glazed baby immediately becomes a yellow pad of gypsy waste to us all.

The first time I saw a glazed girl I shunned her because I had learned the butters were known to be diseased and violent. That day, my friends and I had been playing underneath a mailbox on a dirt road. The tiny yellow Vaseline-faced girl walked over and poked a stick at the ants we'd corralled in our fortress of dirt. We shunned her for a while, saying *get out of here* and *go*. We said your momma is dead. We said we're going home to eat cake and play with all our money and dolls. We told the glazed girl she was unwanted, but we saw in her eyes she'd already known that her whole life. It made us sad for a minute, so we buried all the ants we'd gathered until they smothered underneath our shoes.

In high school, something beyond that yellow-pollen dust followed my friend Wyn around. Rumor said she once walked to school on a sub-zero Minnesota day, bare-chested, waist-up naked. I took a sculpture class with her. None of my good friends were there, so talking to Wyn in art class seemed safe. Ms. Feroy made us do unbelievably trivial things with clay. She played Judy Collins and Buffy Sainte-Marie for mood music. One thing I remember her making us do was pour white plaster into milk cartons. After it dried, we peeled away the carton, revealing a chalky brick. I whittled and sanded, but my art stayed coffin-shaped and plain. Wyn smashed her brick in two and chiseled the most marvelous replica of what I believed to be a poolside snack shack.

"Hey," I said. "I would never think to make a snack shack out of plaster. What are those little oblong things?" Poking her short yellow

finger on the table, Wyn dabbed up plaster shavings and debris. She wore her hair back the way those Robert Palmer girls did in the music video, a sleek, sleek ponytail. Hair the color of a chicken foot.

Wyn covered her sculpture in burlap, and looked at me the way a goat spies a person in the distance with one eye—still and frozen, but aware. "I saw your ugly, manure sculpture. No help for it. And, I must say, your stupid friends suck a lot of wang."

"Not too much," I said. Then I thought about my allegiances and muttered, "No, they don't even suck wang at all."

"Mmm," Wyn grunted, rubbing grit off her fingers. She glowered at her burlap-covered shack. "This is no snack shack. It's a buttered corn stand. Those things you pointed at are not oblongs. They're wine coolers."

After that, Wyn took leave from Ms. Fero's class for a week. We moved on to coil pots, prepping them with glaze for the fire. When Wyn came back, she smelled like canned pumpkin, and her gold lion eyes sat deeper in her yellow face. I asked her where she'd been and she said, "Milking. It's in my blood." I didn't know what she meant, but when I started to ask again, she walked away.

"Fero," Wyn said, clomping toward the art room boom box. "Play that Charlie Daniels Band." Ms. Fero said she wasn't familiar with Charlie Daniels. "Sure you are, Fero," Wyn said. "It's that fast fiddle song about the devil the carnies play when you walk past the Zipper ride. At the fair." People laughed. Wyn didn't care.

Once fired, my clay pot turned the color of an old soggy tube-sock. After the kiln, Wyn's vase reflected mirrors of moving halo light the way her skin often did. She kept to herself after the class critique when nobody would admit to admiring her art even though it was masterful. Ms. Fero said that Wyn should pursue her talent as a sculptor. Wyn shrugged, telling Ms. Fero that she wanted to become a 4-H leader and a County Extension officer instead. "County Extension officers know about the land," Wyn said. "Art is a dream I won't have time for."

The next week our class started to work on clay busts. Ms. Fero asked each of us to choose an inspirational person to be our muse. I selected my friend Becky Norwick because she was sexually active; this made her street-wise and great. Most of the boys chose guitarists or sports stars. Wyn asked Ms. Fero if she could use someone she had never met. We sculpted our busts for a week before we revealed them to the class for critique. My finished bust looked unromantically fat, and noseless and chinless, instead of loved and voluptuous. Wyn had formed a giant fried pickle on a stick, a face frozen in a murderous scream.

We all knew glazed girls ended up in foster care, motherless and unwanted. People told stories about Wyn. She lived in a house full of kids and had to eat lutefisk and oyster stew every day. Foster kids like Wyn had to drink powdered milk instead of the kind that comes from cows. And her transient "siblings" tried to molest her. That's why she had to padlock her basement bedroom door. Wyn had to be locked in that basement all the time. Once she tried to scrape her way out, her fingernails cat-scratching the floor. She came to school, bandages

covering her yellow scabby fingers full of mustardy mucous blood. Wyn's foster mother weighed more than a cow. She made Wyn wash the younger foster kids' soiled underwear with a wire brush and soap made of lard. It couldn't be proven, but people knew Wyn's foster mom once shook a baby glazed girl so hard she died of brain rattle.

These were lies, of course. High school girls tell lies. They use what they know to invent fear and shameful things they won't understand until they grow old. Or they tell a convincing modern day folk story about a pied piper and his rats. Only this time, the piper is the town hockey hero named Sven, who drives a rusty Ford Bronco. The girls follow him around. They belong to his thick hands. They become entranced and lean into his wintergreen, chewing tobacco breath. They lie about how magical he is. Or, for example, a girl tells her friends something quite stupid. They believe her. Now, why, for instance, does a girl invent a psychotic dwarf she once saw masturbating on an old mattress in her neighbor's basement? She invents this story because she likes being afraid of old pipes and darkness. She likes the idea of fear and suffering, but only hypothetically.

After Wyn sculpted the creepy pickle face on a stick, I had no choice but to ignore her forever. She had opened some freaky fear in that pickle face, displaying it proudly to the high school world. My friends and I only spoke of the heinous and wicked when we could invent ways to pass judgment on others. This was something we saw our mothers do. Our mothers weren't gossips. No, *they were actually just shedding light on what was already common knowledge*. We teens hadn't yet honed our mothers' subtle talk-of-the-town skills. We sought drama. Our teenage pain and confusion became what we said we saw in people like Wyn. My friends and I drenched each other with stories about shaken babies and orphan glazed girls without identities.

After the term ended, I didn't see Wyn very often. She started dating a guy who sported a thin moustache and wore big black boots. People said he gave Wyn crabs, and then they forgot about Wyn entirely. The guy didn't go to our school. He looked old and singed, way too heavy metal. Sometimes Wyn and I would nod at one another when we passed in the hall. That was about it. During the winter, Wyn walked to the old guy's Chevy pickup near where the smokers stood when they could stand the cold long enough to smoke. Even in winter, she wore nothing more than a jean jacket or one of those windbreakers with all the useless zippers. I never understood how her gaunt yellow body could stand the cold and wind. It was as though Wyn lived to be bravely frozen and oblivious, standing around smiling in the gray brutal tundra of our winters.

About a year after art class ended, I met Wyn's mother while I shopped with mine at the dime store. They knew each other through church group. Wyn had never lived in foster care. She had been adopted as a three-day-old butter baby by this woman named Carma. Wyn's adoptive father was named Jim. The Gustafsons worked as accountants in the strip mall in an office they shared. When my mom introduced me that day, I told Wyn's mother I thought her daughter was a good artist. But when Carma left my mother and me, I whispered that Wyn was having sex with a pedophile dope-dealer.

What happened is, Wyn died. A few years after we graduated, we learned the news she'd been in a car wreck somewhere near Owatonna. It's funny how people become close to grieving even when

the sadness isn't theirs to own. Large devastation, say one hundred thousand people dying in India or somewhere, is hard to consider. Pretending to know one small tragedy is easy. We trace small patterns then, in a glazed and melted life like Wyn's.

Posthumous Wyn reminded us girls of driving around in some old car. You look down to the left and there's this black raggedy scar running through the driver side mirror. Our own cracked faces reflect our distortion, allowing space, and trees, and somebody passing behind us. I remember so many people saying Wyn was the funniest glazed girl. As if they knew a multitude of butter girls. I remember someone saying how they once parked in the woods with Wyn, and drank blueberry milkshakes and talked about the stars. After her death, Wyn's short life became famous because we wanted a new fable. Everyone knew her suddenly. *Ha ha ha*, we said, I remember Wyn doing the Hustle in a barn loft, her hair matching the color of the hay.

Wyn was a borrowed child; her adoptive mother told me this years after she died. I saw her mother in the grocery, and I confessed I hadn't been close to Wyn. But she sure did march to her own drum, I said. I smiled the stupid way you do when you know you should stop talking. Wyn's mom looked off toward the dairy aisle. "We adopted her when she was tiny," she said. "But you know, even when Wyn was very young, she was reckless." Then Carma's face puckered. She looked at me as if prescribing some sentence or judgment. "We were aware of it," she said, wringing her hands on the grocery cart.

I saw Wyn one time in the summer between junior and senior year. She sat on the back of some guy's motorcycle. One of those beat-up Yamahas. I waited behind them at a stop sign on a dirt road. I remember all the soy fields and the way the sky seemed thin and white blue. I knew it was her, on the back of the bike. I saw shiny harvest cornstalk skin, and the pollen haloed all around her. For a moment she turned back at me with some kind of hindsight intuition. And she smiled. Then she turned to look ahead. Her life was just now beginning: full throttle force, eight-hundred-octane fierce, faster than the Zipper ride could spin, faster than Charlie Daniels could ever play that fiddle.

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The Sunnerset Review



It was not the first time he looked at his hands and fidgeted nervously with the tips of his fingers, rubbing them against each other, burying them in the smooth skin of his palms. Sometimes he rubbed in a deliberate cleansing motion, then pocketed closed fists inside his jacket to resist the urge to look again.

Today, the old man was keenly aware of his hands. He thought the clerk behind the counter at the newspaper office noticed, so he rubbed his fingertips. Years ago, his wife certainly noticed. His ex-wife now. She mentioned it often. His hands were soft, pale, and showed no lines, not unlike his cheeks that appeared as if they were in constant state of blushing. Today, the weather outside made everything worse, the cold air calling to the surface splotches of red, like rose petals crushed into his skin.

He had delicate hands, as his wife put it tactfully, but he knew what she meant.

"Is this it, sir?" The clerk had to ask twice; the old man was lost in his thoughts.

"Yes. That's all. How much to run it for one week?" He fumbled with his checkbook, knowing he'd have to place the paper and pen, and therefore his hands upon the counter.

He'd often avoided bringing attention to his hands when he was around his wife. It had been easier that way. He could sense how she held back and relented with indifference when he tried to hold her. And when she

left him finally, he wondered if it was more than his inability to give her a child, to make her happy. He resented that she'd moved on as easily as changing into a new outfit, and that he'd become bitter, ashamed of himself.

As he left the newspaper office he turned the wording of the advertisement over in his mind. "Female nude model wanted. Generous compensation. No questions please. Call..."

Why had the woman asked, "Is this it, sir?" Should he have written more? And what else could he write, after all? It was what he needed now that he finally had the time, but most of all the courage and the strength to get back to his work. After his wife left him he'd simply stopped. But as much as he wanted so earnestly to be caught up in his painting, he was despairingly unproductive. He sat for hours and hours in his garret on the second floor of his turn-of-the-century brownhouse. He watched students walk back and forth on the sidewalk underneath his window. He watched shoppers with their fat bags, the cars in traffic inching to the light, then lurching forward once again. He watched nothing. This is why he'd decided on the ad, something he'd never done, not even when his work was sought after and he needn't have paid if he'd merely made his intentions known. Women wanted to be painted by him.

His wife had been one of his first models, and his early shows were as much about him as they were about her. She was beautiful, and the paintings were large, life-size reproductions of the old man's then ideal vision. In his eyes she was perfect, and he worked hard to capture her every detail until the woman on the canvas looked at any moment as if she would breathe. But that was a long time ago, and his work now looks nothing like it used to. It has gotten smaller, more abstract.

Besides, it had been more than ten years since his last solo exhibit was remanded to the back room of the gallery for permanent storage. The only other places where he imagined one could find his work were stuffy attics or damp basements where the moisture slowly bit into the canvas, followed shortly by decay. Who would come to him if he didn't place the ad? He'd grown so isolated in the wake of his divorce that his name was a faint memory even among his colleagues. He'd become a stranger, alone, and only now, maybe now could he permit himself to think that it was time.

The old man let his thoughts become muddled as he pushed his aging frame against the January wind, making his way between the drab facades of recently erected towers, bright awnings and twisted window mannequins that stared out onto the street with eerie human likeness. He headed to his apartment that was located not quite on the edge of town, but far enough so that it was at least a twenty-minute walk to the university quarter, the same neighborhood he'd lived in since retiring from his teaching post. And although he'd been down many of these same streets before, he saw them now painted in a new light, with the vigor of a man roused from a stupor, a prolonged lazy sleep. He saw their cracks and crevices, their random drunken sidewalk patterns that marred the regular arrangement of the concrete slabs, the sudden and relieving break from the monotony of expectations.

When he reached the landing of his apartment he unlocked the front door and pushed the measure of his weight against the solid slab of wood that sometimes expanded and stuck on humid days. A pall had settled on the city for a couple of weeks, and only recently had the wind begun to drive away the clouds, making room for the scent of pure, cold air.

Inside the front door, the brownstone was clean, almost clinical. On the first floor was an apartment whose residents were often students in transition to more respectable housing. He seldom shared more than a nod with the occupants below him in the rare instances they met on the stairs or inside the common hallway, before he climbed to the second floor.

As he walked up the stairs he realized he was happy to get back to his rooms today. He was aware of a mild excitement that set in as he left the newspaper office.

It wasn't long until he received a call.

"Hello? Hi. I'm calling about the ad in the paper?" The voice on the other end sounded breezy, but practiced. He couldn't determine an age that fit the tone. The woman sounded interested, but distant.

"The compensation is \$100 an hour. I only ask that there be no questions."

"Sure, sure. I understand. You don't have to worry. I've done this before, and..."

He barely heard the end of her sentence. Something in the woman's voice made him nervous and agitated. His chest felt warm. Was she implying...? She was the first to call, and he was eager to start. "Is Saturday at six O. K.?"

"That's fine. That works just great for me."

"The address: 32 Hyacinth Lane."

Something bothered him. The way the woman on the line had said goodbye, no warmth, but formal and business-like. He waited for Saturday to come. In the meantime he made the necessary preparations and got all of his supplies ready.

At exactly six o'clock he heard the doorbell ring with a short burst. He pressed the buzzer. A curt knock followed shortly after and he opened the door to a woman with a confident smile who presented herself using a first and middle name that he imagined to be hyphenated. She offered her hand by way of introduction. He glanced down and then away, leaving the woman's hand to wilt. He clasped his own hands behind his back and stepped aside to allow her in, then closed the door and moved about the apartment. The hands remained hidden behind his back.

The old man thought that something about her was attractive, but she wasn't necessarily beautiful. At least not in the conventional sense of the word. Her face, neck and upper shoulders were mottled with freckles that looked like they were applied carelessly, like drops of caramel on a vanilla cone. Her nose was interrupted by a rude bump right below eye level and her hair had broad, sweeping curls. They were more like thin strips of yellow- and gold-wrinkled ribbon tied back behind her head. A few loose strands fondled her neck as she moved.

"There is an envelope with the money on the side table by the door."

He was aware of the awful tone of his voice, the way he measured every word. But he had no choice. He wanted to sound professional, dignified. He didn't want to give off the wrong impression.

"Can I use your bathroom to change?" asked the woman, who'd been waiting in the same spot just inside the door.

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry. It's just around that corner, on the left. Don't mind the... I didn't think you'd need to..." He didn't finish the sentence. Behind his back he rubbed his fingertips.

The woman walked into the bathroom, leaving the old man to fidget in his place, trying to convince himself there was no need to be embarrassed. Maybe she wouldn't notice the mirror above the sink, the drops of soap

that made his reflection quiver under the bare bulb that was missing its original glass enclosure. And maybe, he hoped, she wouldn't see the reddish stubble in the sink, the remnants of a patchy beard that grew on his round, boyish face. The face, along with his hands, had led his wife remark more than once that he hardly looked touched. It was not meant as a compliment. She wanted something firm, calloused and rough, proof of work with visible results. A man's hands.

When the woman came out of the bathroom she had removed her clothes and was carrying them in her arms. The old man had placed a chair in the middle of the living room and invited her to sit, gesturing with his head toward the couch to deposit her clothes. Across from the chair, within a few feet, he'd set up his station. It consisted of an upholstered, gently slope-backed chair and a four-panel wooden screen. When he sat down, only his shoulders and head were visible from the other side.

There he sat behind his parapet, asked the woman to make herself comfortable, and told her that she didn't need to worry about keeping perfectly still. From the position she'd taken, slightly turned but still partially facing her employer, she could tell by the movement of the old man's shoulders and the frequent glance in her direction, that his hands were furiously working away at something. After several minutes he leaned forward out of his chair and stood up, coming from behind the screen. He fastened his hands behind his back and approached her where she sat. He circled her, scrutinizing his subject as one would a prized artifact on the auction block.

Completing his circuit once around the chair, he noticed a brown blemish just below her collarbone, a raised birthmark most likely, that disturbed the otherwise smooth skin. His lips curved with satisfaction as his eyes found on her upper arm a small but violent scar. He thought it looked like a childhood vaccine that had spilled outside of its proportions and in the center drew dark skin into itself like two puckered lips. He smiled and walked back to his chair where he bent back upon his work.

At seven o'clock, the end of the hour, he announced that the session was over. After the model got dressed he asked with a little trepidation, would she come back at the same time next week? She agreed, and he was relieved when she took the envelope and walked out the door and down the stairs without prolonging the awkward moment.

He watched her make her way between several muffled bodies along the sidewalk toward the school. She disappeared around the corner and he was once again left at his garret to observe the slow unraveling of spring. In the coming week he resigned himself to put the finishing touches on what he'd already begun before jumping into something new the following Saturday.

And then the day came, unfolding with minute variations of the previous encounter. The woman wore roughly the same outfit, the envelope waited on the side table next to the door, and the middle of the room was arranged with the same chair and screen. What had changed was his bathroom, which he'd taken the trouble to clean before her arrival. He'd done it for her.

As soon as they had taken their respective places and the woman consciously assumed a different pose than previously, she noticed that he did not dip his head as often and the fire that accompanied his earlier movements barely flickered. Something in his eyes, she thought, showed he was not content. She began to think that it was her, and though she'd done this many times before, she began to be uncomfortably aware of his eyes upon her. She drew her arms that much tighter in a self embrace.

The old man stood from his chair as he'd done before and walked in meditation in his circle. When he came to the spot where his face lit up the last time, he simply stood, impassive. After what seemed like an eternity he gathered up the courage to say what he wanted to say.

"Could you please sit as you did last Saturday?"

And because she remembered his request to have no questions asked, the woman shifted in her chair, relieved that with a mere turn the old man looked happy again. He'd seen that mark, the birthmark just below her collarbone, and with a pivot went to work behind his screen.

The woman returned for a few more sessions, and at the end of several months he found that he'd searched and squinted as hard as he could, but could find nothing more. He'd exhausted his subject. When he didn't ask her to return again, he couldn't tell whether she looked upset or relieved. If she was happy to go he didn't blame her. He knew that he could never stand as she did to feel someone else's eyes peel her open, make her painfully conscious of her own body.

When the woman left for the last time he did not follow her down the sidewalk. He went instead into the bathroom, splashed some water on his face and felt the softness of his cheeks that never betrayed what was missing inside. That's why his ex-wife had left. She'd wanted children. She wanted his children, the one thing he could never give her, so she made him feel like less than a man. The old man stood in front of the mirror, gripped the sides of the sink with his wet hands and looked up into the white bulb above.

"This is not my fault. You can't blame me for this."

And he knew as soon as he'd uttered those words that he'd go back to the newspaper office the following Monday morning and ask the woman behind the counter to run the ad one more time. He would walk down the same streets looking up into windows that stared back and seemed to judge him with their meticulous arrangement of limbs and clothes, no wind to disturb them, no wrinkles in the straight, unruffled lines. Nothing on the surface of those China doll white bodies. How he hated their blank eyes, the way they seemed to know while smugly saying nothing, betraying nothing of their thoughts. He'd bend his head toward the sidewalk and the beaten, bruised cement would comfort him.

He placed for one more week. He waited. He was used to that, to the long years when he anticipated that something, anything would light the spark that disappeared when his wife grabbed her things and went out the door insisting, "Really, it's not you. You're a wonderful man. It's just..." and with that she was gone. What followed were months that blended into seasons, and in his mind the words played over again, "It's just..." "It's just..." Until he'd finally looked long enough at the pictures stacked together in boxes, the ones taken by the Jersey shore in the fifties when he still had a full head of brown, wavy hair, and she still wore her bathing suit, the one as tight and intimate as a glove. Everything looked perfect, perfectly still, and from those pictures you could tell nothing more than that. It was then the reason became clear, how deceiving all of it was. It stared out at him, from some place sealed shut with forgetting and forgiveness, a monstrous, unspeakable thing, and now he saw it everywhere he turned, in everything that breathed and in all that didn't.

The phone rang mid-week. He wasn't surprised. When he'd neglected to

answer their calls, his friends had long given up on trying to coax him to come out. No one called these days unless it was necessary to do so. The woman sounded younger than the first, and her voice less confident than he'd expected. They came to an arrangement as to the date and time, and when she hung up the old man sensed her words had a pleading tone, a need for reassurance that was hardly satisfied by goodbye.

She came a bit early the day of the session, dressed in a light camisole—it had gotten warmer outside—and a pair of jeans with a cut and flare revealing her young age. She brought with her the sweet scent of lilacs in bloom, still clinging to her skin and the folds of her clothes. He could have seen her in the past walking back and forth along the sidewalk. She was as identically, as predictably plain as any of the beautiful young girls he'd taught those many years before.

"The bathroom is around the corner if you need to..."

She followed his instructions, bringing with her a bag that had been resting on her shoulder since she'd come in the door. She came out shortly after with a green towel wrapped about her body, leaving bare only legs and shoulders.

"I've sat for an art class once at the university," she offered. "They only pay twenty dollars, so when I read your ad I was hoping no one else had called."

"No one else has called," the old man replied.

"Oh. Well, good for me then." She smiled.

"Make yourself comfortable." He gestured to the chair in the middle of the room and turned to take his own spot behind the screen.

She removed her towel, folded it next to the chair and sat down with legs crossed and one arm craned behind her back. He knew she was doing it because she thought he'd appreciate the artsy pose, just as he knew from the squint of her eyes that she believed he was an odd, eccentric, maybe perverted old man.

From his enclosure he stared intensely, his eyes flicking across her body in a desperate search. Minutes went by. Ten. Maybe twenty. He didn't move an inch. He could tell the girl was getting nervous because he cheeks became flushed. It wasn't the lack of clothes, not that. He knew it was his eyes that were making her feel inadequate.

Finally the old man stood and tried to find an answer in his routine, rounding the chair in contemplation. He went around once, twice, then back toward the screen, stopping short of the other side. He turned to the girl and said, "I'm sorry. This simply isn't working. You can still have the full amount."

The girl sat there and stared at the old man, still in the same twisted position she'd assumed at the start of the session. It had been less than half an hour. I know you don't understand, the old man wanted to say, but this won't do at all.

"I'm sorry. Did I do something wrong? If you need me to move I can. I mean, I've done this only once before and they didn't ask, but..." The old man cut her off, trying hard to check his annoyance.

"No. Nothing is wrong. It's not you, it's just... Look, please. The money is there."

The girl took up her towel and walked into the bathroom. She came out in her fitted top and jeans with bag across one shoulder and picked up the envelope by the door. For a moment the old man was back on the Jersey shore, sand under his feet, arm around a firm, smooth waist. She reminded him so much of his ex-wife, the wonderful stillness preserved in

those photographs that looked as if nothing could ever go wrong.

"Thank you for coming," said the old man halfheartedly. He was disappointed and impatient for her to leave. When she was gone he watched her move down the sidewalk, and from the distance she looked no different than the dozens of other girls cluttering the arrival of dusk. But he knew differently.

Later that night in front of his mirror the old man looked again at his clear reflection, then up through the imaginary, endless extension of the ceiling. He sighed a deep, heavy sigh and murmured, "You can't blame me for this. You left me with no choice. You left me with nothing." Then sunk his head into his chest and turned away from the glass.

That evening he decided to cancel the ad. The following morning he walked to the newspaper office and saw that the weather brought many more people out than usual. The old man never changed his route, so once again as he approached the university walls he came across the Chinese man who stood outside and played his two-string every spring and summer. He sounded terrible, and the old man thought that the so-called musician knew he sounded terrible. But that didn't stop him. Every day, weather permitting, the man opened his black case with a few wrinkled bills and some hard tossed coins to fool passersby into generous pity. The old man didn't know what tempted him to reach into his pocket—the awful music or his awareness that when the man's blunt, knobbed hands drew the bow, he was reminded of his own inadequacy. The Chinese man didn't hide his lack of talent, the fact that he produced abusive sounds. Did he want people to feel for his imperfection, feel bad that he pretended he was good? What made him, the old man thought, work so hard at mediocrity? Who would pity him? Who would pity me?

Those thoughts passed in and through his mind and drifted away when the music faded in the distance. Back in the apartment, the days resumed a monotonous hum until one day the shrill sound of the phone interrupted the silence that had settled like a blanket through the rooms. He recognized the voice. It was the girl whose sitting he had terminated abruptly.

"Hello," she said, apologized again, and could she not come back and sit for him once more, not for the money really, you understand, although that wouldn't hurt she said, but maybe this time it would turn out better. She'd read some things on proper posture.

The old man hated that she'd contacted him again. He'd clearly stated no questions, did not like to be bothered, liked to do things on his own terms. But he was tempted to try again. It was only when he saw these women that he'd been able to resume painting. He just needed the right one.

After a pause he agreed, and the day and time were arranged. When she arrived this time the old man was eager to get to work and didn't wait for her to come out of the bathroom before taking his usual place. She found him sitting half-hidden behind the screen, gesturing for her to sit. As she'd entered the apartment nothing about her struck him as terribly new. Same standard tight blouse, same flawless skin and hair that shone a healthy russet. Not a single mole or scar or otherwise disturbance that he could find.

He made a few agitated movements with the brush, desperately trying to make something of it. He asked her to shift, please, fold and unfold her arms, sweep her hair to the side. He walked around, his steps erratic. He clenched and unclenched his hands. The girl was visibly uncomfortable, but said nothing. She was probably questioning herself, the old man

thought. Wasn't she beautiful enough? Wasn't she perfect for what he needed? Why couldn't he do something, anything, with what he saw? But the girl would never ask that.

"Is something wrong?" she said instead.

"I can't do this," the old man almost whispered.

"What is it this time?" The girl's poise shook slightly.

"Nothing. There's nothing." He took a breath. "Don't you understand? There is absolutely nothing wrong. You come in here and think that just because everyone else... and you expect me to... there's not one single scar, anywhere."

The girl looked down at her lap, then up again. She sat there without a sound as the old man seemed to pour himself out to her, to accuse and ask for understanding at the same time. He turned and walked into the bathroom, ashamed at his tirade, his lack of poise, realized his hands were two fists inside his pockets. But there wasn't anything more he could do. He was tired of searching in vain for what clearly wasn't there. He hoped she'd be gone by the time he came back out.

Encouraged by his absence, the girl wrapped the towel around her body and walked over to the old man's abandoned work. There was an outline that suggested form, but nothing more. She stood there, trying to see herself in the lines, but couldn't recognize anything familiar. She moved to a stack of paintings leaning along a wall beneath the window, the same one where the old man spent his hours, watching people passing back and forth. Where he did not need to hide his fingertips that rubbed against the damp, pink creases of his palm.

When he returned, he found the girl flipping through the paintings like old records.

"What are you doing?" he snapped.

"These aren't portraits. They're not pictures of women. What are these?" the girl asked, her voice trembling with curiosity and horror.

Every canvas showed a prominent dark growth or scar, or any other kind of aberration that glared like an angry eye and took up most of painting. In the background, the women that should have belonged to those marks were mere shades and shadows.

The old man didn't have time to explain. From the look on her face, he suspected that she understood all too well. But he wasn't sure if she was angry, upset, if anything at all. The girl dressed quickly and left the envelope on the table. At the click of the lock, the old man began to put his work away, vowed to himself to never pick it up again.

Subsequently, his days were spent in a cycle typical of his old age, a morning to night routine interrupted only by necessity. He let the mirror get dirty again, its surface cloudy with soap residue. It made his face and hands a bit more bearable as he shaved.

Some days had passed and the memory of the last girl was beginning to give him peace. He couldn't pick her out from the crowd outside his windows. It shocked him then when she rang the doorbell, insisted to see him. She said he wouldn't be disappointed, and he felt compelled to let her in.

As he opened the door she stepped through the opening. He watched her put down her bag and drop the shoulders of her summer dress, letting the

light material crease about her ankles. When she turned her back slightly toward him, he noticed just below the shoulder line a small red mark. It curved like a closed eyelid. It was a perfect mark that still showed where her fingernail broke through the skin and pulled back the flesh. One drop of blood had dried and crusted over in a trail down to her lower back.

The old man realized that when the girl looked over her shoulder to him, she was waiting for his approval.

"Paint me," he thought he heard her say—he couldn't be certain, but it was enough.

The old man found himself walking over to the center of the room and pulling out the usual chair. In his mind he was already dipping the brush in crimson, pushing the tip against the white canvas.

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Trespassing



by **Anne Germanacos**

Dan's Story

Every one of us was looking for a story. It might be small: a glimpse in the mirror, a breakfast plate smashing on the floor of the dining room. Then there were the larger stories, almost always about love.

One morning in early June, Dan and I walked away from the campus on a smooth loop of asphalt. We moved through heavy, wet summer air into a brief tangle of woods. At the pond, I grabbed two tiny frogs and handed one to him. Like a pact, I thought. "Here, take it," I said.

"My dad's got an illustrious career. It kills me that I can't tell you more."

I liked him from the start. His eyes were trusting; he was trustworthy. I wanted to hear what he was about to tell me, guilty that I had nothing to offer him in return. I knew if I kept my mouth shut and simply walked alongside, he would eventually say the things he seemed desperate to let loose.

"He's a surgeon." As he said it, he gave his frog a little push, and it

jumped from his hand. "I guess I can tell you this much: he likes to use his tools outside the operating theater as well as inside it."

I kept my flinch internal, and smiled without showing my teeth. There was silence between us as we stepped from the woods and continued along the dirt path, exposed now to mid-morning light. Crows cawed deep throaty sounds, circling overhead. The day was turning ostentatiously bright.

At a slant, I sized Dan up. His Adam's apple bobbed, holding down secrets. His voice skipped around the lower range of a baritone, soothing. His story was not.

"Oh, shit," he said. "It has to do with their sexual practices."

I wondered whether the mere revelation of family secrets was itself sexual. If so, we were on the brink of a kind of infidelity. I'll admit: it was stirring.

By the pond, the last of the bullfrogs croaked out their double-bass notes. Dan took a deep breath. "All my life, I heard their lovemaking coupled with her crying. Only last year she told me about the practice. He performs small surgeries on her skin as they fuck."

I kept my eyes in the distance, shocked that people did such things, but even more so that he'd told me. "That does make a good story," I said. He stared at my breasts beneath my loose linen shirt. Then I saw him take my point.

"Right," he said, as he watched the crows fly overhead and thought about his parents' sexual life. Random illegible scratches, or more? Did the cuts add up to words? Were my thoughts a form of theft? There was always the possibility, I told myself, that all your words, every act, could be returned to you in a version more acutely recognizable than even your own image in the mirror.

I bent over and urged my tiny frog off my palm. As we walked, Dan's hand brushed mine, and for the briefest moment our fingers met and grasped.

A couple of weeks later, when I went home to my husband, I didn't mention the walk with the frogs. But he gained from it, as he would gain from everything that happened to me (and not to me) during the two years I flew several thousand miles, summer and winter, between home and graduate school.

Beginning

That first spring, it rained a lot. We kept umbrellas in our bags, along with our notebooks and breath mints. At the end of each lecture, you could hear the ping of all the strong-smelling tin boxes as they opened. The campus buildings' floors were filthy, covered in old leaves and crusty mud. We wiped our soles across the wet grass but our shoes kept bringing in dirt.

Between rain showers, the sun was bright and hot. After the morning lectures, we sat around in Adirondack chairs or on blue and pink polyester blankets we had filched from storage cabinets. Sometimes we had a noontime beer. If we were doing laundry and had it timed right, the clothes were usually dry by then.

Leaving the laundry room in a hurry one day, I nearly ran into William, another student. I let drop my clean clothes, T-shirts and jeans, cotton socks, underwear, flesh-colored bras, all of it. William smiled, apologizing, then turned away, hiding his own dirty laundry in his arms. I gathered my clothes from the floor.

That night, he and Sally would begin their affair. I didn't know it then, but within days I'd be covering for them, not quite a go-between.

Squirrel

For several mornings, I was exactly where they needed me to be. Sally would slip out of William's car, and we'd go along together as if taking a morning walk. William would drive around to the parking lot. I'd remind her to put something over her neck—he'd colored it with bites.

One day, before walking onto the path that led to our dorm, I showed her a dead chipmunk I'd already passed, bright red blood at its mouth.

"But that's not a chipmunk," she said. "It's a squirrel." She thought it was amusing that I didn't know the difference; it seemed to augur a period when all sorts of things would be confused. It was a confusion I courted—happy, for a while, to be wandering around in someone else's story.

Solstice

For the summer solstice, some of the students arranged a pagan rite. We walked through a maze of lanterns and smoked pot afterward, looking skyward for stars, then glancing around for fireflies. We brought in the morning eating Chex Mix and dried cranberries, vanilla wafers and licorice Allsorts.

Sally came back the morning after that with hair stringy around her face. She looked spent. The night before, I'd had to tell the others she wasn't feeling well. She'd instructed me to do so, though people knew I was lying.

Dan, for one, saw through everything.

Euphoria

As a group, we dazzled one another with our brilliance. Each day's public reading or lecture, another seduction. How could it not feel as if we were fucking in public, fully clothed? We were euphoric as we fingered the world, let loose our ravenous minds.

Snow

One winter afternoon, Dan and I walked into an old building on campus and crept through it like children, opening closed doors and examining the contents of bathroom shelves, of closets hidden beneath stairs. Dan had to pee, and I dared him to piss in the bathroom on the top floor—a room with ancient rusty appliances, a room no one had used in years. He refused, and eventually our giddiness turned back on itself.

Some days we seemed like siblings, jealousy our primary shared emotion. Other days we were a little in love. Both of us knew how any feeling that passed between us would eventually make its way home—to his wife, to my husband.

Leaving the building, we paused briefly to make sure the massive wooden door was almost shut. Outside, snow was falling. He took my hand, and for a few minutes we walked in the white, touching.

I sometimes fear that I'll never make it again to a snowy clime—the exquisite bliss of cold.

Chewing on the World

There were days on campus, snowy or streaked with sunlight, when I felt I was chewing on a big chunk of the world, and the world, in turn, had the whole of me right in its mouth.

Sally was different: she kept talking about injecting drugs. I told her: "It's not what you shoot into the vein but simply opening it, letting blood flow."

Imagination

Not much of interest starts in the imagination. It's too indiscriminate. It bubbles up in sympathy with all that's real.

A walk in the snow with a friend who tells you he fears his marriage is in tatters. The snow's blue-whiteness. The sun coming up over the mountains, lighting up icicles until they separate and fall with a startling crash. The footsteps left behind.

Candy Trails

One morning, we found trails of pink-and-white Good & Plenty sprinkled across the campus. A day later, it was multicolored Sweet Tarts. I've always loved candy. Seeing it on the ground, I couldn't help wondering what trail was being marked, what new seduction enacted.

Grad school had made us think we could decipher marks of almost any kind.

Porous

You come upon moments of perfect porousness. The flow of you and not-you.

Writing It Out

To write your best, you need to be in a state of arousal.

He came to my room past midnight, and before he said anything, I said no.

He asked: "But don't you feel it?"

There were no mirrors in that room; I didn't stop looking at him the whole time.

"Of course I do. But it's there because of the people we love at home," I said, choosing to say *because of* rather than *despite*.

It was winter. The floors were wet with melted snow from our boots. Something from Verdi played very quietly on my laptop; then it switched to something contemporary, Jay-Z or Eminem. We could have been struggling to stay atop that narrow bed beside the open window, icy air sweeping through.

There's something exhilarating in being able to assert: this, definitively, and not this.

Then again, you can always write it out differently the next morning.

Against the Night

Desire that leaves you throbbing, unable to utter a sound.

Red Hots

The morning Sally and I followed a trail of red hot candies from her door all the way to the dining hall, we saw William walking along a parallel path with one of the first-year students.

After that, Sally couldn't stop biting the skin around her nails. She heard the sound of her heart beating, she said, all through the night. Her skin broke out in a rash.

"I'm allergic to myself!" It was the first time I'd seen her cry.

Recovery

I left presents outside her door: a tiny Etch A Sketch, an awful shade of pink lipstick, every single flavor of Jelly Bellies. When she didn't respond, I left chicken soup. Black tea. The other half of the sleeping pill she'd lent

me.

Ending

Before graduating, I gave things away: my gray bathrobe, blue rubber thongs, hair dryer. I kept the magnets I'd played like awkward music—they soothed my nerves—and a half-bottle of Dewar's.

Flying east, I made the magnets jump and join in odd combinations. Sometimes, I found myself in tears. When the plane touched down, my husband was there, still waiting.

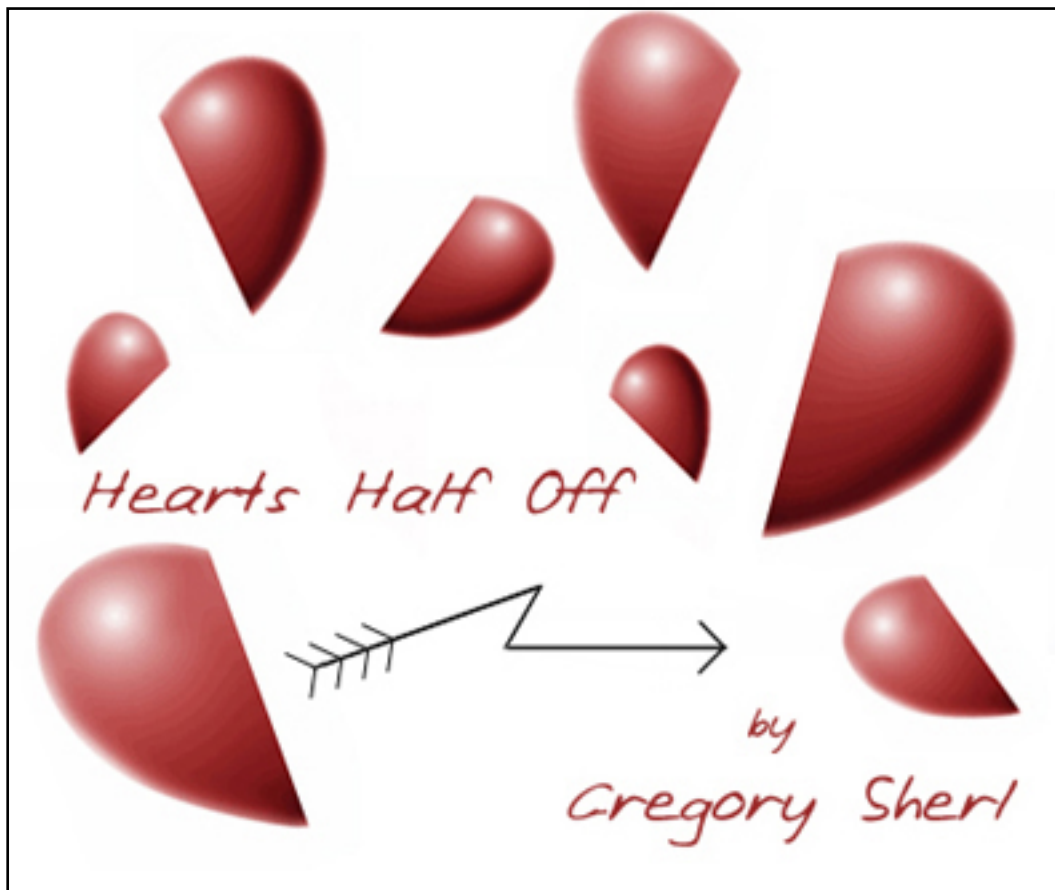
I've kept most of the stories to myself. My husband has an idea things got wild sometimes, but knows better than to ask.

Since the end of grad school, the spirit of that time has passed between us many times, in intriguing ways. Does the substance ever really matter?

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The Summerset Review



I am selling hearts out of the trunk of my car. They are wrapped in plastic Ziploc bags. Some are broken.

I don't clean the hearts before I sell them. Sometimes the customers ask if they can disinfect the hearts. Can they spray them with Febreze? Run them through the dishwasher? I shake my head, say, No, no, no.

They say, But why?

Brittany is leaving me for a boy who smells like Lysol and plays bass in a band called The Babymakers.

You're not enough, Brittany says. You're just a silly boy selling hearts out

of the trunk of his car.

She packs her toothbrush and curling iron and bras that were hanging up in the bathroom.

She's sorry, really, but *these things happen and he has long hair.*

The hearts I'm selling are sad. Some dry up; the edges chip away. They lose their color.

Why are these hearts gray? a man asks.

I shrug. It's warm out. I have the hearts in buckets of ice, trying to preserve them, but it's really no use.

It's my anniversary, he tells me. He wants to buy a heart for his wife. I can't buy a gray heart, he says, much less a dying one.

The hearts I'm selling out of the trunk of my car aren't that bloody, which seems to surprise most of the customers.

They must be fake, they say. Why isn't there more blood?

I don't know, I say. I'm not a heart expert.

But you sell hearts! Shouldn't you be an expert at what you sell?

Shut up, I tell them. I'm closed. I shut the trunk.

No one is buying my hearts. I sell them on the side of Taft Street, between a McDonald's and a widower who sells watermelons out of the bed of his truck. I try to trade a heart for a watermelon, but the widower shakes his head, packs up his truck, and drives away.

The hearts are breaking. No one wants to buy them. I make a sign on a poster board. It reads: *HEARTS HALF OFF.*

There is a Girl Scout troop panhandling cookies outside of McDonald's. One of the blondes walks over and stands in front of my trunk, staring at the hearts. She is holding a box of Thin Mints.

Wanna trade? she asks.

She points to a heart that is resting on the spare tire. The heart is cracked, but not all the way broken.

I think she might be able to save the heart. I take it out of the trunk and hand it to her. She removes it from the Ziploc bag. It is beating in her

hand. She drops it on the floor. The heart is beating faster. She steps on it.

The heart surrounds the sole of the Girl Scout's sneaker like putty. I think of Brittany and the bras that are no longer hanging from the shower rod.

A black SUV pulls up, a U-Haul attached to the back. It is stacked with lungs packaged in Saran Wrap.

My palms are sweaty. I look at my hearts. I tell them, Beat, damn it.

The man who is selling lungs is walking toward me. A cigarette hangs from his bottom lip, like a dog's tongue. He smells like a cologne sample from a magazine ad.

Hearts, he says, looking into the trunk. Cute.

I'm trying to save the world, I tell him.

The man who sells lungs laughs, takes a drag of his cigarette. No one wants to feel anymore, he says.

It's not like I forgot how the hearts got broken, I tell a pretty girl with many, many freckles. It's that I don't know how they got broken.

She smiles at me like I have an ugly baby.

I want that one, she says. She points to a heart toward the back of the trunk. It's small, held together by veins that never had enough time.

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The Summerset Review



This, then, is where it begins, with a simple trailhead at the curve before the Dyea bridge. A fan of powdered root-dirt spills over rocks and dribbles into the grass and gravel. A gust of wind and the trees exhale pollen and dust. Angular bootprints overlap each other in a jostle for permanence. A camera whirs, preserving the broad clean grins of hikers as they pose next to the Chilkooot Trail sign. *One more*, someone says, *I had my eyes closed!* and there are groans and shifts of weight as people flex their shoulders under their packs. Then another contrived grin and the camera is tucked away and there are claps on shoulders as hikers turn to the trail, stepping up into the trees. Bright packs span the length of their backs to rest on half-hidden buttocks, colored rings of heavy socks decorate their ankles; bare knees crease with each step until they are swallowed up by the trail.

For the next few days, these hikers, like the group before them and the group before that, will belong to the winding Chilkooot which in turn belongs to Parks Canada and the National Park Service. This summer, I too belong to the Park Service. I'm a summer worker, a student-hire

from the university in Fairbanks. I took the job at the Skagway Trail Center because I grew up just across the water in the town of Haines, and I feel I still belong to this corner of the world, this skinny elbow of Alaska that branches south into the panhandle. I've returned to scratch a few short months into the earth here before leaving Alaska for graduate school back east. Sometimes, I think I'm looking for some sort of history on which to graft my own experience—or maybe just the inverse—but my grounding here, like that of the trail itself, has shifted in the intervening years.

A hundred-ten years ago, Dyea's main road—Trail Street—ran from the beach to the Taiya River crossing with a wagon road rambling further up the route. For some, the lower river was the trail, as they poled canoes and rafts upstream, while later ones sledged on the winter ice. Tents and freight filled the corners of the route for miles as some thirty-odd thousand stampedeers rushed north toward Dawson and the Klondike gold fields. The original trail navigated the canyon at Canyon City; the new trail skirts it. Glacial rebound has raised the valley nearly ten feet and the Taiya has wandered in its bed, washing west over the remains of Dyea's downtown and even its cemetery, while logging roads from the 1950s obscured or appropriated early sections of the old route. In 1961, convicts and juvenile delinquents roughed out a trail for renewed use on the east side of the river, rather than the west. Camps and tent cities that once housed a thousand or more among saloons, boarding houses and restaurants have been gobbled up by the landscape and replaced by bare warming huts and tent platforms. Early Dyea and Skagway residents collected trail-discarded goods for use or to sell, while hikers slipped them into their packs as souvenirs.

It's not the same trail, and yet hikers—limited to fifty a day over the course of the hundred-day season—still come. The limit is imposed for environmental concerns, to protect the trail and its habitat of bears and mountain goats, martens and voles and the odd moose, and promote a wilderness experience for the hiker far different from the wildness that crossed this pass over a century ago.

When the Klondike was discovered in 1896 and word steamed into San Francisco and Seattle a year later with over two tons of recovered gold, it spurred one of the last great gold rushes. The country had been suffering a slow depression since the Civil War; people began to hoard their gold, and in 1893, the economy crashed yet again. Four years later, Klondike gold filled the nation's consciousness; it was a lottery that any man willing to work could win, and the image of Klondike kings wrestling their suitcases filled with gold down the gangplank impressed itself upon a country.

Within hours, the stampede had begun. Clerks jumped counters and policemen left their beats. The Mayor of Seattle joined, along with a general, a former governor, and an hotelier. Some hundred-thousand prospectors and proprietors left their homes for the Canadian gold fields, traveling catch-as-catch-can toward the north.

Routes to the Klondike—some untried, some unknown—multiplied. A rich man's route entailed sailing the entire way, cutting across the Aleutians northward to St. Michael at the mouth of the Yukon and then taking a steamer up the river. An all-American route dumped some 3,500 dreamers off at Valdez, in front of its uncharted glacier. Perhaps one in 200 made it to the Klondike that way (Berton 200). Other routes—the Ashcroft Trail, the Stikine Trail, the Edmonton Trail—snaked across Canada, delivering only a handful of aspirants.

Two in the upper crook of Southeast Alaska, however, proved most popular: the Chilkoot Trail and the White Pass Trail, originating in Dyea

and Skagway respectively. The idea of each was the same: to traverse narrow passes through the Coast Mountains, drop down to the lakes and rivers that fed into the Yukon, and float the rest of the way northwest to Dawson, where the streets were strewn with gold in flake and nugget form.

Overnight, the trailheads bloomed into competing towns of tents, straggled roads and saloons. The more westerly of these was Dyea (pronounced Die-ee, from the Tlingit word *diyeyi* meaning "to pack"), originally the site of a Tlingit fish camp on the mouth of the Taiya river. For at least two centuries before the rush, the Chilkoot Indians had used and guarded the trail as their primary trading route through the Coast Mountains. When they found they could not prevent the steady flow of miners over their pass, they hired themselves out as packers, charging up to a dollar a pound. If the stamperder bargained too much, the Native packers simply refused to port that person's goods, leaving them at the mercy of the tides on Dyea flats.

The demand for packers intensified as the Northwest Mounted Police appeared at the summit of each trail, claiming Canada's boundary with a pair of machine guns. From those dual posts, they required each stamperder to carry with him a full year's supply of food, plus whatever accoutrements he may also need. Early prospectors had slipped into Canada with plans to purchase food as they went, not realizing that there simply wasn't any; even as stampederders struggled across the northward trails, Dawson itself was slowly starving, waiting for next summer's supplies.

And so the stampede carted—on their own backs, on sleds, on the backs of friends and porters—a rough ton of goods including 400 pounds of flour, 200 pounds of bacon, forty pounds of candles, and five bars of soap, heavy winter clothing of wool and mining tools: saws, hatchets, nails, shovels, and stove. All had to be portaged and cached, in fifty or hundred pound bundles, over the thirty-three miles. The trip could take anywhere between three weeks to three months.

I leave work at the Trail Center at six p.m., and am on the trail by seven-thirty. The first half-mile climbs 300 feet up Sainly Hill, thus named because its early incline could try the patience of a saint, or perhaps only a saint could keep from cursing. Tonight, after a day spent standing and sitting in a small office, the climb feels good. It's early July, and my legs feel strong; I don't curse, but breathe deep and inhale a small mosquito that chokes at the back of my throat. I hack for a moment, and continue.

The sun is high but oblique behind thin clouds, shooting side rays through the trees. Hiking in the evening is cooler and quieter; I can hear the gentle swoosh of the river and the creak of branches, the squeak of my pack and the ping-ping of borrowed hiking poles as they bounce off small stones.

Descending from Sainly Hill, the trail is broad and packed, two or three could walk abreast here. But no one else is on the trail with me during these miles; I am alone with my thoughts and the mosquitoes investigating the moist vestiges of my skin. I pause to lather on more bug dope, smearing it on the back of my neck, the outer curve of my ear, the small of my back where my shirt rides up.

Without the stampederders' supplies, the trail takes only three to five days, and few hikers carry more than forty pounds, some less than thirty. My pack weighs in at just twenty-seven pounds, plus a hefty half-pound canister of bear spray that dangles from a loop at my side and knocks against my thigh. I don't like carrying the spray; there are too

many ifs tied to its effectiveness—if the bear is ten yards away, if it's downwind, and if I can unhook the canister, aim and spray before such a bear could swat me sideways—but I carry it because my boss wants me to.

My boss is a ranger for the Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park; this summer I work as a Visitor Use Assistant in the Chilkoot Trail Center. I answer hikers' questions and sell them permits, and on the weekends I wander around the Dyea campground picking up litter and making campers feel safer. Just as my gray and green uniform reassures some, bear spray makes people feel safer.

Four miles into the trail, a little before Finnegan's Point, I see my first bear. The trail is broad here, slipping gradually down toward the campground. An old, heavy spruce on my left briefly darkens the sky, and then I'm past its shadow. A scattering of slim birches fringed with tall grass on my right and I am singing to myself again, singing nonsense songs collected from the radio, and planting the hiking poles forward in a swinging arc.

On the right, a movement catches my eye and I slow to look over. A small face peers back at me through the tall grass. Perhaps thirty feet away, just out of range for the bear spray. He's a honey blonde-brown, and his shoulders weave slightly as he lifts his nose, trying to smell my combination of shampoo, bug dope and human. Upright, then, I think, and realize he must be young, barely more than a cub. Inquisitive.

More startled than scared, I forget about the bear spray slapping my hip and lift my hiking poles over my head, clacking the metal together instead. "Hey bear," I say, "Hey bear." I can almost see his brow ridge lift with curiosity as I turn, facing him, and move sideways down the trail, past him. "Hey, pretty bear." I clack the hiking poles above me. The bear drops, his face disappearing in the blond grass as I inch further down the trail. He goes his way, I go mine.

These trails have always acted as conduits, not only channeling travelers of all types and species from one place to another, but collecting them as well. They congregate populations, siphoning them up through the mountains, draining them out into the lowlands, the headwaters of the Yukon. Our shoulders rub against others; each of us displaced, we share this communal space, giving way, moving forward, intent on our common purpose.

A hundred years ago, this trail brought together ministers and whores, card sharks, bus boys, shopkeepers, writers, dreamers, a few murderers, more drifters, engineers, farmers, students, the unemployed and the unemployable. In the winter of 1897-1898, some 22,000 crossed the Chilkoot Pass, converging upon Dawson with the veterans of other routes. As stampedeers spilled into the Klondike, Dawson bulged with some 40,000 men, women and children; a few months later, by 1899, four out of five had left. By 1903, Dyea, the mouth of the Chilkoot, had crumbled from 8,000 residents to just three.

The numbers have become a litany rounded by history. Who is to say that a few more didn't slip through, a few less turned back early? For a moment, they were part of the greater collective; afterward, they scattered, pushing on to the golden beaches of Nome, Fairbanks and the fledgling outposts of the north, or turning back, retreating from their dreams, returning to the farm, office or shop they had left the

year before.

For a moment, these people were seen, thrust into rough relief by their exertions, their aspirations. For a moment, they congregate: they see, and are seen.

Between Finnegan's Point and Canyon City, the Alaska summer sun begins to wallow, dipping into the trees and behind the ridges. It is nearly 10 p.m. I stop singing and start listening, not sure what I want to hear: the sway of the trees, the whine of mosquitoes, my own sharp exhalations.

It's the second time I've hiked this trail this summer, but as the day wanes the trail telescopes and distance kaleidoscopes. I know I'm on the right trail, I know I'm not lost and that Canyon City and the Trail Crew cabin are ahead of me. Still, the woods seem to whisper to me. A chill creeps across the nape of my neck, and I pull down the sleeves of my long underwear top.

A water creature dives into the river below, beyond the trail's cusp; by the time I look, the ripples have vanished in overhanging branches. I convince myself that it was a bear. That there are lots of bears on this trail. And that all things happen in threes.

I count the triplicates in my life for the next mile, letting bear and boogey-man stories coalesce in the back of my brain. The air deepens to a spruce-scented grey and I start hoping that the trail crew will wonder about me, will hike down to find me. One, Adam, has asked me out a few times but the relationship has stalled in that uncomfortable space of conflicting schedules and my own indifference; now I wish I had radioed ahead so that he would be expecting me.

The trail climbs with a drunken gait, twisting, dropping, climbing back out of gulches and gullies. I begin to feel tired. My right knee aches a bit after a sharp ascent. A mosquito raises a welt between my knuckles and I stop to scratch it furiously before looping the hiking pole back over my wrist. I start to worry that I've missed the turn off to the Trail Crew cabin, its steep granite scramble hidden in the grey light.

My aloneness shrinks the space around me, leaving me vulnerable. For the first time on a trail, I feel afraid. Of what, I'm not sure. I breathe harder, recite prayers and the things I hate about myself in thin whispers that collect around my lips.

And then, a rustle. The bushes next to me convulse slightly and I jump half a foot sideways. A bear! A bear! The third, promised bear, hidden behind a screen of dusky greenery. I don't see it, but I hike faster, knees in a quick lockstep, pack-straps creaking, hiking poles pinging a staccato against glacial-scoured rock. I don't exhale until I see the thin twist upward, the path toward tonight's home.

Inside, collages plaster the wall near the loft-ladder, images cut and pasted from magazines, rippled with time and too much glue. Women's eyes look back at mine in a sensual, angular repetition that's vaguely disconcerting. Joe, one of the Trail Crew, hands me a cup of cocoa. It's a hobby of some of the guys, he says, but they try to keep them from being offensive in case women come to visit. I sip the chocolate and wonder what women have visited since my short lunch here a month ago.

The cabin is brushed clean in that bare wood style that speaks of outdoors and pragmatism. A metal cabinet under the loft contains a summer's worth of spaghetti sauce and pasta, canned fruit and Bisquick, airlifted here back in May. A spectrum of gold rush-era bottles—greens, blues, whisky-browns—lines the front window, looking out over the helicopter pad and the crew's tent platforms. Bright orange dome tents—their bedrooms—dot the hillside; I have the one-room cabin to myself. It's a perk of the job, knowing the people who work out here, getting to crash in their summer homes. I lean my light pack against the wall, happy I'm not carrying a tent, water filter or stove.

The men—and this season they are all men—on the Trail Crew work eight days on and six days off, days that begin shortly after the morning radio call at 7:45 and last until or after the evening radio update at 5:15. They clear brush, build bridges, maintaining and preserving the Chilkoot via strong backs and chain saws. At the end of the day, they take turns making dinner for each other, listening to the static radio station from Haines, playing puzzles and games and reading. There's no TV here, no phones, no alcohol. I pull a bag of slightly smashed brownies out of my pack—my peace offering and thanks for hospitality—and put them on the counter. Joe takes one, smiles, and then stashes the rest away where the smell won't reach out to passing bears.

Joe bids me good night and I crawl up into the loft, warm and protected and smelling only slightly of DEET. I spit on my fingers, try to wipe some of the chemical from my face. It collects under my short fingernails in dirty crescents. I give up and fall asleep.

In the morning, I wake to the sound of a helicopter. There are flight seeing tours out of Skagway and Dyea, but I don't know of any that come this far, or this early. Joe comes back to the cabin and we share a banana, waiting for the early morning radio call. My co-worker Jennifer from the Trail Center reads out the weather for the next day or two, the schedule of hikers at the various campgrounds with notes to keep an eye on the Boy Scouts and one couple that seem under-prepared. The other trail camps report in: Ellis, the Trail Ranger at Sheep Camp and Sarah the Canadian Warden from Lindeman. A sick hiker has been evacuated from near Sheep Camp—he got sick in the night, and his daughter finally went up to the ranger cabin for help. Ellis thinks it might be the man's appendix. Each party gives their well-wishes and signs off.

We don't say anything, the silent listeners.

Breakfast ends in a rush. Joe ends his shift today and he is in a hurry to return to Dyea and then Skagway, to see his fiancée and dog again. I'm not sure which he is more excited about, and I shove my sleeping bag into my pack and catch his directions toward the trail's shortcut; his hand makes pointing and turning motions. It's right near the outhouse, he says, and I nod. But if you need to go, he says, pee outside. It's urine that makes an outhouse smell.

Canyon City—the ruins and the present-day campground—sit just above where the Nourse River meets the Taiya, at the mouth of a narrow canyon. The trail wriggles upward here, white rocks bulging through the earth-padded trail to trip the unwary hiker. I trip more than once, and start watching my feet.

When I hiked the trail back in June, I spent the first night at the ranger's cabin in Sheep Camp, and these late miles of pushing off stone pounded my feet. That night, Pleasant Camp, with its open sandbar and river view, seemed like a sick tease; I paused only minutes before continuing. Now the bright morning seems welcoming, and I hitch my pack off next to the picnic table. I wait to watch Adam and Ellis shoot film for the Park Service's new orientation video. They have just finished their eight-day shift as well, but instead of hiking back out via Dyea, they've agreed to hike through over the Pass and take the train back to Skagway.

I didn't realize that our schedules would converge in these campgrounds for the next two days, and am not sure quite how I feel about the company. Last night, I would have given my chocolate for someone to hike with, now I feel awkwardly captured by their loud conversation, an intruder walking into a private poker party. Somehow, it seems rude to push on past them, to purposefully shuck their company. I have no excuse to do so, and so I linger. I slap at black flies and watch while they take turns setting up and breaking down a camp stove and filter water at the bridge.

From here the trail rises gradually north to Sheep Camp, flanking the river. Sheep Camp, nestled in a basin just below tree line, is the last campground before the ascent to the Pass. During the Gold Rush, it held some 1,500 people with their tents, goods, and businesses, along with stray dogs and packhorses unable to climb the grade. Now, as then, travelers about to cross the Pass stay here by necessity. The next campground is four miles into Canada, and hikers are required to stay in the campgrounds to manage our environmental impact. A collection of tent platforms dot the forest as groomed trails snake to warming huts built by convicts, bear-proof boxes and brand spanking new outhouses. The men film me entering and exiting the outhouse, twice.

Just past Sheep Camp, we pass the ranger's cabin, where I met Ellis a month ago. Then, he showed me videos on his computer, poured me red box wine, and kept up a steady patter of conversation. I nodded mutely, rubbing my cramped feet, unable to keep up with his energy. The same energy drives him now: when we finish with the outhouse, he has me sign in on the Hiker's Log. (As a woman, I'm recruited to provide gender diversity in the orientation film, which makes me wish I had borrowed my neighbor's matching poly-propylene, rather than my collection of ragtag hiking clothes.) He says, write whatever, and so I scrawl Whatever in the narrow line, too shy and uncomfortable to be anything but literal. This messes up his camera shot.

Soon after Sheep Camp, the men pass me by. Adam lingers for a moment to slide his hand against my shoulder, and then he too moves ahead. For years, I thought I was a slow hiker, a plodding, out-of-shape weakling, too physically frail to lay claim to any trail. But as I watch them bounce forward up Long Hill, I feel good in my own limbs. Strong. The ranger hikes this ascent daily; the trail crews ascend and descend the entire Alaskan side carrying chainsaws and wood planks; together, they spend their days off climbing the trail-less mountains that ring Sheep Camp. That they are faster than me casts no aspersions on my own ability.

More than that, though, I am happy to see them move ahead. If they slowed for me, we would both be frustrated: they bored and sluggish, I rushed and irritated. Their voices still flutter down, and that is plenty. The separation leaves me alone to pace myself, plant my feet squarely, to breathe deep and long and even.

The trees give way to high foliage, bushes, scrub and false hellebore, a curious plant that will raise a rash if you brush against it under a sunny sky; the sunshine releases poisonous alkaloids. I am careful, holding it away from my legs with the hiking poles, edging past carefully. Then it too yields to the high alpine—a mess of angled boulders studded with sun-stippled snow.

I thread through the rock field, following cairns of stacked stones, splotches of old paint, and bright marking tape. Some of the rocks tip gently under my feet to tease my precarious balance. In the space of four miles, Long Hill climbs some 1,500 feet; looking up I feel as though I am in the bottom of a narrow jaw, the mountains around me dark molars spotted with sheep and snow.

Early in the season, snow hangs dangerously from these peaks and ridges, rumbling as it sloughs off. In today's warmth, the snow seems to lean away from me, slumping back into shadow to hug the mountainsides. I can trace the path of fallen iceballs that have tumbled down the receding glaciers and snowfields like a child's battle weapons; they leave thin tracks in the sunny-gloss of the snow. It looks benign and picturesque, and I pause at the edge of a snow-patch to rub the granular cold against the back of my neck. As it melts, it trickles down my spine, dampening the strap of my bra. I sigh, happy, resting against a boulder and gulping down some water. A light breeze lifts, flattening my shirt against my front; I stretch into the coolness, retie my bandana over my scalp, and pick out a palmful of cashews before beginning to hike again.

The winter of 1898 was not kind to those on the Chilkoot Trail. Nearly seventy feet of snow fell at the summit, burying supply caches. In February and March, heavy snows blanketed the slopes and slowed the stampede's progress to a creep. On the first Saturday in April, a blizzard blew another six feet of snow upon the peaks (Berton 256), before dropping some with Palm Sunday's daybreak; fidgeting stampedees set off for the summit despite avalanche-ripe conditions that made others—including the Native packers—balk. Late morning, three slides claimed over sixty lives; the largest and most deadly of these covered ten acres. Within minutes, over a thousand men responded from Sheep Camp and all traffic halted for four days as bodies were recovered.

On Monday, April 4, 1898 the *Dyea Press* published a special bulletin headlined: "A Disastrous Avalanche—First Authentic List of Fatalities Reported. Complete Details As Far As Can Be Procured.—Many Encounter Sudden Death On The Trail." The ambiguity of death remained unsettled, however. A committee of miners turned a Sheep Camp tent into a makeshift morgue; strangers shuttled bodies south. With Soapy Smith, Skagway's local crime boss, acting as coroner, bodies arriving in Dyea were stripped of their valuables. Some were shipped home for burial while others were interred there in Dyea in a cemetery dedicated to them. Still others were tucked into the mountainside itself, silent witnesses to the parade of the humanity that once again shouldered its packs.

No one knows, exactly, how many died or who they all were. Each account differs slightly, overlapping some but never completely. Six tombstones in the Slide Cemetery are blank; if once known, they are no longer.

As I continue hiking, I reflect on the anonymity of death here. My purpose for the summer is, of course, to prevent such—to track each hiker by name and itinerary, to know where they sleep each evening, to notice if someone goes missing. If I broke an ankle or stopped to sit

here on a rock in the sun, someone would soon find me, collect me, carry or fly me home. Were the achievements of forgotten stampedeers any less, I wonder, because their stories were less recorded? Their exertion, their pain, their daydreams less noted or less crucial?

The duality—the anonymous seeking the unknown—intrigues me. What would it be like to not know the next camp, the next day, to step out on a foreign trail—or no trail—with simply a hope of gold, to say goodbye and simply keep going? To slip past the humanity with a nod, a smile, and disappear into a silent future. The possibility still draws people to Alaska, channeling them northward, and for a long moment, I am tempted.

When I reach the Scales, I pause again. Here the trail levels for a moment; here stampedeers' packs were reweighed and packing fees renegotiated. From here, the slog of Long Hill pitches upward and the climb begins. The snowy route has melted out into a rock pile, a sludge of boulders and scree rammed together, an exercise in balance. I telescope my hiking poles to their shortest length and tie them onto my pack. They are more unwieldy than helpful as the trail steepens to a forty-five-degree angle. The best bet is the three-touch rule, three points of contact between me and the rock at all times—two arms and a leg, two legs and an arm, a shoulder or knee when I can swing it.

I move up as much as I move forward, curving my back to lean into the rock, holding my balance close to the earth so that my ungainly pack won't pull me sideways or backward. I feel my cheeks redden with exertion, my hairline dampen with sweat as I twist and lift my body upward.

There is a pattern, a logic, to this movement refined into separate motions. A boot nosing into a crevice, fingers that curl, press, against rough granite edges. Like working a crossword puzzle with my body: the mind's focus zeroing in on a scrolling patch of slope not much larger than me. The rest—job frustration, worry, anxiety, the niggling emotions that prick up and down my spine in Skagway—sloughs off. I don't move quickly, but I move steadily, not looking up, not looking down. Upward is overwhelming, turning to look down is scary, providing a gorgeous view, but also reminding me what happens if I misstep, if I turn an ankle and let go. I watch my feet, lever myself forward.

Minus the snow, this is the image people conjure when they imagine the Chilkoot: the dark swarm of men thinning to a single line as they wind upward on a stairway cut into ice, one step at a time, no pausing, and no stepping off. Ant-like, their ascent blurred by snow and sweat. The best of these images come from E. A. Hegg, a photographer from Seattle who spent the winter of 1897-1898 documenting the movement on the Chilkoot and on Skagway's White Pass trail. Of the Golden Stairs, he chose to shoot panoramas, dwarfing his stampedeers by the mountains surrounding them; their faces minute, tucked behind scarves and collars; none looking up, none posing. His photos starkly contrast the black figures with the washed whiteness of the snow. Like nothing else, his images embody the movement of the stampede, distilling the men to their raw motion.

Today, the photos are reproduced as postcards and posters; in Skagway, they are omnipresent, staring back at me from walls and license plates. Sometimes I forget to stare back. Sometimes I choose not to, choose to slide my eyes lightly over the anonymous figures and faces. Other times, I catch myself wondering about them. About how and why they came: not just the gold, but what they wanted from the gold, what they prayed as they fell asleep, who they missed. What drew these men to do this? To climb this same hill forty times with heavy

packs? At some point, in the swarm of humanity, their sureness of riches must have faltered, and yet they pressed on. *Why?*

In trying to explain the same thing, Pierre Berton, the son of one such miner, points to their age and impetuosity—most "were still young enough to want to search for something even though they did not exactly know what it was they were searching for" (408)— and the "steadfastness" (409) of those who persevered to Dawson.

When I see their photos, my throat tightens.

Refusing perspective keeps me calm. My hopes don't rise at the false summit or as old snow appears, smooth and sweet, between rocks. I distrust the snow. It is too simple, too easy. Summer melt has undercut its presence until only a thin bridge, too weak to hold my weight, lingers. I tamp the crusty snow with a boot before edging on to it.

From above, one of the men halloes, checking on me. I holler back. It's Adam, and he says he'll wait. I lean against a rock for a moment, blink to refocus my eyes. The afternoon is waning and the sun beginning to pull away; fresh wind spills over the Pass to cool my cheeks. It smells like rock and long winters and new frontiers. Thin wisps of clouds race across the sky. Goosebumps begin to pebble my arms.

A packless Adam waits for me at a rock outcropping near the false summit. He's already been to the summit and has dipped back down to hike the last rise with me. The ground is mostly snow here, but it's melted out around the weathered spines of collapsible canoes. The wood and tattered canvas have bleached to almost the color of rock, and we look at them for a minute, then shrug and continue. Their owners no doubt meant to canoe from Lake Bennett to Dawson, another 550 miles of lake and rapid-studded rivers. I wonder, briefly, if their owners ever made it to Dawson, if this abandoned cache meant they turned around, slid down the steep snow and walked home.

Adam looks back at me, smile splitting his face apart, and I smile back. He comes down to give me a hug, rubbing his rough red beard against my cheek and says that he's so glad I decided to come and hike with him. His eyes are wider than most, as if he were perpetually surprised, a child excited by each new moment. I don't tell him that I didn't come here for him, afraid of marring that smile. So I hug him back and we try to hold hands and hike up together, but the snow is too slippery and so we let go to keep our balance.

At the summit, water boils cheerily for hot chocolate in the Warden Cabin where Alaska and Canada meet. Sarah, one of the Parks Canada Wardens, has hiked up from Lindeman, and together we watch the evening weather roll in from the north, funneling smoggy clouds through the gap until a thin mist clings to the glass windows, refracting the blank light. Winds buffet the small cabin; at the table our knees knock into each other. The inside is cramped and white; two rooms. The first holds a kitchen with a nook of a table where our knees touch, in the back are facing bunks.

After dinner, the men mosey down to the unheated warming hut, and Sarah and I roll out foam mattresses and sleeping bags. It's the second time I've met Sarah; when I hiked through last month I stayed with her at Lindeman. That night, it was the other warden's birthday, and for nearly an hour I hand-whipped egg whites for a meringue while she

rolled out a pie crust. We sang happy birthday and ate moose stew, tossing our napkins into the stove as we finished. Laundered underwear and socks hung from a wire behind the stove pipe, dripping occasionally on the firewood.

Afterward, she and the other warden compared notes about the recent bear sightings. I sipped quietly at my tea as I listened to them unravel the history of the area's fauna: this adolescent as the offspring of that sow, that blackie and little brown that hung out last summer, the current crop of cubs, and the small herds of elk and goats that move through the area. If the radio hadn't squawked goodnight from Whitehorse, they could have talked past midnight.

Tonight, as the winds scream and die and settle and scream again, we burrow into our bedding—I wear my long johns to sleep in, and can feel the poly-pro rasp against DEET-tendered skin—and talk in the half-light of clouds. About the trail, some, about how we came to be here. The magnetism of this place that draws us back. She's worked on this trail since the mid-1970s, putting in her first season soon after the international park began staffing it. I realize that she must have been the warden here when my own father hiked this trail, when he was my age, before I was born.

The minutes billow over us like the wind. Sarah rolls over, looks back up at the ceiling. One of the Native groups here wants to adopt her. It hasn't happened yet, she says, but it's an honor, and she is very excited. Don't tell anyone yet, she asks, please?

A day and a half later, we hike together near Bare Loon Lake. Listen, she says. Can you hear them? The back of my neck shivers. I pause in drinking and a trickle of water spills from the corner of my mouth. I wipe it away with the side of my palm and hold my breath in the silence. A moment, and then a high quavery call like lakeside ripples. A singularly lonely sound echoing between the trees. The call pauses, drops to the common loon's signature three-tone wail. Neither of us moves despite the whine of a close mosquito. The lake falls quiet again, and then another loon answers.

John Muir described the call of the loon as "one of the wildest and most striking of all the wilderness sounds, a strange, sad, mournful, unearthly cry, half laughing, half wailing." This morning, there's something haunting about it, something ghostly that mingles in the morning mist, shadow-like. Echo-like.

Sarah leans down to adjust the tongue of her boot. The straps on her pack creak with the movement, and I blink, gulp down one more swallow of water before tucking my Nalgene away. The lake gleams dull and silver over my right shoulder, its surface pocked with droplets and water bugs.

She settles her foot back in the boot, wags her ankle back and forth before pointing toward the small island where the loons nest each summer, hatching and raising their twin-egged clutch. I can't see much in the mist. We wait another moment, listening to the echoing calls, then I pull up the edge of a lazy sock and we continue hiking. Bare Loon Lake has one of the smallest of the Chilkoot trail's campgrounds, and yesterday's hikers—I remember seven from the radio call—have already pitched camp and must be ahead of us on the trail.

Once on the Canadian side, the stampeders followed a trail of lakes—Crater, Morrow, Long Lake, Deep Lake—to the six-mile long Lake Lindeman. Some stopped there while others pushed on to Lake Bennett, where they met up with the veterans of that winter's other route, the White Pass trail. There they stopped again, halted by winter's ice. Along the lakeside they built quick bustling towns of heavy canvas tents and cached goods. They denuded the flanks of unnamed mountains, using the wood to scabble together the river boats that would, hopefully, carry them north to the burgeoning Dawson.

Pierre Berton recorded the lakeside sounds in his *Klondike*: "the rumble of avalanches mingled with the screech of the new sawmills, the crash of toppling timber, the rasp of saw and plane, the pounding of mallets, the incessant tap-tapping of a thousand hammers, the shrill altercations of embittered partners, the neighing of horses, the bleating of goats, and the howling of malamutes." (263).

In contrast, today's trail is foggy with quiet. Ellis and Adam have spent the morning leapfrogging us with their camera; they are ahead of us now and so we hike in silence. Nor is there much to see in these last miles: A bit of rusted metal. A twisted thread of telegraph wire. On the side of the mountain, a line of green marks a century's worth of growth. It's our last day on the trail and much of the debris has been carted off by souvenir-seekers. Lake Bennett is four miles ahead; on our left is Lake Lindeman, on our right, Bare Loon Lake. We slip between the rocks and the trees and the long bodies of quiet water, our boots leaving dry patches in the trail's dew-damp crust, and sandy outlines on exposed rock. The grey sky brightens slowly, burning through the wet clouds.

As we walk, Sarah tells me about the loons' daily schedule, how they leave each morning to fish and forage for the chicks—which prefer minnows and snails—before returning to the nest in the evening. The funny thing is, she explains, they think we do the same thing. Every afternoon-evening, the campground fills up with hikers setting up their tents, racketing around making dinner, and then in the morning, they break camp and head on to Bennett. And when that evening's hikers come in, the loons just think it's the same people returning. They can't tell the difference.

I pause for a moment, nod. An anthropomorphic view, but something about it makes sense: here the people are transitory and the loons, which live up to thirty years and return every summer to this lake, are the locals. From a bird's eye view, yesterday's wave of hikers is the same as today's, and this season's steady stream of boots and backpacks is no different than the previous year's. Even in my own mind, the hikers I meet in the Trail Center have begun to slip, to conflate into yesterday's group or last week's pilgrimage. I can't tell them apart any more than I could keep track of the color of their North Face coats. They appear as reincarnations with the same fears, bandanas, accents, and the same ripe aroma.

We hike on, silent now, and I wonder if Sarah sympathizes with the loons as well. She's overseen generations of people like me, summer rangers and trail crew, students crammed into uniforms, witnessed the daily waves and the seasonal tides of workers for thirty years. This trail is home to her, and she knows it with a depth that makes me feel fumbly and awkward. And yet, two nights ago she told me about her upcoming adoption as though I was the only one she'd explained it to.

Now she pulls her graying hair back with combs and she places her feet solidly upon the trail, as if she already knew each step—each rock, root, shrub—before making it. In a slow sea of people, the rocks are a

constant.

When we reach Bennett, Sarah peels away. In an hour, she's giving a historical talk for the day passengers coming up on the train from Skagway—she'll meet them at St. Andrews church, the only surviving Gold Rush structure at Bennett, but first she wants to walk down to the beach and glass the hillside for bears. I turn left, loosening the shoulder straps on my pack, letting the weight sway over my hips as I walk down toward the bright, boarded-up station. A few picnic tables weather in the sun, and I drop the pack on one of them. The clouds spread further apart and the sun turns hot. Bennett turns more beautiful. The lake mirrors a glassy blue and sunshiny weeds poke around the grey picnic tables.

I press a finger to my forearm to check for sunburn. None yet.

Across the train tracks a few straggling hikers mince blistered feet down the last rise, the lake stretching out to the right. As I watch them, sharing a piece of cheese with another hiker, emotion swoops in and sucker-punches me in the gut. The bright sun turns to an embrace. For me, this is the end of the trail, here on the banks of Bennett Lake. There will be no boat-building, no whip-sawing logs into tippy rafts loaded with all my worldly goods. There will be no Dawson, no gold. In an hour, I'll take the train south from here, zigzagging down through White Pass, the Chilkoot's parallel route that began in Skagway. Tomorrow, I will be back at work, answering mindless questions for faceless visitors and next month, I'll say goodbye to Adam and leave Alaska for school back east.

I pull out my Nalgene, take a gulp of tepid water. With the clarity of sore knees, dirt-rimmed nails and exultant muscles, I feel placed, purposed, known. Although it's the second time I've been here, I've yet to explore the lake edges or the few buildings; still, the long-gone ghost town with its railroad tracks and bright, boarded-up station house seems congenial and friendly now.

When the train rumbles its early boarding call, I walk my pack in front of me, kicking it forward with my knees and lifting it into the last car. A dozen or so other hikers are taking today's train back; their packs lean against each other in small mountains, and their untied boots and laces dangle off grime-ringed ankles. I prop my pack against theirs and wave a hello. Many are familiar faces from the Trail Center and from three days of leapfrogging through the various campgrounds. Most of the women hikers are wearing braids or bandanas, decorated with small haloes of escaped hair. The men sprout half-inch beards.

The train hisses and starts, leaving behind the cheery but locked boarding house that used to sell lunches, and we begin to trundle south. I pull the last of my trail mix from my pack. There are a few M&Ms left, and I chase them through the various nuts and dried fruits before offering the rest over the seatback. In a practical discrimination, hikers are segregated to the last railcars, where our outdoor smell won't bother the tourists. As yet, I can't quite smell myself, but I know that's coming.

A few miles down the tracks, I'll feel the caked sweat in the knees of my nylon pants. I'll become aware, again, of the streaks of dried mud that paint the inside of my calves, a souvenir from walking a wet trail. I'll become aware of my own hair, stringy with scalp oil and matted

with movement. My muscles will begin to cramp, and my stomach will begin to ache for a burger and beer. The windows will slide closed between me and Bennett.

But not quite yet: I can still judge the weight of my boots as natural and, even better, purposeful. The train still feels foreign, the air stuffy with prepackaged heat, varnished wood, plastic and people. The sounds of hikers' voices strangely contained, their crescendo and fall spilling over each other, unable to escape.

In two short hours, we weave over White Pass, pausing to salute a deserted line of flags before descending back to Skagway, where the engines hiss and hoot, shuffling the railcars across Broadway and bisecting the short six-block shopping area from the harbor lined with cruise ships. Conductors stand on either side of the tracks, waving off the tourists who gather in to see. The whistle blasts and we are home. I shake my head of sleep and retie my bandana. Arms lifted, I sniff. Other hikers are doing the same, stuffing fleece back into packs and readjusting their straps. Of the different cars, ours is the one the tourists stare at: we are incongruities of Gore-Tex in streets lined with shops selling cheap shirts and overpriced jewels. Holding onto the handrail, I swing myself off the deep step and onto pavement. The crowds of tourists on Second and Broadway are overwhelming and I watch others slip under their packs and scatter homeward, disappearing in the throng. I realize I never exchanged names with any of them.

Berton, Pierre. *The Klondike fever: the Life and Death of the Last Great Gold Rush*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1958.

Muir, John. Edwin Teale, ed. *The Wilderness World of John Muir*. New York: Mariner Books, 2001.

Neufeld, David and Frank Norris. *Chilkoot Trail: Heritage Route to the Klondike*. Whitehorse, Yukon: Lost Moose, 1996.

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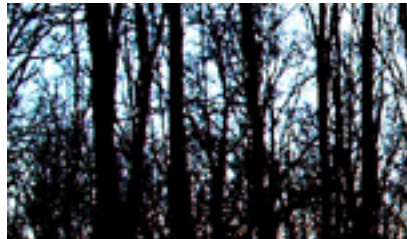
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The Somerset Review



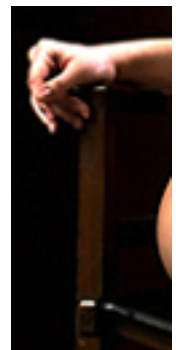
Contributors' Notes

Kasandra Snow Duthie's stories have been recently published or are forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, and *Many Mountains Moving*. She can be contacted at duthiek@gmail.com.



Anne Germanacos' work has appeared in over fifty literary reviews. In 2010, a collection of her short stories will be published by BOA Editions. She lives in San Francisco and on Crete.

Andrei Guruianu is currently pursuing a doctorate in creative writing at Binghamton University, NY, and teaches at Ithaca College. He founded the literary journal *The Broom Review* (www.thebroomereview.com) and served a month-long writer residency at Yaddo. He has published a book of poems and short stories, *Days When I Saw the Horizon Bleed* (FootHills Publishing, 2006). You may reach him at aguruianu@aol.com.



Paul Olson lives in Minnesota and is currently working as a healthcare IT consultant in order to feed one of his life's passions: photography. Capturing scenery, animals, food, and people just being people, his canvas is everything that life is about. Visit www.paophotography.com to see more of his work.

Alita Putnam currently lives in Reykjavik where she's working on a degree in Medieval Icelandic Studies; she completed her MFA at Penn State University in May. Her nonfiction has previously appeared in *ZYZZYVA* and is forthcoming in *Narrative Magazine*. She can be reached at alitabeth@yahoo.com.



Gregory Sherl is the best kind of love. Gregory breathes with his mouth closed. Gregory is writing a play about a girl whose arms fall off but there is no blood. Why is there no blood? Gregory is between things: some good, some not so good, some magical. Gregory can be reached at jesuis.gregory@gmail.com.

The Summerset Review

Fifty-for-Fifty Contest Award

We are awarding a monetary prize and a complimentary print issue to the reader who submits the best feedback on a piece appearing in each issue of *The Summerset Review*. Runners-up receive complimentary copies. For information on how to submit your feedback, see our [Guidelines](#) page. We have awarded from \$50 to \$150 in past issues.

For the Fall 2008 issue, we awarded \$100. For the current issue - running now through March 1st, 2009 - the prize money is again set at \$100.

Award winner for the Fall 2008 issue:

Kat Gonso of Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts

Runner-up:

Meg Britt of Burnsville, Minnesota

We want to thank all those of you who submitted entries. We recognize the investment you've made to read our publication and write to us. We sincerely appreciate the interest.

Kat writes -

Kara Mae Brown's first description of Bath drew me into the city. Never having visited there myself, I felt compelled by this mysterious "coy city" that "pried through the fog." Although I enjoyed the immediate description for both its ability to draw me into the story and for its vivid, lush language, it wasn't until I was introduced to the character of Greg that I fully appreciated this opening image. Brown juxtaposes the coy nature of the city with the coy nature of Greg. Both are foreign, yet alluring and familiar. The narrator's first glance of Greg is very much like her first glance of the city. This circular motion of the prose (which is later repeated at the end of the piece) painted the city as a romantic yet troubling place, a place that one can never fully understand. And, like love and crushes and ourselves, we too can never fully understand.

This piece isn't just about Bath or Greg. It isn't just a travel piece, nor is it merely a love story. It is the story of young girl struggling to find herself, and she does, if only for a moment, as she watches a man from the arched doorway, entranced by the light of Bath--the same light of Jane Austin, the same light of the Romans--and she learns to grow up, just a bit. She learns to let go. These complex emotions, coupled with the beautiful descriptions and narrative scenes, make Bath and this young woman's story particularly alluring.

The Somerset Review

Guidelines for Submissions

Fiction and Essay Submissions

Writers are invited to submit literary stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, please read *The Somerset Review* or consult our [Recommended Reading List](#). We are currently not accepting poetry or book reviews.

Email submissions to editor@summersetreview.org as an attachment in MS Word, or as plain text. We suggest you include the word "Submission" in the title of the email, so that we don't mistake it for junk mail. Be sure you specify whether your piece is fiction or nonfiction.

You may alternatively submit in hard-copy by sending to 25 Summerset Drive, Smithtown, New York 11787, USA. We prefer disposable copies of manuscripts. We can respond via email in lieu of a SASE if you so designate.

All submissions receive replies as quickly as possible. If we have not responded within three months, please hassle us. We read year-round and never go on hiatus.

Book excerpts will be considered if you believe the work stands alone. Reprints will be considered if the work has not appeared elsewhere within the last two years. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even so, a brief note accompanying the submission is preferred. We are not sure what we want to read in this note, but would appreciate the extra effort, rather than a blank email with an attachment. We are always interested in knowing how you've heard of us, and what you like about us.

Authors will see drafts of accepted pieces for review prior to release, and will receive twenty-five dollars at release time for their contribution.

Writers retain all rights to use their work elsewhere, however, we reserve the right to republish the material, without modification, in a nonprofit print volume. We also reserve the right to quote brief excerpts of text at literary events, with no connection to monetary gain, crediting the author in all cases.

We have nominated stories annually for various anthologies and awards, including *Pushcart Prize*, *Best American Short Stories*, *New Stories from the South*, *Creative Nonfiction's Best Of anthology*, *storySouth's Million Writers Award*, *Sundress Publication's Best of the Net*, and others.

Enter Our Free Fifty-for-Fifty Contest

Anyone is invited to submit comments on stories and essays (excluding photo essays) appearing in the current issue of *The Somerset Review*. We award at least fifty dollars and a copy of a print issue to the person contributing the best entry over fifty words, and will include the comment in our next issue, along with the reader's name and home town. (For the exact amount we pay each quarter, see the Fifty-for-Fifty Contest for Readers page. We will withhold publishing the writer's name / home town if requested.)

Comments can be in any form and there is no fee. Only one entry is allowed per person, per quarter, and the entry must pertain to a piece appearing in the current issue. We are particularly interested in how the story or essay affected you; what impact it had, what memory it stirred, what idea it precipitated. Be honest and lucid. Writing style is not critically important.

Email your entry to editor@summersetreview.org. Include your name, town, state, and country (if outside the USA). Qualified entries will receive acknowledgement of receipt within a few days. The winner will be notified when the new issue is released. The deadline for comments is two weeks before release date. Issues are released on the 15th of March, June, September, and December. Entrants who have not won will not be individually notified of contest results.

Email addresses will not be published, circulated, or archived. Writers making content submissions are eligible to participate as long as they do not discuss their own work.

We may choose to publish more than just the winning comment. If we decide to do so, readers will be notified and although it is not likely monetary awards will be given, we may send complimentary copies of Volume One to runners up.

By offering this prize, we hope to increase the awareness and appreciation of literary magazines in our world and culture.

Questions for Reader Groups

Readers and Reading Groups are invited to provide answers to questions we have posted on the material in our current issue. See "Questions for Reader Group Discussion" in the Table of Contents for details on how you can win a complimentary copy of *The Somerset Review* if you or your reading group provides meaningful answers to all questions.

The Somerset Review

Recommended Reading List

| Author | Title | Source |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Aciman, Andre | Cat's Cradle | From the November 3 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1997 |
| Altschul, Andrew Foster | From A to Z | From Issue #1 of <i>Swink</i> , 2004 |
| Anderson, Dale Gregory | The Girl in the Tree | From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2003 |
| Ashton, Edward | Night Swimmer | Online at <i>The Blue Penny Quarterly</i> , Spring/Summer 1995 |
| Baggott, Julianna | Five | From <i>Other Voices</i> #28, 1998 |
| Bardi, Abby | My Wild Life | From <i>Quarterly West</i> #41, 1995 |
| Baxter, Charles | Snow | From the collection <i>A Relative Stranger</i> , published in 1990 |
| Benson, Amy | Vectors: Arrows of Discontent | A memoir excerpt in Issue 29.2 of <i>New Orleans Review</i> , 2004 |
| Borders, Lisa | Temporary Help | From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Bananafish</i> , 1998 |
| Brooks, Ben | Wildflowers | From the Spring issue of <i>Georgetown Review</i> , 2005 |
| Broyard, Bliss | Mr. Sweetly Indecent | From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 1997 |
| Burns, Carole | Honour's Daughter | From <i>Other Voices</i> #31, 1999 |
| Cain, Chelsea | Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl | From the Spring issue of <i>Grand Tour</i> , 1997 |
| Cheever, John | The Stories of John Cheever | A collection published in 1978 |
| Christopher, Nicholas | Veronica | A novel published in 1996 |
| Clark, Susan | Besides the Body | From the Spring issue of <i>Red Rock Review</i> , 2004 |
| Coake, Christopher | Solos | A novella from Vol. 9, No. 1 of <i>Five Points</i> , 2005 |
| Crane, Elizabeth | When the Messenger Is Hot | A collection published in 2003 |
| Crowe, Thomas Rain | Firsts | Online at <i>Oyster Boy Review</i> in January, 1997 |
| Dancoff, Judith | Vermeer's Light | From <i>Alaska Quarterly Review's</i> Intimate Voices issue, 1997 |
| Dormanen, Sue | Finishing First | From the Summer issue of <i>Lynx Eye</i> , 1998. |
| Doyle, Larry | Life Without Leann | From an issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> in Fall, 1990 |
| Glatt, Lisa | A Girl Becomes a Comma Like That | A novel published in 2004 |
| Hyde, Catherine Ryan | Dancing with Elinor | From the Summer issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 2006 |
| Kennedy, Thomas E. | Kansas City | From Vol 62 No. 4 of <i>New Letters</i> , 1996 |
| McInerney, Jay | Model Behavior | A novel published in 1998 |
| Millhauser, Steven | Enchanted Night | A novella published in 1999 |
| Moses, Jennifer | Circling | From the Spring issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 1995 |
| Murakami, Haruki | South of the Border, West of the Sun | A novel published in 1998 |
| Nadzam, Bonnie | Moon Helmet | From the Fall/Winter issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2007 |
| Offill, Jenny | Last Things | A novel published in 1999 |
| Orlean, Susan | The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup | A collection of essays published in 2001 |
| Peelle, Lydia | Reasons for and Advantages of Breathing | From No. 87 of <i>One Story</i> , 2007 |
| Perry, Rachael | Sullivan's Inventory | From No. 82/83 of <i>Confrontation</i> , Spring/Summer 2003 |
| Pope, Mary Elizabeth | Divining Venus | From the Spring issue of <i>Florida Review</i> , 2007 |
| Raboteur, Emily | The Eye of Horus | From <i>StoryQuarterly</i> #40, 2004 |
| Reyn, Irina | The Firebird | From the Spring issue of <i>Lit</i> , 2008 |
| Robison, Mary | Why Did I Ever? | A novel published in 2001 |
| Row, Jess | The Secrets of Bats | From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 2000 |
| Russell, Karen | Haunting Olivia | From the June 13 & 20 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 2005 |
| Ryan, Jean | Paradise | From the <i>Massachusetts Review</i> , Autumn 2001 |
| Salinger, J.D. | For Esme - With Love and Squalor | From the collection <i>Nine Stories</i> published in 1953 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Schappell, Elissa | Comet | From Volume XI, Number 1 of <i>Witness</i> , 1997 |
| Sellers, Heather | Tell Me Again Who Are You? | An essay from Fall/Winter issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2006 |
| Shilling, Michael | Black Celebration | From <i>Other Voices</i> #43, 2005 |
| Somerville, Kristine | What the Heart Doesn't Know | From Volume I, Number 5 of <i>Many Mountains Moving</i> , 1995 |
| Tilghman, Christopher | The Way People Run | From the September 9 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1991 |

The Summerset Review



Questions for Discussion

Readers and reading groups are invited to discuss the topics below relating to the material presented in this issue. Send answers to editor@summersetreview.org and you will be eligible for a complimentary copy of Volume One of *The Summerset Review*. All questions must be answered and received by March 1, 2009.

Include your name, town, state, and country (if outside the USA) in your entry. The editors will decide the winner(s) and send out notification when the new issue is released. We plan to announce the names of those who are awarded free copies, so if you do not want your name to appear in the journal, please let us know. Postal and email addresses of all entrants will not be published, circulated, or archived.

-
1. Are you a hiker? If so, relate an experience you had to those in "Across the Chilkoot." If you are not a hiker, was there anything in this essay that made you think about strapping on the boots one day?
 2. Do you think many of the individual sections of the story "Trespassing" work on their own? Discuss the effect of stringing these short sections together to make a longer story, as was done here.
 3. What are the characteristics of a glazed girl in "Where the Glazed Girls Go"?
 4. Discuss the use of the hearts in the trunk as metaphor in "Hearts Half Off."
 5. Do you think "Body of Work" follows more of a traditional storyline than a contemporary one? If so, what are the differences between these two types of storytelling.

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Previous Issues

Kara Mae Brown, Giano Cromley, Katherine Karlin, Susan Niz, Sarah Orton

Fall 2008

Summer 2008

Kevin Brown, Melanie Haney, J. M. Patrick, Joe Ponepinto, Ria Voros

Catherine Brown, Jack Cobb, Bill Cook, Allie Larkin, Naomi Leimsider, Didi Wood

Spring 2008

Winter 2008

Daniel DiStasio, Marko Fong, Sandra Maddux-Creech, Sandra Gail Teichmann-Hillesheim

Anne Corbitt, Julie Dearborn, John Hansen, Scott McCabe, Thaddeus Rutkowski

Fall 2007

Summer 2007

Renee Carter Hall, Sabine Maier, Jen Michalski, Michelle Panik, Brenda Whiteside

Olivia Kate Cerrone, Kelly Jameson, Saundra Mitchell, Ron Savage, Nathan S. Webster

Spring 2007

Winter 2007

E. P. Chiew, Andrew Coburn, LaTanya McQueen, Nancy Stebbins

Zane Kotker, Corbitt Nesta, Kevin Spaide, Philip Suggars, Steven Torres

Fall 2006

Summer 2006

Elizabeth Bernays, Penny Feeny, John Gooley, Jeffrey N. Johnson, Shellie Zacharia

Phoebe Kate Foster, Amy Greene, Dee Dobson Harper, John Riha, Robert Villanueva, D. W. Young

Spring 2006

Winter 2006

Steven Gillis, Barbara Jacksha, Mary Lynn Reed, Arthur Saltzman

Lisa Ohlen Harris, Michael Hartford, Tammy R. Kitchen, Jillian Schedneck, Sandi Sonnenfeld

Fall 2005

Summer 2005

Mariel Boyarsky, Michael J. Cunningham, Catherine B. Hamilton, Maxi Hellweger, B.J. Hollars

Erin Anderson, Carl R. Brush, Mark X. Cronin, Elise Davis, Shellie Zacharia

Spring 2005

Winter 2005

David McKinley Lowrey, Mark Mazer, Corey Mesler, Terry Thomas

Julie Ann Castro, Bill Glose, Graham Jeffery, William Starr Moake, Philippe Tarbouriech, Carolyn Thériault

Fall 2004

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Karen Kasaba, Chris Ludlow, Court Merrigan, Michael F. Smith, Mark Vender

Scott Carter, Alan M. Danzis, Gerard Marconi, Jordan Rosenfeld

Spring 2004

Winter 2004

Maura Madigan, Troy Morash, Pam Mosher, Paul Silverman

Aline Baggio, Susan H. Case, Zdravka Evtimova, Tony O'Brien, Tom Sheehan, Jennifer Spiegel

Fall 2003

Summer 2003

Linda Boroff, Thomas Brennan, Sue Dormanen, James Francis, Gina Frangello, Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz

Eric Bosse, Sarah Maria Gonzales, M.M.M. Hayes, Janice J. Heiss, Pia Wilson

Spring 2003

Winter 2003

Max Dunbar, Jenny de Groot, Soo J. Hong, Rachel Belinda Kidder, Michael Marisi, Ulf Wolf

Kit Chase, Diane E. Dees, Edison McDaniels, Regina Phelps, Jacob Fawcett

Fall 2002