

Neon

A Journal of Brilliant Things
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The Pheasant Feather Hat

Sarah Hilary

She wore white, of course. A buttonhole from her bouquet in the lapel of his suit. Lemon blossom for fidelity, affection in the form of sorrel. She printed cards so we would know exactly what was signified by the arrangement she held. When it came time for the tossing, I stood aside, taking refuge beneath the brim of my hat. All you could see of my face was the smile I'd painted there in lipstick. Rum Kiss.

I bought the hat from a shop in St James's with wood-lined walls. All-over pheasant feathers, a brim down to my chin. Dogs followed me home through Green Park, sniffing at the hatbox, suspecting a treat. I felt I ought to set it loose, throw it like a £300 frisbee for them to fetch. They'd have torn it to shreds in seconds, looking for the carcass that wasn't there. Into the attic it went, after the wedding. In its box, lavish with tissue paper, dun-brown without the light to strike an iridescent note from the feathers.

The groom wore grey, the same shade as the doves they released after the service. Up they flew, wings clattering like football rattles. I wondered how many times they'd performed this pantomime flight of freedom, tempted back by crumbs to the dovecote in the hotel grounds.

They took the honeymoon suite. Made love all night.

I'd fucked the bride in a Travelodge in Slough. Skin and teeth and the kiss of sweat like a promise in my palms.

'You like this?' she said.

'I do.'

They hired a marquee as an investment against rain. She bought two pairs of the same shoes, in case a heel broke. Put extensions in her hair to make a better effect of the chignon. French manicure. St Tropez tan to set off the white

silk. Nut-free wedding cake as a safeguard against allergies. She had her bouquet professionally preserved, and his buttonhole. Her eggs and his sperm frozen as a contingency against sterility. Their babies' feet cast in bronze, tiny handprints set in plaster of Paris.

Mice found the pheasant-feather hat and nested there, fucking contentedly. Raising little knuckled clutches of brown babies.

Isn't nature astounding?



Three Poems

Peter Schwartz

The Longest Life

I'm down to blank confessions
floating through the city streets
like confetti

midnight

warehouses, each as empty
as the next and the
dust

has no triggers
to solve this.

Little December

every day the world is
whitewashed
back to the blank winter it was:

and little snow and
the symmetry
is perfect.

One Formula (And Another)

every night comes
down to night X
another portion to
sit with or cram
down the drain

X is everything:

a piece of evolution
that doesn't want to.

the other:

X is the very stretching
of one's self-horizon
into

bliss.



Two Poems

Graham Burchell

Great Grandmother Ethel Davis

I have her book before me
her Sunday School second prize
first passed to small fingers
in the winter of eighteen ninety

This is the book
passed with pride to her mother
to her daughter/my grandmother
the dried whorls of fingerprints
settled deep inside the meat
between hard olive covers
with her name inscribed
our sole connection
until I learned today
how she passed away

we shared a house it seems
its gray slate roof protected
the start of my life
and the close of her own
her heart stilled in my mother's arms
beneath one of its high-ceilings
the physical
and the sounds of our two voices
separated by a sliver of time
lives close back to back
with blood thicker than water they say
and hers thickened and dried
in the old pipes leaden unseen
like fingerprints loitering in her prize

Akela

had us in her nesting box
one evening every week
creosote wood haven
in a rustic island
off The Ridgeway

she had us filed in sixes
half dozens in green plumage
wool and skullcaps slipping
over brylcreem short back and
sides arms stitched with badges

this weekday evening goddess
had us raising two stiff fingers
tilted like pistol barrels at our heads

had us chanting *dib dib dob*
without coercion or torture
made us wear scarves pulled
like a noose to a woggle of

leather Akela with the beak
of an owl brown owl Akela
woman our smiling Anubis
from a jungle book of tame
names and innocence

Akela thin as a winter alder
with a mossed-up trunk
the knot expert almost without
sex yet warm as fresh-boiled milk





If Thoughts Were Rockets
Peter Schwartz

This Other Life

Dianne Rees

He finds himself on a dark path, walking away from the boy. His eyes are on the road and on the last five minutes of his leaving. He sees the spaghetti flung against the wall, the sauce like a blood stain dripping down the stucco, the boy by the stove, watching him warily. When his gaze returns to the path, the trees hide the road ahead. Only the immediate way forward is visible. It's an indeterminate time of day. It could be early morning or early evening. The house he's come from is far away but the boy is on his mind, the tendrils of their severed relationship still cling to him. The fact that he is walking away and will not be back feels like a murder. It occurs to him that he has been on this path before.

She wakes up. In her dreams, she is this man and it feels right. This other life feels more familiar than her own. She stretches into her own skin which is yet not hers and resigns herself to getting up. She resents her consciousness because she felt almost close to knowing - what? A name? An occupation? The way the story ends?

She pads downstairs to the kitchen, her feet in mismatched socks. She is wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt. She might continue to wear this for most of the morning. Her children are already at the breakfast table. Twin calls to responsibility. Magda and Molly try to shove their tiny fists simultaneously into a single giant box of cereal. “

“Mooommm,” they both call.

Sarah takes the box away. Like an anthropologist, she gazes intently into their faces.

“Mom, we're hungry,” Molly says a bitterly.

“Alright, my baby birds,” Sarah says, pouring contents of the box first into a blue bowl, then into a pink bowl. She pretends to retch into one of the bowls and the children squeal

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with horror and delight at her grossness. "That's how mother birds feed their babies," Sarah says.

"We're not birds," Magda says, pouting. "Yeah, Mom," Molly echoes.

"Guess not," Sarah says airily, disappointed in her daughters' way of taking things so literally. She pushes the carton of milk in front of them and decides to let them fend for themselves on this one. She turns her face from her children to look out the window, to reach back into the dream. The dream that feels more real to her than her own life.

When she looks back at her children, they've finished eating. There are a few clots of cereal, swollen by milk but otherwise the bowls are clean. She claps her hands and appreciates that they both startle, that she hasn't lost her capacity to surprise. "Vamanos, muchachas," she says.

"Mommy, speak English," Molly says, knitting her brows in a way that makes her look ancient.

"I was," Sarah says, "you were just hearing in Spanish." She sees Molly's eyes widen with doubt and fear and feels a stab of satisfaction and guilt. Magda reaches for her sister's hand. Sarah sighs and gets up. She walks away from the table to collect their sweaters, their school bags. She was not meant for this maternal life, she thinks. She would be better off if she just tried to be their father and left the mommy act behind.

She turns back to gather her children and sweeps them to the door, gives them money for lunches and walks with them down the street, in the clothes she's slept in, to the bus stop.

These children were an accident and now her life is not her own. She tries to rephrase this bad thought in her mind. Her life is her own, just with children. Her girls giggle and poke each other, speaking to each other in their twin language. It used to fascinate Sarah, now it just depresses her. Soon, she thinks, she will stop being able to understand what anyone really means. She'll just stare incomprehensibly, earnestly, trying to divine intent from gestures, from expressions.

Sarah looks in the direction where the bus will come from and is drawn back into her dream, into the night world of the woods, the dark slide of shadows all around her, the memory of the boy. The bus



comes huffing and growling to stop in front of her as if materializing from thin air. Magda and Molly stop chattering and clamber up the stairs enthusiastically. Sarah wants to be with them, to comfort their fears of confronting another day at school, but they are not those types of children. Neither of them are the type of child she was.

The children disappear, swallowed up by the maws of the yellow school bus and the conforming embrace of their classmates. "Who are you?" Sarah wants to shout at them as the bus drives off and she sees them making faces at each other. She wonders if they are complaining about her, telling each other and their little schoolmates how weird their mother is. Sarah sighs. It was such a flip of the coin, her decision to keep them when she discovered she was unmarried and pregnant. Their father was long gone across state lines before she could even think about telling him. Gone so quickly, the fact of him seemed unreal, and she would think that she had imagined him but for the evidence he'd left. His leaving made her fall into a dreamy inertia. In the end it was this inertia that made the twins possible; her inability to take action about the pregnancy suddenly became the fact of their birth. Her parents had been ecstatic, thinking perhaps Sarah would settle down, that her children would make her less odd, less

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off-kilter. They came by weekly to see if this has happened. Weekly, they were disappointed. Finally, she'd told them to stop. Finally, she'd moved away and they didn't have the money to follow her except to find her at major holidays when she pretended for them and allowed them to pretend.

With the children, they do not have to pretend. They are so clearly related to Magda and Molly that Sarah often feels that she is raising her own parents.

Sarah turns and walks home. She gets undressed, dropping her sweatpants in the hallway, her T-shirt in the living room. The house is still. Sarah hasn't had anyone else in it but the kids in a while. She's lost interest in interacting with most people. Sarah walks naked through the house and finally into the kitchen. She reaches in the fork drawer to pull a pack of cigarettes out and lights one. She smokes for a while this way, standing up by the sink, letting the ashes fall into the basin, squinting out the window at the narrow patch of her lawn, a mosaic of green, yellow and brown. She supposes she should tend to it. Eventually she will tend to it. A few days ago, the lawn Nazis of the neighborhood left a nasty note in her mailbox. "Take care of your lawn" it said. We have covenants!" The word "covenants" was misspelled. It's been close to a hundred degrees over the past week, there's been a water shortage. She'd returned a note to her own mailbox. "Think native plants!" it said. The next day the note was gone. She felt violated and vindicated at the same time. The day after she put a note in that said, "Tampering with someone's mail is a crime!" This note remains in the mail box even now. Sarah leaves it there. The mailman doesn't ask questions.

Sprinklers start turning on across the street and to the sides of her house, making abortive spurting sounds. Sarah sees a neighbor woman - Sarah doesn't know her name - walk out of a house across the street to pick up a newspaper from her stoop. The woman is wearing a skirt and blouse that look impeccably tailored. The woman glances in the direction of Sarah's house, frowning. Sarah moves back from the

window. She knows she can't be seen, but feels inhibited now.

She goes into her bedroom, where the bed is unmade and clothes are scattered on the floor - her kids are far neater than she is. She puts on jeans and but keeps on the same T-shirt. The jeans slide down her nearly nonexistent hips. In the bedroom, the sleepy dream feeling comes back, the memory of an existence where she is not a wrong person though she is doing wrong things. What is her life now? Atonement for a past one? She's not a particularly spiritual person but she feels ready to believe this. She thinks about the boy, standing in the narrow kitchen regarding her other self with annoyance and resignation. Her other self does bad things, must have done bad things. This is why she is being punished now. What goes around...

Kicking a pile of clothes under her bed, but still resisting making the bed, she reaches for a denim jacket hanging on the baseboard of the bed and tailored to make her look tough. Sarah leaves the bedroom, leaves the house.

She doesn't have any projects she has to fill today, no clients to meet. Everything she needs to do to earn money is online and she can do that at night when the children are asleep or during the day, when she feels like it. She barely makes enough money for them this way, but she can't imagine being another way, having these restless urges seize her in some 9 to 5 job.

She goes to the coffee shop down the block. There's a long line and she watches the people in front of her. They seem confident, assured. Even the ones in sweatpants have an air of wearing haute couture. The woman in line in front of her is about Sarah's age. Her face is carefully tended with a layer of makeup, not a single pore visible. The woman's eyelashes are thick with mascara. Her lips glisten with a lipstick just a shade off from red. She sniffs periodically, making Sarah self-conscious about her two-day old clothes.

"Sir, can I get a drink started for you?"

Sarah starts when she realizes the teenager at the counter is talking to her. She wants to correct him, to say, "It's

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Ma'am," but this has been happening to her for a while. Her face makes it difficult to tell. Today the mistake seems symbolic. She tells him what she wants and she can see his discomfort. He's starting to wonder but doesn't quite know now what Sarah is. He asks her for a name and she says, "Sam," smiling viciously as she watches him struggling with the facts of her/him. Sarah smiles viciously and strides down to the counter where the coffees are served. Let him wonder, she thinks. When the kids are with her she makes more of an effort. It embarrasses them, this confusion people experience with her - it's as if it's Sarah's fault. As her mother points out often, the way she dresses doesn't help. When Sarah's out on errands with the girls she makes an effort, wears girly colors, blouses with frills or sequins, T-shirts with flowers or Disney characters on them. It's harder for her lately though. Even around the twins, she seems to care less.

It's only 10:00 and Sarah feels a stranger in her skin. She tries to convince herself that the dream is her real life and that this is really a dream, but she knows that she is posing. She tries to breathe in a meditative way. This is what an anxiety attack feels like, she thinks - the heart racing, the sweaty palms. But it's also what awakening from a very vivid dream feels like. She goes back to imagining that she's reversed things, that she's trying to awaken from the dream she's in now, to be back in the dark woods with its familiar sliding shadows.

She shakes her head to clear herself of this dazed, stunned feeling. She's across the street from a bookstore and latches onto the idea of spending some time in there, treating herself to something to read. She browses through the magazine section to look at travel magazines, trying to find an image that sparks familiarly against her retina. She sees a picture of a small town in Indiana, tries to see herself there. There's something familiar about the images, but Sarah has the sense of trying too hard, her effort clouding her vision. She's aware of false memories from TV talk shows, recollections that seem so strong and in the end are planted through the force of suggestion or wishful thinking. Memories

destroying entire lives completely as they take possession their victims. Is that what this is? A chemical imbalance in her brain or a bad meal that's left her with a dream so real she wants to abandon her real life to find it. If only she hadn't dreamt this before. Times ago. Many times. What does that mean? That the imbalance has created a neuronal pathway that fires again and again, the first time completely accidental.

She rubs a thumb over the picture, tries to see the man on the road in the forest, smelling the damp and fire-streaked air. From the dream, she snatches the man's memory of campfires smoldering. Up ahead, in his forest, she knows that there's a road, a small tributary that leads to the main highway. When he gets to it...

"Can I help you?" A perky voice startles her out of her reverie. A fresh-faced girl with suspicious eyes has moved to her side. She's holding a clipboard, taking stock of the books and magazines apparently. Sarah gapes at her. "No," Sarah says finally. She continues to hold the magazine, notices her thumb has left a fingerprint on its glossy surface. She shifts, plants her feet apart to stand her ground a few minutes more until the girl walks away.

It's noon now and though the time seems to be disappearing, Sarah still feels anxious. Most of the day is still looming ahead of her. She strides from the book store without intention, with just a need to do something, to rub against something, to create some friction that would allow her to feel present in her own life. She sees a bar starting to open and knows that it's early, too early for a mother of two young children to enter. She hesitates in the door. The darkness beckons her. A man brushes by her. He's wearing camouflage pants and a brown leather jacket, a baseball cap. She feels a twisting deep inside her. A predatory yearning. She walks into the darkness.

At the bar, there are three men. One of them reads a paper, and has a plate of French fries in front of him, the remains of a bloodied piece of meat. The two other men seem to be together, leaning into a pitcher of beer and an urgent whispered conversation. The booths are empty. A young man

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leans over one of the tables of the booths with a cloth and wipes it down in practiced, bored motions. Sarah catches her breath. She walks over to look at him, watches the bony protuberances of his collar bones, the lowered lids, the eyelashes long and slightly curled. “May I sit here?” she asks. The young man, a boy really, glances at her and at the other empty booths where he is not. He shrugs, frowning, and moves away to allow her to slide into the booth whose table he’s been wiping down. “Is there a menu?” she asks, hating the way her voice sounds, prim, girlish. At the sound of her voice, one of the men at the bar turns. “Hey, lady, are you sure you’re in the right place?” he asks her. His partner laughs. She flushes. She pitches her voice lower, “It’s none of your business is it?” she growls.

The man’s eyebrows lift and he raises his hands, a gesture of peace. He turns back to her partner. The boy at the booth slides a plastic-covered menu at her. The meals consist of appetizers and hamburgers. She orders a quesadilla plate and a beer. She takes the magazine she’s stolen from the bookstore from the inside of her jacket and flattens it on the table before her. She flicks through the pages, trying to find the picture again. When she looks up, the boy is back with a plate of folded tortilla triangles, flattened and oozing with cheese. She grunts a thanks but the boy’s already gone back to the bar to get her beer. She looks at the picture of the woods and tries to place the boy there on the road or in a house that’s hidden by stand of trees, somewhere to the right, out of the picture frame.

When she looks up, she sees the man in the camouflage pants. She takes in more of him. He’s tall, slender, but solid, the outlines of his muscles clearly visible through his shirt. He’s removed the baseball cap to reveal blond, tightly curled hair. The curls jar with the hard lines of his face so that she has to look at him again, take in the whole of him without the cap. She watches the man move towards the kitchen when the boy, her boy, comes out. The man reaches for the boy and places a hand on the back of the boy’s neck. It’s a gesture both proprietary and fond. The boy

shrugs him off but smiles, aware that he has some power here. Sarah wants to warn the boy that he doesn't have enough power, not to keep himself safe, and the man squeezes now, baring his teeth. He murmurs something into the boy's ear and the boy looks annoyed but then the man slips money into the boy's pocket and the boy shrugs off the man's hand.



The boy walks away from the man comes to her table with a chilled glass and a bottle of beer. He pours the beer and she wants to speak to him. "Hey, remember me," she imagines herself saying. "In another life, I knew you." More importantly she wants to stop him. To tell him how dangerous the man is, the boy leaning towards the man even now, yards away, trapped by the man's gravity. "You're not good for each other," she wants to say. Because to be fair the boy too was/is part of the man's downfall. Sarah knows this with more certainty than she knows the events in her own life. All this in seconds as the boy pours the beer with an expert amount of froth on top, already pivoting away as she murmurs a startled "Thank you," and the man who is slouching casually at the bar grins - at her or the boy - she can't tell. *It's too late*, she thinks.

The boy walks back to the man, the distance between them closing. With a casual gesture, the boy walks towards the exit by the bar. The man continues to sit at the bar for a moment, shelling some peanuts but not eating any of the meat. The shells lie scattered on the bar when he finally gets

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up to follow, walking slowly, carefully, the way a stalking animal moves.

Sarah presses her fingers against her eyes. Her hands feel icy and her eyes sting when she rubs against them. Sparks of light, like glimpses of sunlight through densely stacked trees, flash against her retina. She feels the leaving inside her, the aftermath from the dream, of doing the wrong thing. She hastily puts a twenty dollar bill by her plate and leaves the bar. The sunlight blinds her as she walks out and she turns her head towards the shadows of the alley behind the bar, where the boy and the man embrace. She's still, watching them, looking for - what ? Some spark of emotion between them. Something more than anger or a desire to find themselves by destroying each other. She wants to shout at them. To tell them to stop. If she makes a scene, she can probably send them running. It's that kind of town - certain types of behavior are not sanctioned in public. But she stands there mute and catches the man's eye as he embraces the boy. A certain recognition passes between them and the corners of his eyes crinkle as if he's laughing at her. She shivers and turns away. She walks away.

It takes her a long time to get home because she loses her bearings. When she finally arrives in her neighborhood, it's started raining. Her children are waiting at the front of the house, hunched in the doorway, damp from the rain, their faces snot-covered and red with the frustration of the abandonment they've come to expect from her. She's forgotten to leave the keys under the mat, forgotten to meet them at the bus stop. Forgotten them. She rushes to them and cries with them. It's not the response they want from her.

She fumbles for her keys in her pockets and finds them at last, feeling the slick surface of her house keys, she draws it out and holds it to her children like an offering. They sniffle and frown at her. She pushes the wrong key and then the right key into the lock, her hands shaking and finally gets the door open for them. They run up to their rooms to change out of their wet clothing and she hears them complaining about her as they stomp up the stairs.

Sarah presses the keys to her lips and shuts her eyes. Tries to breathe. She feels as if she's broken into a stranger's house, kidnapped some other woman's children. She tries to imagine her next steps. She decides to cook some food that will make the girls forgive her. She goes into the kitchen and reaches into the cupboards for a box of macaroni and cheese mix.

As she puts the water to boil, she calls her mother, who answers on the second ring. "Mom," Sarah says.

"What's wrong?" her mother asks, picking up on Sarah's tone, her own voice somewhat impatient.

"I am," Sarah says, trying for a joking manner. But it comes out as a sob. "I can't do this. Maybe I can send the girls to stay with you a bit?"

Her mother is quiet and Sarah hears the neighbors' sprinklers turn on.

As the water slaps briskly against the baked earth, Sarah hears her mother say, "I know things are hard for you." She wants to hear her mother say, "Anything you need. I love you Sarah. You're you. You're my child. That's always enough for me."

But what her mother says instead is, "You can't run away from your responsibilities, Sarah. We love those girls but we're no substitute for their mother. You need to try harder. For them."

Try harder.

She watches through the kitchen window her brown scorched lawn through the rainbow haze of water from the sprinklers across the street. There are patches of green where she haphazardly threw fertilizer.

She nods at the phone, and then she speaks, "Yes," she tells her mother. "Yes." She'll do this. Because what else is there to do?

She puts the macaroni into the boiling water. Adds the powdered cheese now, though she should wait until after she's drained the water. She watches the carrot-colored powder clump and stirs desperately to try to break up the clots. Then she gives up. She'll add more cheese later, after she drains

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the water. Some parmesan, because it's all she has. The girls will complain. They won't admit they like it even if it tastes more interesting.

In awhile, she'll go outside and turn on her own sprinklers. Maybe she'll even set the timer this time, so that the water turns on regularly, without her having to make the concession each time to her neighbors' collective will. And surely it's better not to fight so much.

And when she sleeps she'll dream.



A Short Course on Cloud Physics

Daniel Hudon

Clouds have always existed, though their true nature is poorly understood. They roam over the Earth at the mercy of the wind. They obscure the sun, cluster around mountaintops and bring the rain. They have tenuous, ephemeral lives. That much is known.

Sometimes defined as assemblies of tiny water droplets, clouds are much more than that. They are the integrated total of unrequited love of the people below. Naturally, tears are involved. Tears evaporate from individual hearts until they saturate the air above – a cloud begins to form. These unexpressed tears are not categorized into anger, pain, joy or grief. They are simply evaporated tears, ferried up to the cloud by the wind.

Evaporation relieves the burden of carrying around so many tears. Humans are weighed down with tears accumulated over a lifetime of missed opportunities, mistakes and longings. In quiet moments, they look into the distance and think, “I should have...” and “If only...” and a tear is unexpressed. Most people don’t think about it and shed their unexpressed tears subconsciously.

Inside the cloud, the tears coalesce into larger water droplets. They lose whatever identity they had. In a sense, they become communal.

Once a cloud begins to form above a village, it increases in strength and is able to absorb more unexpressed tears. When a parent worries over his teenaged children who are out at night, his unease is absorbed by the cloud. When a woman frets over the honesty of her lover, her anxiety is absorbed by the cloud. Every soul who is lonely and longs for companionship, this longing is absorbed by the cloud. Finally,

the cloud can hold these tears no longer, and bursts. Rain falls.

Because the tears are communal, the rain is always fresh. No one recognizes the tears as ones they used to own. The tears are free and fall of their own relief. They splash down to the Earth, redeeming all with their solvency. When the cloud is rained out, the wind pushes it along. Soon the process repeats all over again.

In this way, clouds look after all of us.



Letter From A Saugus Muse

Tom Sheehan



Jesus, Thomas, take my hand again! Walk the field with me. We belong together, you and I. Dispel me of doom. Let the music of words come, let them dance in your eye, roll on your tongue, live to die on the page. Let them vibrate on your spine, get kissed of your skin, shoot out of here in flight of geese, and mournful sound of heading home when there is no home, steaming freight train whistle calling you from a circle of blue nights, self shout at the moon shining on a hill east of Cleveland, South of Yang-du, east a long stretch from the Chugach given in a word picture, west of cliffs near Kerry, rain moving as a god laughing at rootstock of silence, Celtic mummery, God buried in stone.

If you can't come with me, Thomas, you're the loser, lonely, forsaken. I can take you back to the hard places, to adjectives and verb ends; to the quadrangle in Japan in 1951 and the cool wind coming through Camp Drake and the voice

of death talking in it and calling Maciag's name (Body Hunger) and Salazar (Arab Dagger) and Captain Kay (Memphis Peon) and Billy Pigg (Cowpoke) and Stony Mason (Pennsy Slateman) and Anadazio (Bread You Can't Imagine) and Dan Bertelsen (AKA The Knife) and you listened and it didn't talk your name and you felt sad and knew you were the only ear. In three weeks they were all gone, and their voices went into ground, and all their words, and they built on the word rock and now they still dance sadly... such words that make you cry with music still in them, and they come slowly out of another time funnel, like Billy Pigg saying, "Shit," as he rolled over in your arms and Captain Kay saying, "I just want to go home for a little while and tell Merle and Andy I love them. Just for an hour or so."

Do you remember, later, far from the Land of the Morning Calm, the room in Ireland, that space of pewter walls, made hard by the anvil? The spark spray of peacock's fire, head-tucked-under-wing smell ripe as working acids, dead melons; tin-plated, throat-sucking water weaving its skin of iron dust thick as magnetized talcum; the unknown and unsure shapes of heat, cool in its third form, introducing friction to matter, the sound a gulping sizzle swallowing bar, freezing form, and the voice of the man at the end of the hammer and the end of your poem, saying, "That poem, my man, is iron. You made a good pour, a good draw. You beat it well. It's iron." And all the words come out of ground, out of rock, erupt and blow at you.

I am Saugus. I can make you cry. I remember more than you the sound of silence just before the word breaks. I am the edge of all things, the point of it all, Saugus.

Two Poems

Christopher Barnes

Fin

There is a Tiger shark in the port.
Below the flattening comma
And tail of a comet's
Pinking sky.

Fog will rubberize,
Into a crease-resistant whole.
This is the deck
On which he'll dull and croak.

First Date

These dams
 On which we edge
 Suffocate.
 That star –
 Studded lip,
My temper tingles.



Look at the long range –
 An eagle leering.

Kisses
Are promises shocked.
Those bell-bottoms tighten.

 Come-again-chaos,
Breath-spent impatience.



Secret Industry
Peter Schwartz

Two Stories

CL Bledsoe

Rain

It is raining again. I need groceries. I have work later, but I can't go out. I'm made of sugar. You think that's funny? You've never been caught in a light drizzle and felt your face melt. I have. It's hideous. Nose dripping into chin, eyes drooping, one twice the size of the other. Nothing to do but bake a new one. Laugh. You think it's funny. Mom told me, life isn't always sweet. Not always.

Pizza Den

Kirk Cameron works at Guido's Pizza Den; that's why I get a discount on pizza. He is researching a role for a movie about an out of work actor who works at a pizza place. Kirk Cameron lives in an apartment he rents from a troll in a cave under the bridge in front of Pizza Den. When I cross the bridge, it rattles and Kirk knows a customer is coming. I'm not the only customer he gets, but I'm the best looking. He told me that during a screening of "Left Behind IV: Son of Apocalypse." He told me that so I would tip more. I am not a fool.

Kirk Cameron drives a Volvo. He bought it when he worked on "Growing Pains." Kirk Cameron doesn't buy American, but he plans ahead. Kirk's favorite song is "Time is on My Side," by the Rolling Stones. Usually, Kirk doesn't listen to rock, but a techie on the set of "Growing Pains" used to listen to the Stones. Kirk likes it for the memories. He likes to think back to when he felt things. He's not a romantic, but he's familiar with the concept.

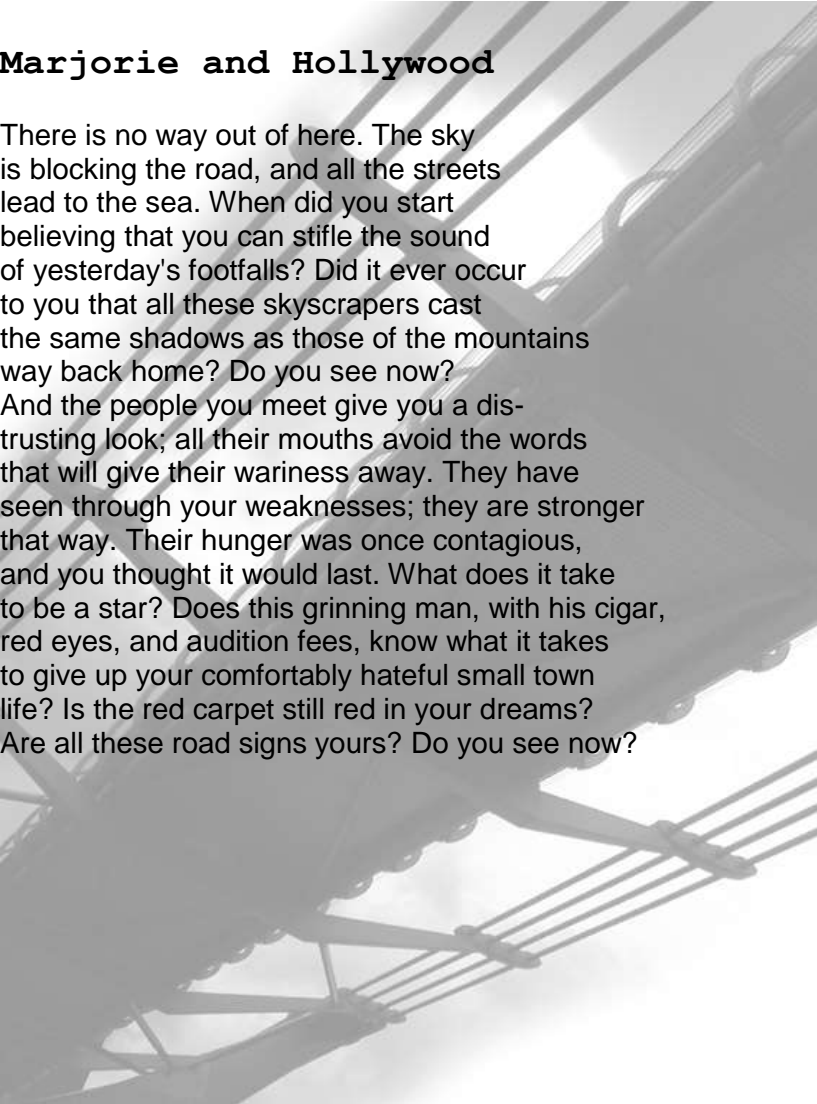
Kirk learned to make pizza from the troll, who is the owner of the Pizza Den. The troll's name isn't Guido; it's Terrence. Kirk thinks of Terrence as a sort of grudging father figure. Terrence considers Kirk a has-been, really, a never-was. Kirk pays his rent. He makes pizza. The customers like him; they come back. This is what Terrence cares about. Terrence doesn't think about the way Kirk's body moves under his uniform. He doesn't stay late, sifting through the soiled aprons, trying to catch Kirk's scent. He doesn't daydream. He counts pepperoni, turns the thermostat down, and thinks about the martini he's going to make when he gets off work. He'll drink it in the hot-tub he bought with the money he stole from Kirk's tips. The boy can act, Terrance will admit, but he can't count.



Three Poems

Kristine Ong Muslim

Marjorie and Hollywood



There is no way out of here. The sky is blocking the road, and all the streets lead to the sea. When did you start believing that you can stifle the sound of yesterday's footfalls? Did it ever occur to you that all these skyscrapers cast the same shadows as those of the mountains way back home? Do you see now? And the people you meet give you a distrustful look; all their mouths avoid the words that will give their wariness away. They have seen through your weaknesses; they are stronger that way. Their hunger was once contagious, and you thought it would last. What does it take to be a star? Does this grinning man, with his cigar, red eyes, and audition fees, know what it takes to give up your comfortably hateful small town life? Is the red carpet still red in your dreams? Are all these road signs yours? Do you see now?

The Jar That Contains My Eye

clinks on purpose
again and again.
It cannot sleep
for it is on fire.

It cannot scream;
all roads lead
to doors that lead
to other roads,

and in this maze
my visions
are slowly being
forgiven.

The jar is supposed
to catch
all the berries
that I have picked,

all the berries
that do not exist.
From scratch,
the jar builds itself

to get to the brim
that will limit
what the jar
can contain.

Dark House

This was where you grew up
and left your ghosts everyday
when you went to school.
This was where you took your first step,
uttered your first word, nurtured hatred
like a favorite twin. On its mirrors,
you saw what you were
if you only stared long enough
to believe what you had seen.
The reflected images yielded
their meanings to you until
you could not look at them anymore.
You still ignored the windows; they
had nothing to do with you.



Identity Unfolding

Julie Ann Shapiro



1. The Lure

The smell of roasted beans in the shop makes my stomach belch. I suppress it as I sit down by the girl with the long brown hair. I check the baby. He's asleep. A shot of whiskey did the trick.

I adjust his blanket; a little blue, a little pink; how maternal of me. He breathes in winds of whisper; sweet baby dreams. Well, he is my kid, well sort of, that is. The dead beat, Jack couldn't make rent this month. I told him we needed to do something.

He said, "Take my sister's kid out; take her out, will you?"



Neon

2. The Object

I watch the brown haired girl type on her computer; words of magic, mystery they unfold on her screen. I never did get past the second year of high school. I read over her shoulder in her story how a whole town weeps when the angel stature is destroyed.

I glance at the woman's purse. It's not leaning against her at all, but is on the floor by her feet. I reach down to adjust the baby's blanket. Our eyes meet. She motions to the baby, "Oh, what a sweet sleeping angel."

"Yes," I smile with waxed maternal pride.

The girl's cell phone rings. She answers it. I fiddle with the baby's blanket. One quick tug; the purse is underneath the stroller.

The smile stays locked on my cheeks. I can smile all day like this, although my cheeks are shaking as I push the stroller out of the coffee shop.



3. The mirror

The brown haired girl's driver's license is in my hand as I look in the mirror. I dyed my hair just like hers. No more gray. I'm young now.

Jack calls from down the hall, "Did you get some for the kid; white trash baby might be worth something."

"The baby's not a pawn, Jack."

It cries in the background.

Jack says, "What's that and what'd you do to your hair?"

"I dyed it and went to the library. I checked me out a book on chess. See in chess a pawn is one of the weakest players. The real brains play it, whole lot of cash with that game."

"So where is it? And what's with the fucking library?"

"Nothing, you'd understand."

I toss him the fifteen dollars from the girl's wallet and walk out the door.



4. The Identity

Driver license, credit cards, a glam watch with diamonds; these are the valuables I found in the girl's purse. I stare at her driver's license and practice signing her name. My hands shake. The rightie, the leftie, I can't keep either of them still.

Jack told me before how I could get a thousand bucks for credit cards and someone's ID on the Net. I left him, I remind myself.



Neon

5. The confusion

I see the halos. No, I'm not dead, not dead," I shout.

"I should hope not, 'cause I'll give you \$500 for it."

"IT? Oh, you mean, the angel baby, that's not for sale, not for sale."

"Ma'm, you're dreaming in my lazy boy recliner. You're in a pawn shop, remember?"

"Oh."

I open my eyes and inhale the stale whiskey on my breath.

A man in faded jeans and a Budweiser shirt says to me, "Ma'am, I said I'd give you \$500 bucks for the watch."

"Yeah, yeah fine. And a chess set to go with it and some scissors."

"That'll knock down the price to \$450, anything else Ma'm?"

"That'll be it. No, wait...can't I just use the scissors for a sec?"

"Sure ma'am. " I tap on my pocket with the ID and credit cards. This girl writes about angels.





The Most Nervous Thing
Peter Schwartz

Four Poems

Joseph Goosey

86 ' d

There is nothing here.

Do not query about when the
Barbecue will be finished.

Do not wear your University
Clothing.

We know, we know...
It's more difficult than the most searing
of theoretical coals beneath the
feet but we did not write the code
we only comment upon its
atrocities.

There is absolutely nothing here for you.

Leave the platform,
Walk the plank,
Spit out the water
into a bucket
and return it in an envelope
to the following address.

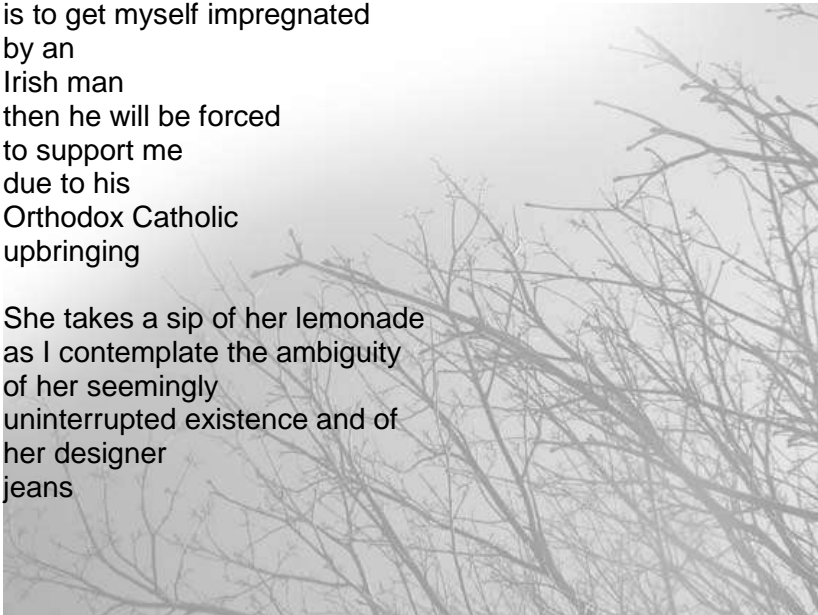
you are finished.

**And To Think, I Used To Buy Her Ice
Cream**

Her black hair
hangs out
around her
chest and as she sat
in a hammock
next to the pond
the bugs
ate away
at my
digits

My new plan,
she explained,
is to get myself impregnated
by an
Irish man
then he will be forced
to support me
due to his
Orthodox Catholic
upbringing

She takes a sip of her lemonade
as I contemplate the ambiguity
of her seemingly
uninterrupted existence and of
her designer
jeans



Neon

Notes Taken While Watching The 11 O'clock News

Stuck with no water
in a room full of folks
whose
fav
piece of literature is "The Da Vinci
Code"
(Not that I pride myself
in anything
literary but can't a man
breath some clean
air?)

Blue lights
flashing atop Ford four door
sedans that are
occupied by overweight
men who are under the impression
that existing is the
"In" thing
to do

tell me that you like my eyes
and fix a panini in the
toaster oven

and maybe I won't
blow this entire
scene

blah.



Author Bios

Sarah Hilary - Author of "The Pheasant Feather Hat"

Sarah's stories have been published by *Velvet Mafia*, *MYTHOLOG*, *Heavy Glow*, *Apollo's Lyre*, *Twisted Tongue*, *Four Volts*, *Neon* and the *Boston Literary Magazine*. Her short story, *On the line*, was published in the Daunt Books 2006 anthology. She won the Litopia "Winter Kills" Contest in 2007. Sarah lives in the Cotswolds with her husband and young daughter. Website: www.writewords.org.uk/sarah_hilary/

Peter Schwartz - Author of "The Longest Life," "Little December," and "One Formula (And Another)"

Peter Schwartz is the editor of 'eye' and the associate art editor of *Mad Hatters' Review*. His artwork can be seen all over the Internet but specifically at: www.sitrahahra.com. His paintings have been published on such sites as *HiNgE*, *Subtle Tea*, and *Mastodon Dentist*. His paintings are in the print journals *Orange Coast Review*, *Whiskey Island*, and the *Louisiana Review* to name a few. He has over 200 poems published in such journals as *Porcupine*, *Vox*, and *Sein und Werden*. His fiction has been published on such sites as *Pindeldyboz* and *Dogmatika*. His last exhibition was through *Aesthetica Magazine* and featured a projection of one of his digital paintings on a busy street in York, UK. Currently he is working on paintings for an exhibit at the Amsterdam Whitney Gallery in Chelsea NYC.

Graham Burchell - Author of "Akela," and "Great Grandmother Ethel Davis"

Graham Burchell was born in 1950 in Canterbury, England but now writes from his home in Houston, Texas. He is the winner of the 2005 Chapter One Promotions Open Poetry

Competition, Winner of the 2006 Hazel Street Productions Poetry Contest, the runner up in the 2005 *'Into Africa'* International Poetry Competition and a runner up in the 2006 Ware Open Poetry Competition. He was also nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize. His poetry has appeared in many print and online literary magazines. His first poetry collection *'From The Right Side of the Pond'* (Sun Rising Press) and his second *'Vermeer's Corner'* (Foothills Publishing) will be published this year. He is the editor of the online poetry journal, *Words-Myth*.

Dianne Rees - Author of "This Other Life"

Dianne Rees is a writer who lives in Southern California. Her works have appeared in *Vestal Review* (nominated for a Pushcart Prize), *Spillway Review*, *Farmhouse Magazine*, *The Scruffy Dog Review*, *Planet Magazine*, *Universe Pathways*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The Harrow*, *Halfway Down the Stairs* and *AtomJack*.

Daniel Hudon - Author of "A Short Course on Cloud Physics"

Daniel Hudon teaches natural science to humanities students at Boston University. He writes for kids science magazines and his first book, *"The Bluffer's Guide to the Cosmos,"* will be published in the fall of 2007 by Oval Books (UK). He has published more than two dozen literary travel stories in *Descant*, *The New Quarterly*, *Grain*, *The Antigoniish Review*, and most recently in *Eclectica Magazine*, and has work coming up in *Bayou Magazine* and *Cezanne's Carrot*. Presently inspired by the writings of Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, he is working on pieces similar to the one appearing here in *Neon*.

Tom Sheehan -Author of "Letter from a Saugus Muse"

Neon

Tom Sheehan's *Epic Cures*, (short stories), from Press 53 won a 2006 *IPPY Award* from Independent Publishers. *A Collection of Friends*, (memoirs), 2004 from Pocol Press, was nominated for PEN America Albrend Memoir Award). His fourth poetry book, *This Rare Earth & Other Flights*, issued by Lit Pot Press, 2003. Print mysteries are *Vigilantes East* and *Death for the Phantom Receiver*. *An Accountable Death* is serialized on 3amMagazine.com. Six novels seek publication. He has nominations for eight Pushcart Prizes and two Million Writers Awards, a Silver Rose Award from ART for short story excellence, and many Internet appearances.

Christopher Barnes - Author of "Fin," and "First Date"

"In 1998 I won a Northern Arts writers award. In July 2000 I read at Waterstones bookshop to promote the anthology '*Titles Are Bitches*'. Christmas 2001 I debuted at Newcastle's famous Morden Tower doing a reading of my poems. Each year I read for Proudwords lesbian and gay writing festival and I partake in workshops. 2005 saw the publication of my collection *LOVEBITES* published by Chanticleer Press, 6/1 Jamaica Mews, Edinburgh.

On Saturday 16th August 2003 I read at the Edinburgh Festival as a Per Verse poet at LGBT Centre, Broughton St. I also have a BBC web page

www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/gay.2004/05/section_28.shtml

and http://www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/videonation/stories/gay_history.shtml (if first site does not work click on SECTION 28 on second site.

Cl Bledsoe - Author of "Rain," and "Pizza Den"

Cl Bledsoe has work in *Hamilton Stone Review*, *The Dead Mule*, *Istanbul Literary Magazine* and *Cautionary Tales*. His first collection, *Anthem*, is forthcoming this fall. He is an editor for *Ghoti Magazine* <http://www.ghotimag.com>

Kristine Ong Muslim - Author of "Marjorie and Hollywood," "The Jar That Contains my Eye," and "Dark House"

More than 450 of Kristine Ong Muslim's poems and stories have appeared or are forthcoming in over 150 publications worldwide. Her poetry has appeared in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *GlassFire Magazine*, *Elimae*, *Noneuclidean Café*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Thieves Jargon*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Turnrow*, and *Void Magazine*. Her publication credits can be found here (<http://www.freewebs.com/blackroom8>)

Julie Ann Shapiro - Author of "Unfolding Identity"

Published stories and essays have appeared in the *Diego Union Tribune*, *North County Times*, *Los Angeles Journal*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Sacred Waters/Fire: (Adams Media 2005)*, *Story South*, *Word Riot*, *Opium Magazine*, *Insolent Rudder*, *Elimae*, *Cezzane's Carrots*, *Mad Hatters Review*, *The 2nd Hand*, *Ghoti*, *Spoiled Ink*, *Void*, *Footsteps to Oxford*, *Salome*, *Skive*, *The 2nd Hand*, *Millennium Shift*, *Mega Era Magazine*, *Science Fiction and Fantasy World*, *Green Tricycle*, *Long Story Short*, *All Things Girl*, *Ultimate Hallucination*, *The Glut*, *Somewhat*, *Uber*, *Moon Dance*, *The Quarterly Staple*, *Journal of Modern Post*, *Rumble*, *Long Story Short*, *Cellar Door Magazine* (Spring and Summer Issues 2005), *Edifice Wrecked*, *Espresso Fiction*, *Flash Fiction – Coffee Cup Series Issue I & II* and *ISM Quarterly*.

Joseph Goosey - Author of "86'd", "And to Think, I Used to Buy Her Ice Cream," and "Notes Taken While Watching the 11 O'clock News"

Joseph Goosey lives around Jacksonville, Florida. He loves his 2 cats as well as a girl who has red hair. He has upcoming work in "*The Round Table Review*", "*Locust*", and "*ESC!*"

If you enjoyed the work in this issue, visit the website to find out more about the authors who contributed, or to submit your own work.

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