The Red Wheelbarrow
"There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before."

-Willa Cather
paper plate, adding pickles, mustard, and onions to one, ketchup and relish to the other. A handful of potato chips from a large bowl that looked like it had been melted in a dishwasher completed the meal.

The waitress served the men and returned to the grill, picked up her spatula and began to prepare mine. "Anything on it?" she asked. "Mayonnaise, lettuce, and tomato, please," I said.

The waitress reached for a knife on a shelf under the grill counter. The shelf overflowed with dirty pots and pans. She began cutting the lettuce and tomatoes with a stained knife.

On the wall there was a red and white Coca Cola clock, which was ten minutes slow. Below the clock, a sign, green with gold metallic letters read: "In God We Trust...All Others Pay Cash." Yellowed wedding photographs bordered the sign. All I could see through the splatters of grease and dirt were outlines of faces: dancing, eating cake.

Setting the hamburger down in front of me, she asked, "Anything else?"

"Coffee," I said. She poured my coffee into a chipped mug, and put it down next to my hamburger. Then dropped packages of sugar and Cremora onto the counter as an afterthought. One Cremora package broke and drained onto the counter. The waitress turned, pretending not to see it. Hitting her back to me, I could picture the pink lipstick on her downturned mouth. I watched the Cremora spread over the counter, as it concentrated around the sticky places.

My hamburger tasted like it looked: grey with whitish specks in it, the texture of window caulking. After one cautious bite, I put it back on my plate and ate the potato chips instead. On the counter, an old pecan pie was displayed under a plastic dome. The scratched plastic almost totally obscured the pie from view. I considered ordering a piece, but the waitress had returned to the men, and resumed her one-sided conversation.

"I tell ya, being married to that man has led me to nothin' but grief. He wouldn't know how to support himself if there were 20 jobs for every man around. He just doesn't think like that." She sighed and slowly shook her head. "But I tell ya: What can I do?"

"Anything else I can get you boys?"

I drank my coffee from the chipped rim of the cup and gazed ahead of me at the wedding photos. In one, the couple was standing posed under a wood canopy. After looking at length, I could almost make out the figures. The young woman, standing next to the tall man in a grey suit, appeared short, her waxy face smooth under bleached hair. Her bright pink lips laughed at the camera.
The sign in the window, written on a pizza cardboard, promised "World's Best Hamburgers." As I stepped into the restaurant, the air was even muggier than outside. Passing two old men, the only other customers in the diner, I chose a stool at the counter; it was grey formica, and sticky, as if someone had poured maple syrup on it and let it dry. The red vinyl stools swiveled under my weight, threatening to fall off at any moment. They reminded me of the kiddie rides I used to love at carnivals.

The grill was only about six feet away from where I sat, and two World's Best Hamburgers burned on its surface. From their pungent odor, I wasn't sure I wanted to try one.

As if reading my thoughts, a woman with a grey apron on emerged from the back room, her high nasal voice, like the sound of an arrow being released from its bow, preceded her into the room. "...Yeah, he was arrested last night for drunkin' disorderly," she spoke, and at first I thought to me. But then I realized her words were directed to the two old men at the front of the restaurant, who until she came out, had been conversing quietly between themselves. She spoke to them, seeming to continue a conversation never interrupted. "I tell ya, if you ask me, he could rot there for the rest of his life, for all he's worth. I guess I'll have to go down there and bail him out, though. And I tell ya, what thanks do I get? Last week he tried to set the house on fire. With me in it. What'll it be next? I tell ya..." She continued talking, sometimes punctuating a sentence with flicks of her pudgy wrist, or resting a fist on her hip. She was a short woman, with straight bleached hair and greying roots. Her face was like melting wax, sagging around mouth and eyes. Her lips were painted bright pink, the color belonging to a young woman. The whole time I watched her, though, she never smiled. Her frown seemed a permanent part of her.

She returned to the grill to turn the meat over and now she was only a few feet away from me. I could see the fine, dark hair on her arms and neck, as she flipped the meat. She asked me over her shoulder: "Some- thin I can get ya?"

"A hamburger," I said. Almost before the words were out of my mouth, the waitress had slapped a raw patty on the grill. It fell to the iron with a hiss, and smoke began drifting up into the vent about the grill. She transferred the two already cooked hamburgers to a bleached bun on a
Last night I was out cruising with Andrea in her red Torino. Andrea pays less attention to the road than to the boys in front of the Party Store. Cars creep past each other; Andrea blares the horn when a car full of strapping football stars passes. (I tell her once more that football teams and Party Store boys bore me. I say they run on liquor and dirty gym socks.) Tonight I'll stay home, write letters to New Jersey or type up a sonnet. Unless of course, the phone rings, and Andrea says she'll pick me up in the Torino, eight sharp.
Julie Jurrejens

ON WHY ALL GREAT ARTISTS ARE MALE

Miss Peavy strains for the shelf, reaches eighteen egg cartons and eighteen boxes of crayons.

The boys draw green and blue tulips, discuss "Space Invaders" as lines sprawl over the cartons. The girls draw red and yellow tulips. They draw lines first and color within them. Miss Peavy says: "The girls are neat; they stay within the lines."

Jack Driscoll

THE SUMMER MY BROTHER AND I GOT BB GUNS

Those days we shot BB's through the paper lungs of kites, through dark cellar windows, splinters of glass healing the wounds in our tamed hearts.

We love to hang bottles on the branches of trees, the muscles in our eyes straining against the dim light of the rain.

Sometimes we selected each other's targets: another blue jay screeching at the feeder, the white diamond dead center between the horse's brilliant eyes.

Afternoons we shot the red lips of women from magazines the BB's spitting paper into the tall grass. We snickered as we walked towards home, the shade moving slowly up our sleeves.

At night, on our beds, we polished the wooden stocks, sighted even sleep down the gun-blue barrels, the summer wind through the screen moving in unnoticed to protect us.
Jay R. Tomaszewski

MOVING NOWHERE

Housekeeper Betty
takes me in under wing,
confides that her husband Frank,
a twenty three year man,
can't get the same vacation time
in May.
She turnbolts her body,
holds up the lobby desk
eyes transfixed in disbelief.
Tells me, "that's all you can do.
You don't dare say anything. Ever."

Tonight she and Frank will eat pork,
watch the fat man stuff rags
in his mouth.
They never realize the dishwasher switch,
blender button, and microwave are
their umbilical life lines.
They will be cut off.

Julie Jurrjens

EVERY EVENING

When the sun's rays tangle themselves
in tree branches, and playground shouts
are echoes gone home
with children for dinner,
an old man shuffles
to the rusted metal chair
he calls his own. He opens the copy
of Lee's Last Stand that he's been reading
a year now.

His fingers find the page
with the folded corner,
but he stares at the red and yellow
monkey bars, remembers
a boy at this park
who squealed, upside down from monkey bars,
who wore green, who shuffled
only in a game, a dance.

And this chair, this rusty chair?
Was it there when the boy was?
The old man does not know.
Such things don't matter, don't matter.
He strokes the arms of the chair
As he would a cat, sees
the sun has given up on red
and orange and left a faint bruise
on grey sky. The old man
feels the night wind
and tries several times
before he rises from the metal chair.

He holds his closed book,
makes his slow way to a single room,
memories trailing behind, fading
as he thinks of the canned soup
he'll heat tonight if he gets around to it.
TEMPORARY LAPSE INTO GENDER CONFUSION: LAST THURSDAY

I considered dressing like a man for the rest of my life. I would be pulling a gender-bender, so to say. No more lifting pinkies when sipping from teacups. No more mascara, no more nylons and perfume. I would dress like a man, but gender's already bent all to hell, and I find it difficult to lapse into anything original.

Julie Jurrjens

backs of two turtles. The grey trench coat was open, and Chris could see his blue-and-red band uniform with gold buttons down the front. Chris was glad that her old man belonged to this band. She saw on her right another man, this one playing a beaver's tail, crystal notes shimmered like fairy lights blinking in the night. Next to the beaver were three white ducks which glowed iridescently. When their backs were pressed, they chugged notes deeper than tubas. Chris was delighted with the band, and the dark haired woman smiled and kissed her on the cheek. Today was a rose day.

But the roses could not stay. Something was wrong. Chris could feel it, just as she could feel a storm pressing in before the first cloud appeared. Then she saw it, the snake again, crossing the smooth, grey floor of the bandstand. The snake was coming closer. Chris reached out to the old man in the trench coat, but he just waved to her and stayed safe in the tulips with his turtles.

The dark haired woman seemed unafraid. She touched Chris' hair. "Listen to the band," she said and leaned back in the roses, letting the music take charge. Today, after all, was a red day. But, no, she thought uneasily, the old man was there in the tulips. The old man came on yellow days. Today must be a yellow day.

Chris wanted a red day. The snake came closer. He wanted a red day, too. Chris listened to the music, to the music from the book her mother had read so long ago, and the snake crawled up her leg, settled into her skin. Smooth as music, crawled the snake, silver over her arm. Each time the cymbals crashed, the snake made its own silver mark in her skin. The silver snake left a trail red as roses that washed over her hand, and Chris watched the old man and yellow tulips drown in her red day.

They were completely gone, the old man and the tulips, when Chris felt someone grab her clean wrist. "Chris what have you done to yourself?" It was Mrs. Anderson from next door. "I...I don't know." Chris looked at her arm. "We're taking you to the hospital, young lady. Where is your father?" Chris said nothing. "I'm going to get a towel. You stay here." Mrs. Anderson took the paring knife with her. "Okay." Chris watched Mrs. Anderson cross the lawn and run into her house. Then she hung her head and closed her eyes, hoping for some peculiar, soothing music. No sounds came, but when she opened her eyes, she saw a red rose with a gold stem lying in the leaves. Everything would be all right now. It was a red rose day.
Chris fought back tears. "But Dad, you know I try to help you all the time." Tears ran down her cheeks.

He stared at her, confused by the tears and when he answered, sympathy mixed with self pity. "Oh, Baby, Don't cry. Your eyes look black like your mother's when you cry." He stood on one foot, then the other. "See here now, I was going to cut some roses for your mother -- for the cemetery, you know." He handed her the paring knife he always used. "But maybe you'd rather do it. We'll go out there today, okay?"

Her father turned to walk across the lawn to the house. "You know," he said, "we've got to start keeping this lawn up better. It's only been six months, but it looks like no one's touched it in years."

Chris put the paring knife in her sweatshirt pocket, then started raking the leaves towards her. She'd barely begun a good-sized pile when the rake handle started to melt. She squeezed it harder, and it fell limp in her hands. Then it slipped to the ground and wiggled under the leaf pile, as fluid and elusive as a snake.

The snake wanted to coil around her legs and pull her down. Chris looked up from the leaves for a moment and saw that the old man had come again to the yellow tulips. He smiled and raised his hands, but he would not help. She wanted to run from the snake but the leaves were waist high now and she could not move through them.

Just as she was about to give up and let the snake pull her down, the leaves turned to rose petals and Chris moved freely through them. The snake was gone, and Chris saw instead a woman with white skin and black eyes sitting under a mushroom. When the wind blew, the tips of the woman's long black hair turned into ravens that flew away. The woman with dark eyes reached to Chris, and when their hands clasped, the woman snuggled against Chris' body and fell asleep. Chris waved her fingers through the long, black hair until finally the woman awoke and gave to Chris a red rose with a gold stem. When Chris rubbed the soft petals against her cheek, she heard the faint, searching mews of a newborn kitten.

The woman with white skin and dark eyes led her into a field of red roses. The two stopped before a bandstand in the middle of the field. Chris wanted the peculiar, soothing music to play forever. She looked at the dark-haired woman, wondering what instruments the musicians played. "They are animals." The woman answered Chris' unspoken question. Then Chris realized she was listening to an old-man-animal-band, one just like the musical band in the favorite book her mother had read to her when she was small.

A toothless, grinning man in a lavender band suit was playing a hen. When the man pulled her wings, the hen squawked an egg-shaped note. Chris laughed and settled down in the roses to watch the show. She looked up and to the left and saw her own, familiar old man surrounded by yellow tulips. He used a pair of tulips to play a rhythm on the
Sul'mertime
floats
through my mind
carrying sand
and seagulls
into winter.

Thunder and rain knock
against my bedroom window
waking me from my dreams.
They want to enter
from the starless, dark night.
They want to be warm
and dry like me.

Never cry
while lying in bed
staring
at the ceiling,
for you will get tears
in your ears.

Maura Troester
CHILDREN'S POEMS

Summer time
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Maura Troester
A RED ROSE DAY

The old man was outside again, waiting for her in his grey hat and
trench coat. Today was a yellow day. The old man always arrived on yellow
days. Today, as always, he stepped through the tulips without harming one
of them. He stood in the middle of the tulip bed holding his hands out,
palms upwards. Sometimes the lines of his hands would talk to her in
different languages. Today they spoke in French.

"Tu est tres ver fe." The old man's hands continued, "Mais je ne sais
pas que vous dites." Chris had studied enough French to know his hands were
saying something about green, but they moved too quickly for her to catch
the full meaning.

She put her hands on top of his outstretched palms. The words traveled
up her arm, danced around her brain. She could almost understand. The old
man's hands were as soft as her grandfather's had been, when he helped her
to be brave and not cry at her mother's funeral last spring and Chris wanted
to hold tight to this old man's hands, but they grew warm and began to melt
as her father's voice cut through the space around her.

"Chris, why are you standing in those leaves? I told you to rake them,
not stand in them. How many times do I have to tell you to pay attention
to what you're doing?"
The old man in the trench coat faded into the background. Chris said
nothing. When anger and alcohol brewed in her father's eyes, she knew
better than to talk back.

"You're getting as absent-minded as your mother was before she took...
Damn it, Chris look at me when I'm talking to you."
Chris looked around for the old man with the trench coat, but he was
gone. The yellow tulips stood tall and untouched. Chris stayed quiet as
her mother always had when her father started in. But it helped her no
more than it had her mother. Her father was building up to a full head
to steam.

"I've spent as much time as I'm going to, trying to talk some sense
in your head. You either get these leaves raked in the next twenty minutes
or I'll put you on the bus to your Aunt Julia's house."
"Dad" Chris knew she couldn't leave this house, this yard. Then she
would not have the tulips. She couldn't leave the tulips. "Dad I can't
leave I'll get behind in school I'm trying real hard to get all B's
and I don't want to live with Aunt Julia; she's too moody."
"Well, it's too much for one man to raise a teenage girl alone.
You straighten up and fly right or I'll send you off somewhere."
EXCHANGE

and in each breath is the rhythm of your body
the measure of your steps  the curve
of your fingers bending

you look long past me
your breath catching  your glance
pulling at the wall

your breath enters the air which knows
how we all are naked with your breath
you gather the shape of white linen sheets
cool at my entering touch

you gather our nakedness in each breath
is the rhythm of our bodies

My sister and I stood closely by our grandfather. Watching
his tall frame as he bent slightly to inspect a bunch of ripening
grapes, I noticed that his faded flannel shirt, pulling tightly
around his middle, was about to lose its bottom button. Turning
to us he stooped lower, the heavy odor of alcohol warmed my face.
Deep lines creased his forehead, his face calloused by the wind.
His bare scalp was tanned and spotted from the sun.

"Grandpa," Lori interrupted, "where did all your hair go?"
The old man's face broke into an intricate pattern of lines. As
he smiled his face matched the gnarled grapevines that surrounded
us. Laughter pulled the button tighter. He swept my sister from
the ground and rested her on his hip.

"Well Lori," he began, "one day a long time ago, I was out
in that field an along comes this big wind. It was so strong that
it just took my hair right off of my head, just like that."
Lori giggled. "No, it's true," the wrinkles smoothed from his
face and his eyes sharpened, "so when a big wind starts comin' an
the sky turns grey, you best be runnin' inside before you lose all
that pretty golden hair, and end up just like your old grandpa
here." He looked hard at Lori then down toward me, and for an
instant, I thought I saw him wink.
Curt Rideout

HUNTING AFTERHOURS, THE MOON HIDDEN BY THE TREES

And hasn't the night taken us all
to the side of the road
where a car pulls off onto gravel,
where wheels stir the angry green leaves.
The driver lifts a gun from the seat,
makes a second check for his shotgun shells.

This man enters the woods with a Jack Daniels glow,
his flashlight following fresh deer tracks.
He waits under an oak until a buck
comes to drink from the slow stream before them.
The man leans forward to press shells into blued chambers,
his finger pushing the safety catch off:

He remembers his fiance that calls on weekends, whispering
that she will be back when she works things out.
The look on his father's face as he spoke
of leaving the family to look for work.
His friend who went canoeing at night,
to be found in the morning, pulled from heavy water.

The trigger remains still, the air left silent.
This man places his gun on the ground,
turning to walk under the shadows
to follow his boot tracks to the road.

And when he returns empty handed,
he will get into his car, he will drive past
other abandoned cars from which we all
walk alone into this silent forest.

Deirdre Kovac

THE SEARCH

When the sky darkens above the water,
the wind cold and heavy,
I look for you, knowing you are not what I want to find.

I listen for your breath
in the silence of deep snow,
for your laughter
in the rustle of leafless trees
for your footsteps
in the air that hangs still below the wind.
And when I reach to touch you
like water thirsting on the lake bed
I know that I can never find you.
A SIXTH OF A SEASON

Alaska. I thought of igloos, polar bears, and dog sleds as I sat next to my uncle in the coach section of a jumbo jet bound for Anchorage. It was the summer of eighth grade. I was fourteen and had just begun to shave, and it was high time, my uncle had said, that I learn what it feels like to have to work for a living.

I was to work for three weeks on a fishing barge owned by my uncle in Bethel, Alaska. The work would be hard menial labor—loading, cleaning, and packing salmon, seven days a week, on an average of thirteen hours a day. If one worked there all summer, he could pull in four or five thousand dollars (plus a bonus of three grand or so, if it was a good season.) However, being the boss's nephew, under working age, and there for only a sixth of the season, it didn't seem I had much to gain financially or otherwise.

One of my uncle's employees met us at the airport, helped us with our luggage, and drove us the four hour ride through Anchorage to Bethel.

Anchorage is a sprawling city of about 150,000 complete with movie theaters, malls, McDonald's and anything else apt to ensnare the dime or dollar of the American consumer. Quite a contrast to Bethel, I noticed, getting out of a car within the village limits. Here was mud as far as I could see, with occasional puddles of grass and weeds up alone the lip of the shoreline. A few scattered wooden houses waded the muck on stilts. Barking dogs strained from their tethers which were attached to wooden posts sticking out of the mud at odd angles, like rotting dinosaur's teeth. Taking my bags, I walked with my uncle through mud and down a dock to a gray floating barge with a spray painted sign on it that said, KEMP & PAULLUCCI SEAFOODS, INC.

A small Eskimo boy was hosing fish heads out of the barge gutters into the ocean. I was taken inside and shown to my quarters, passing along the way several workers sitting in the kitchen watching "Patton" on a video player my uncle had installed for morale.
The bedroom I was in had eight summercamp style bunk beds. After I was introduced as Kemp's nephew, one of the men moved to the top bunk and offered me his lower berth. I went to sleep, thinking how fishy everything smelled.

By the time I woke up the first morning, everyone had been at work and was already starting coffee break. I got up, took a forty minute shower, dressed, and went into the kitchen. Matt, the old black cook who had once been a boxer, mixed me some dehydrated milk and pointed to the Cheerios. I saw a small puppy lying asleep in the sand near a rowboat. When I approached, I sneaked fish eating leashes dragging behind them. I used to sneak fish into the window. Of the small shops that doubled as houses.

One such evening I was enjoying my solitude, feeling like I owned Alaska didn't seem like such a bad place; I really enjoyed the night. I'd put on my robe and walk outside onto the deck. Beneath the rail was the sky as well as the sea. Little dots of light came ever closer on the sea, like an infinitely deep hole the barge floated on. I snuck out onto the deck several nights in a row, staring out at the flat black plane of the ocean, always hoping to see the northern lights.

At dawn, I didn't mind loading the slimy fish; it was just like loading boxes. I began to enjoy working fast and efficiently. By the end of the day my face, as well as the white woolen gloves they gave us for warmth every morning, became pink and sticky with the blood and digestive juices of salmon. Fish didn't smell so bad anymore. I saw little of my uncle. Occasionally, he would nod at me from a distance while I loaded fish. I was even getting used to the dehydrated milk and the evening meal; usually a type of stew the bargemen referred to as "sh*t over rice" or "sh*t over noodles."

Terp didn't say anything as we walked back to the barge. I didn't wash the blood off my hands until I got ready for bed.

By the sixth morning, I didn't mind loading the slimy fish; it was just like loading boxes. I began to enjoy working fast and efficiently. By the end of the day my face, as well as the white woolen gloves they gave us for warmth every morning, became pink and sticky with the blood and digestive juices of salmon. Fish didn't smell so bad anymore. I saw little of my uncle. Occasionally, he would nod at me from a distance while I loaded fish. I was even getting used to the dehydrated milk and the evening meal; usually a type of stew the bargemen referred to as "sh*t over rice" or "sh*t over noodles."

One such evening I was enjoying my solitude. Feeling like I owned the sky as well as the sea. Little dots of light came ever closer on the water. The foreman, Jim, came out onto the deck. Paying no attention to me, he set up a cardtable and chair, then opened a silver tackle box full of money. The trolling boats came closer, their kerosine lanterns now lighting the barge with an orange glow. Downstairs a man slowly walked onto the lower deck and began to use the crane. I leaned over the rail and looked into the pale lit windows of the boats lining up on the side of the barge to unload their chests of fish. Men came aboard to collect their money. Jim touched his fingers to his tongue, then to each bill as he counted them out into the open hands in front of him. The barge slowly came to life, as men, eyes still squinting with sleep, trudged out of their doorways to begin work. Jim suddenly slapped me on the back and asked me if I was taking a little breather. I told him I wasn't and looked away from him, back out at my obsidian sea.
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While walking along the shore one evening after work, I saw a small puppy lying asleep in the sand near a rowboat. I bent down and gently patted its head. My fingers sank into its soft, giving skull. I drew back and saw that the dog was dead, and had been flung head first into the boat's stern. I drew back and saw that the dog was dead, and had been flung head first into the boat's stern. With a stick, I made a star of David in the sand as a burial marker in case I didn't have time to return. Then I jogged back to the garage and found Terp, the guy who slept in the bunk above me. He went to where the dog lay carrying an old fish box to bury it with. Terp asked about the star in the sand. I told him it was a burial marker. We placed the dog in the box and carried it over to a thin patch of grass. Terp kept repeating how he thought it looked as if someone had killed the dog and left the mark as a joke. I held the box. The dog's blood did not yet have the chance to coagulate, dripped through into my hands. We buried the box, and an angry Eskimo harassed us for digging up his land. I told him I was Kemp's eldest son, and he left us alone. Terp didn't say anything as we walked back to the barge. I didn't wash the blood off my hands until I got ready for bed.

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Aaron Shohet

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A small Eskimo boy was hosing fish heads out of the barge gutters into the ocean. I was taken inside and shown to my quarters, passing along the way several workers sitting in the kitchen watching "Patton" on a video player my uncle had installed for morale.
Curt Rideout

HUNTING AFTERHOURS, THE MOON HIDDEN BY THE TREES

And hasn't the night taken us all
to the side of the road
where a car pulls off onto gravel,
where wheels stir the angry green leaves.
The driver lifts a gun from the seat,
makes a second check for his shotgun shells.

This man enters the woods with a Jack Daniels glow,
his flashlight following fresh deer tracks.
He waits under an oak until a buck
comes to drink from the slow stream before them.
The man leans forward to press shells into blued chambers,
his finger pushing the safety catch off:

He remembers his fiance that calls on weekends, whispering
that she will be back when she works things out.
The look on his father's face as he spoke
of leaving the family to look for work.
His friend who went canoeing at night,
to be found in the morning, pulled from heavy water.

The trigger remains still, the air left silent.
This man places his gun on the ground,
turning to walk under the shadows
to follow his boot tracks to the road.

And when he returns empty handed,
he will get into his car, he will drive past
other abandoned cars from which we all
walk alone into this silent forest.

Deirdre Kovac

THE SEARCH

When the sky darkens above the water,
the wind cold and heavy,
I look for you,
knowing you are not what I want to find.

I listen for your breath
in the silence of deep snow,
for your laughter
in the rustle of leafless trees
for your footsteps
in the air that hangs still below the wind.
And when I reach to touch you
like water thirsting on the lake bed

I know that I can never find you.
and in each breath is the rhythm of your body
the measure of your steps  the curve
of your fingers bending

you look long past me
your breath catching  your glance
pulling at the wall

your breath enters the air which knows
how we all are naked  with your breath
you gather the shape of white linen sheets
cool at my entering touch

you gather our nakedness  in each breath
is the rhythm of our bodies

Deirdre Kovac

EXCHANGE

My sister and I stood closely by our grandfather. Watching
his tall frame as he bent slightly to inspect a bunch of ripening
grapes, I noticed that his faded flannel shirt, pulling tightly
around his middle, was about to lose its bottom button. Turning
to us he stooped lower, the heavy odor of alcohol warmed my face.
Deep lines creased his forehead, his face calloused by the wind.
His bare scalp was tanned and spotted from the sun.

"Grandpa," Lori interrupted, "where did all your hair go?"
The old man's face broke into an intricate pattern of lines. As
he smiled his face matched the gnarled grapevines that surrounded
us. Laughter pulled the button tighter. He swept my sister from
the ground and rested her on his hip.

"Well Lori," he began, "one day a long time ago, I was out
in that field an along comes this big wind. It was so strong that
it just took my hair right off of my head, just like that." Lori

"No, it's true," the wrinkles smoothed from his face and his eyes sharpened, "so when a big wind starts comin' an
the sky turns grey, you best be runnin' inside before you lose all
that pretty golden hair, and end up just like your old grandpa
here." He looked hard at Lori then down toward me, and for an
instant, I thought I saw him wink.

Susan McGahan

GRANDFATHER
Maura Troester
CHILDREN'S POEMS

Summertime
floats
through my mind
carrying sand
and seagulls
into winter.

Thunder and rain knock
against my bedroom window
waking me from my dreams.
They want to enter
from the starless, dark night.
They want to be warm
and dry like me.

Never cry
while lying in bed
staring
at the ceiling,
for you will get tears
in your ears.

Maura Troester
A RED ROSE DAY

The old man was outside again, waiting for her in his grey hat and trench coat. Today was a yellow day. The old man always arrived on yellow days. Today, as always, he stepped through the tulips without harming one of them. He stood in the middle of the tulip bed holding his hands out, palms upwards. Sometimes the lines of his hands would talk to her in different languages. Today they spoke in French.

"Tu est tres ver fe." The old man's hands continued, "Mais je ne sais pas que vous dites." Chris had studied enough French to know his hands were saying something about green, but they moved too quickly for her to catch the full meaning.

She put her hands on top of his outstretched palms. The words traveled up her arm, danced around her brain. She could almost understand. The old man's hands were as soft as her grandfather's had been, when he helped her to be brave and not cry at her mother's funeral last spring and Chris wanted to hold tight to this old man's hands, but they grew warm and began to melt as her father's voice cut through the space around her.

"Chris, why are you standing in those leaves? I told you to rake them, not stand in them. How many times do I have to tell you to pay attention to what you're doing?"

The old man in the trench coat faded into the background. Chris said nothing. When anger and alcohol brewed in her father's eyes, she knew better than to talk back.

"You're getting as absent-minded as your mother was before she took... Damn it, Chris look at me when I'm talking to you."

Chris looked around for the old man with the trench coat, but he was gone. The yellow tulips stood tall and untouched. Chris stayed quiet as her mother always had when her father started in. But it helped her no more than it had her mother. Her father was building up to a full head of steam.

"I've spent as much time as I'm going to, trying to talk some sense in your head. You either get these leaves raked in the next twenty minutes or I'll put you on the bus to your Aunt Julia's house."

"Dad" Chris knew she couldn't leave this house, this yard. Then she would not have the tulips. She couldn't leave the tulips. "Dad I can't leave I'll get behind in school I'm trying real hard to get all B's and I don't want to live with Aunt Julia; she's too moody."

"Hell, it's too much for one man to raise a teenage girl alone. You straighten up and fly right or I'll send you off somewhere."
Chris fought back tears. "But Dad, you know I try to help you all the time." Tears ran down her cheeks.

He stared at her, confused by the tears and when he answered, sympathy mixed with self pity. "Oh, Baby, Don't cry. Your eyes look black like your mother's when you cry." He stood on one foot, then the other. "See here now, I was going to cut some roses for your mother -- for the cemetery, you know." He handed her the paring knife he always used. "But maybe you'd rather do it. We'll go out there today, okay?"

Her father turned to walk across the lawn to the house. "You know," he said, "we've got to start keeping this lawn up better. It's only been six months, but it looks like no one's touched it in years."

Chris put the paring knife in her sweatshirt pocket, then started raking the leaves towards her. She'd barely begun a good-sized pile when the rake handle started to melt. She squeezed it harder, and it fell limp in her hands. Then it slipped to the ground and wiggled under the leaf pile, as fluid and elusive as a snake.

The snake wanted to coil around her legs and pull her down. Chris looked up for a moment and saw that the old man had come again to the yellow tulips. He smiled and raised his hands, but he would not help. She wanted to run from the snake but the leaves were waist high now and she could not move through them.

Just as she was about to give up and let the snake pull her down, the leaves turned to rose petals and Chris moved freely through them. The snake was gone, and Chris saw instead a woman with white skin and black eyes sitting under a mushroom. When the wind blew, the tips of the woman's long black hair turned into ravens that flew away. The woman with dark eyes reached to Chris, and when their hands clasped, the woman snuggled against Chris' body and fell asleep. Chris moved her fingers through the long, black hair until finally the woman awoke and gave to Chris a red rose with a gold stem. When Chris rubbed the soft petals against her cheek, she heard the faint, searching mews of a newborn kitten.

The woman with white skin and dark eyes led her into a field of red roses. The two stopped before a bandstand in the middle of the field. Chris wanted the peculiar, soothing music to play forever. She looked at the dark-haired woman, wondering what instruments the musicians played.

"They are animals." The woman answered Chris' unspoken question. Then Chris realized she was listening to an old-man-animal-band, one just like the musical band in the favorite book her mother had read to her when she was small.

A toothless, grinning man in a lavender band suit was playing a hen. When the man pulled her wings, the hen squawked an egg-shaped note. Chris laughed and settled down in the roses to watch the show. She looked up and to the left and saw her own, familiar old man surrounded by yellow tulips. He used a pair of tulips to play a rhythm on the
TEMPORARY LAPSE INTO GENDER CONFUSION: LAST THURSDAY

I considered dressing like a man for the rest of my life. I would be pulling a real gender-bender, so to say. No more lifting pinkies when sipping from teacups. No more mascara, no more nylons and perfume. I would dress like a man, but gender's already bent all to hell, and I find it difficult to lapse into anything original.

backs of two turtles. The grey trench coat was open, and Chris could see his blue-and-red band uniform with gold buttons down the front. Chris was glad that her old man belonged to this band. She saw on her right another man, this one playing a beaver's tail, crystal notes shimmered like fairy lights blinking in the night. Next to the beaver were three white ducks which glowed iridescently. When their backs were pressed, they chugged notes deeper than tubas. Chris was delighted with the band, and the dark haired woman smiled and kissed her on the cheek. Today was a rose day.

But the roses could not stay. Something was wrong. Chris could feel it, just as she could feel a storm pressing in before the first cloud appeared. Then she saw it, the snake again, crossing the smooth, grey floor of the bandstand. The snake was coming closer. Chris reached out to the old man in the trench coat, but he just waved to her and stayed safe in the tulips with his turtles.

The dark haired woman seemed unafraid. She touched Chris' hair. "Listen to the band," she said and leaned back in the roses, letting the music take charge. Today, after all, was a red day. But, no, she thought uneasily, the old man was there in the tulips. The old man came on yellow days. Today must be a yellow day.

Chris wanted a red day. The snake came closer. He wanted a red day, too. Chris listened to the music, to the music from the book her mother had read so long ago, and the snake crawled up her leg, settled into her skin. The silver snake left a trail red as roses that washed over her hand, and Chris watched the old man and yellow tulips drown in her red day.

They were completely gone, the old man and the tulips, when Chris felt someone grab her clean wrist.

"Chris what have you done to yourself?" It was Mrs. Anderson from next door. "I...I don't know." Chris looked at her arm. "We're taking you to the hospital, young lady. Where is your father?"

Chris said nothing. "I'm going to get a towel. You stay here." Mrs. Anderson took the paring knife with her.

"Okay." Chris watched Mrs. Anderson cross the lawn and run into her house. Then she hung her head and closed her eyes, hoping for some peculiar, soothing music. No sounds came, but when she opened her eyes, she saw a red rose with a gold stem lying in the leaves. Everything would be all right now. It was a red rose day.
Jay R. Tomaszewski
MOVING NOWHERE

Housekeeper Betty
takes me in under wing,
confides that her husband Frank,
a twenty three year man,
can't get the same vacation time
in May.
She turnbolts her body,
holds up the lobby desk
eyes transfixed in disbelief.
Tells me, "that's all you can do.
You don't dare say anything. Ever."

Tonight she and Frank will eat pork,
watch the fat man stuff rags
in his mouth.
They never realize the dishwasher switch,
blender button, and microwave are
their umbilical life lines.
They will be cut off.

Julie Jurrjens
EVERY EVENING

When the sun’s rays tangle themselves
in tree branches, and playground shouts
are echoes gone home
with children for dinner,
an old man shuffles
to the rusted metal chair
he calls his own. He opens the copy
of Lee's Last Stand that he's been reading
a year now.

His fingers find the page
with the folded corner,
but he stares at the red and yellow
monkey bars, remembers
a boy at this park
who squealed, upside down from monkey bars,
who wore green, who shuffled
only in a game, a dance.

And this chair, this rusty chair?
Was it there when the boy was?
The old man does not know.
Such things don't matter, don't matter.
He strokes the arms of the chair
As he would a cat, sees
the sun has given up on red
and orange and left a faint bruise
on grey sky. The old man
feels the night wind
and tries several times
before he rises from the metal chair.

He holds his closed book,
makes his slow way to a single room,
memories trailing behind, fading
as he thinks of the canned soup
he'll heat tonight if he gets around to it.
Julie Jurrjens

ON WHY ALL GREAT ARTISTS ARE MALE

Miss Peavy strains for the shelf, reaches eighteen egg cartons and eighteen boxes of crayons. The boys draw green and blue tulips, discuss "Space Invaders" as lines sprawl over the cartons. The girls draw red and yellow tulips. They draw lines first and color within them. Miss Peavy says: "The girls are neat; they stay within the lines."

Jack Driscoll

THE SUMMER MY BROTHER AND I GOT BB GUNS

Those days we shot BB's through the paper lungs of kites, through dark cellar windows, splinters of glass healing the wounds in our tamed hearts. We love to hang bottles on the branches of trees, the muscles in our eyes straining against the dim light of the rain. Sometimes we selected each other's targets: another blue jay screeching at the feeder, the white diamond dead center between the horse's brilliant eyes. Afternoons we shot the red lips of women from magazines the BB's spitting paper into the tall grass. We snickered as we walked towards home, the shade moving slowly up our sleeves. At night, on our beds, we polished the wooden stocks, sighted even sleep down the gun-blue barrels, the summer wind through the screen moving in unnoticed to protect us.
Last night I was out cruising with Andrea in her red Torino. Andrea pays less attention to the road than to the boys in front of the Party Store. Cars creep past each other; Andrea blares the horn when a car full of strapping football stars passes. (I tell her once more that football teams and Party Store boys bore me. I say they run on liquor and dirty gym socks.) Tonight I'll stay home, write letters to New Jersey or type up a sonnet. Unless of course, the phone rings, and Andrea says she'll pick me up in the Torino, eight sharp.
Bonnie Nevel

THE WAITRESS

The sign in the window, written on a pizza cardboard, promised "World's Best Hamburgers." As I stepped into the restaurant, the air was even muggier than outside. Passing two old men, the only other customers in the diner, I chose a stool at the counter; it was grey formica, and sticky, as if someone had poured maple syrup on it and let it dry. The red vinyl stools swiveled under my weight, threatening to fall off at any moment. They reminded me of the kiddie rides I used to love at carnivals.

The grill was only about six feet away from where I sat, and two World's Best Hamburgers burned on its surface. From their pungent odor, I wasn't sure I wanted to try one.

As if reading my thoughts, a woman with a grey apron on emerged from the back room, her high nasal voice, like the sound of an arrow being released from its bow, preceded her into the room.

"...Yeah, he was arrested last night for drunkin' disorderly," she spoke, and at first I thought to me. But then I realized her words were directed to the two old men at the front of the restaurant, who until she came out, had been conversing quietly between themselves. She spoke to them, seeming to continue a conversation never interrupted. "I tell ya, if you ask me, he could rot there for the rest of his life, for all he's worth. I guess I'll have to go down there and bail him out, though. And I tell ya, what thanks do I get? Last week he tried to set the house on fire. With me in it. What'll it be next? I tell ya..." She continued talking, sometimes punctuating a sentence with flicks of her pudgy wrist, or resting a fist on her hip. She was a short woman, with straight bleached hair and greying roots. Her face was like melting wax, sagging around mouth and eyes. Her lips were painted bright pink, the color belonging to a young woman. The whole time I watched her, though, she never smiled. Her frown seemed a permanent part of her.

She returned to the grill to turn the meat over and now she was only a few feet away from me. I could see the fine, dark hair on her arms and neck, as she flipped the meat. She asked me over her shoulder: "Some-thin I can get ya?"

"A hamburger," I said. Almost before the words were out of my mouth, the waitress had slapped a raw patty on the grill. It fell to the iron with a hiss, and smoke began drifting up into the vent about the grill. She transferred the two already cooked hamburgers to a bleached bun on a
paper plate, adding pickles, mustard, and onions to one, ketchup and relish to the other. A handful of potato chips from a large bowl that looked like it had been melted in a dishwasher completed the meal.

The waitress served the men and returned to the grill, picked up her spatula and began to prepare mine. "Anything on it?" she asked.

"Mayonnaise, lettuce, and tomato, please," I said.

The waitress reached for a knife on a shelf under the grill counter. The shelf overflowed with dirty pots and pans. She began cutting the lettuce and tomatoes with a stained knife.

On the wall there was a red and white Coca Cola clock, which was ten minutes slow. Below the clock, a sign, green with gold metallic letters read: "In God We Trust...All Others Pay Cash." Yellowed wedding photographs bordered the sign. All I could see through the splatters of grease and dirt was the outlines of faces: dancing, eating cake.

Setting the hamburger down in front of me, she asked, "Anything else?"

"Coffee," I said. She poured my coffee into a chipped mug, and put it down next to my hamburger. Then dropped packages of sugar and Cremora onto the counter as an afterthought. One Cremora package broke and drained onto the counter. The waitress turned, pretending not to see it. With her back to me, I could picture the pink lipstick on her downturned mouth. I watched the Cremora spread over the counter, as it concentrated around the sticky places.

My hamburger tasted like it looked: grey with whitish specks in it, the texture of window caulking. After one cautious bite, I put it back on my plate and ate the potato chips instead. On the counter, an old pecan pie was displayed under a plastic dome. The scratched plastic almost totally obscured the pie from view. I considered ordering a piece, but the waitress had returned to the men, and resumed her one-sided conversation.

"I tell ya, being married to that man has led me to nothin' but grief. He wouldn't know how to support himself if there were 20 jobs for every man around. He just doesn't think like that." She sighed and slowly shook her head. "But I tell ya: What can I do?"

She shook her head again at the hopelessness of the situation.

"Anything else I can get you boys?"

I drank my coffee from the chipped rim of the cup and gazed ahead of me at the wedding photos. In one, the couple was standing posed under a wood canopy. After looking at length, I could almost make out the figures. The young woman, standing next to the tall man in a grey suit, appeared short, her waxy face smooth under bleached hair. Her bright pink lips laughed at the camera.
"There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before."

-Willa Cather
The Red Wheelbarrow

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