The Red Wheelbarrow
William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens
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*Marie Bernard

Calgary Martin

Martha Lackritz

Ullia B. Wade

Erin O'Neill

Jesse Jett
After 35 Years, My Parents Slow Dance Again

Beth Bigler

for the first time we heard Blue Moon

His breath rushes into her ear, sounds like a distant tornado, woosh, as if it were coming from Manchester or Muskegon, swooping through Ann Arbor and into their basement. Blue Moon is on the radio, they are transported back to high school-varnished floors, slick as grease, record players playing vinyl and pedal pushers of every color. He rubs his bare hands down her back, cradles his palm around the crescent beneath her skirt. Now, it is rounder than he last remembers. He thinks of when that curve was forbidden, remembers tickling her there, that tender flesh where thigh meets bottom. Her manicured nails hold tight onto the place she thinks his shoulder blades should be. She's not sure she can feel the outline of his bones, but presses her fingers into his flesh, they are cushioned and warm.

Their hips don't quite move together anymore; they even step on each other toes. Her thick heels are wood blocks on the floor, they don't click like they used to. Her feet used to be delicate, they used to slip into satin pumps that matched her skirts. Now, they squeeze into scuffed dancing shoes. He can't tell what color they are anymore. His temple meets hers, the plastic of their glasses catch each other's strand of hair. Their eyes open at the same time. Leaning into each other, they sway in small circles.

Improv in the Jazz Club

Jesse lott

I'm sitting in a downtown club listening to red jazz, a saxophone player lighting up between solos, a 19-year-old guitarist with a scotch sitting on his amp. And the dancers, women in tight dresses with sweat running down their legs, men in their Bogart hats with their drinks in one hand. A girl sits in the corner, her red hair cascading down her shoulders. The trumpet player stands up, plays, the ends of his fingers on fire. I wave to her, half-grin on my face. She laughs and waves back, a short finger-wave. I beckon her over, stand up to meet her halfway on the floor. We dance, her shoulder digging into my chest, the folds of her smile spread across my palm, eyes half-open – the drummer closes it, his long wooden fingers pounding on the skins. She takes my hand and laughs the laugh that breaks the heart of every other guy at the club, takes me back to the table and pulls an ice cube out of her Manhattan, runs it down the crevasse of her neck. The sax player opens up his fingers at both ends of the scale, skipping octaves like a needle. I take the drink and down it, lead her back to the floor. She smiles and pulls me close, and the sax player flips over his stand, because he doesn't need the music anymore, and she doesn't need the music anymore, and the trumpet player pulls his solo from beneath his tough. And I can feel the thin black strap of her dress between my fingers, and I don't need the music anymore, and I pull her close and take her neck in my mouth, and the guitarist sips and waves to the drummer, picks up the line. We dance kissing, we dance the dance of filthy jazz, inside her mouth are a million beams of light, and her shoes fall off, and no one needs the music anymore, and glasses melt out of the hands of the men, and no one is thinking, they dance with their fingers and their mouths, they dance with sweat beading into their eyes. The music has stopped coming out of them, and the music is heat and water. This is for the lovers, the sax player says, and he reaches down his throat and pulls out fire.
apartment. Exhausted, she began to head up the cobblestone toward it, and
took her time, strolling up the hill. Before she had reached a halfway point, she
glimpsed a flash of yellow beyond the café. The apartments were all dark and
the street quiet, but that spot of yellow seemed to sing out, disturbing the
peace. And it didn’t take long for her to realize what it was, that yellowish
splotch, because a part of her already knew. Her last pot of yellow begonias
were there - struggling, singing, and swelling out of the darkness of its neigh-
bors, and of the entire street, and the entire town.

I’d like to trace the way they dance,
carve small circles into the ground,
small moons, small spectacles, small records
that play and play and play.
A Man in Red Gingko Leaves
Rowan McMullin

She used to be all apples and spice, but then she met a man in red gingko leaves, and he gave her exotic perfumes and flowers for her neck and treated her to an all expenses paid trip to the stars, and she came back exhausted. Said her week had been great, but she was tired, and could we talk about it another time.

That was when the nightmares started. I woke up to a house of dim shapes with scales and spindly, hair-covered legs. She was standing in the middle of them, singing a lullaby at the top of her lungs. One of them stepped closer to her and brushed her face gently with one of its legs. Her voice faded and she began chittering and swinging her head back and forth in search of some smell. Her hair swayed like a curtain of water, blue and gold and silver, and she began dancing.

Then she dropped my hands a second later and twirled around the house. laughing and shouting, Dance! Dance! Dance! Dance! The scaly shapes wandered around bumping into things and each other, but she flashed through them, lightening speed, impossible to catch. And suddenly she stopped and shivered, giggling and shouting, Dance! Dance! Dance! Dance! The scaly shapes wandered closer to her and brushed her face gently with one of its legs. Her voice faded and she began chittering and swinging her head back and forth in search of some smell. Her hair swayed like a curtain of water, blue and gold and silver, and she crawled across the floor to me and took my hands and said I was wonderful, and did I want to come dancing?

She pretended to be upset, gazing out over his shoulder and through the window. She stared at the last pink begonia, and wondered whether she should move it into a pot of yellow to keep it alive. “Eva...? Eva...?” he had whispered, unsure whether she had been listening. And when she kissed him goodbye from her door, he muttered past her cheek, “non era il destino,” and she smiled half-sincerely.

Past the café, and down the cobblestone road, she spent her last night in Assisi like her first: alone by the fountain. Dipping her hand in the warm water, she watched pieces of floating dirt swirl around dried leaves, and stared down at the dark cobblestones glistening under her feet - the Assisi rains had lasted longer than expected. She knew how dry it was at home, and considered which she would prefer. She had hardly spoken a word of English in the eight months she had spent abroad. And she thought then of St. Francis, with his dedication to a life of poverty and an unprecedented appreciation for the animal kingdom. She imagined herself on frescoes and colorful, stained-glass windows during the different periods of her life, and found that it wouldn’t seem quite as interesting or as devoted as his. Then she wondered what the most recent picture would depict: Eva at the fountain, or Eva with her sketchbook? The image that stuck most in her head was that of Eva sitting on the balcony, surrounded by her begonias. And beneath the picture would read what engraved caption? Manca? She would have probably preferred, La ragazza con i fiori americani. But perhaps it would need to say both.

From the fountain, Eva could make out the rooftop of the cafe near her girl. And she had smiled feebly.

It was when she began sketching the story of the creation of the Franciscan Order that the dullness in the color of her begonias seemed impossible to ignore. The yellows were the only ones that still supported more than two blooms per pot, while the pinks were so far gone that she had nearly given up all hope for them. In late July, the morning after her birthday, she stayed on the balcony with them, sprinkling drops of water onto their petals, and carefully picking away dead scraps from their leaves. She spotted with disgust that day, the butt of one of her lover’s cigarettes inside a pot of the yellow begonias, which astonished and infuriated her. When he came to find her that evening, she locked herself in her room, complaining that she could not leave her helpless flowers alone. The next two evenings went the same way. Within a week, his restlessness overcame his previous attraction to her soft eyes and untouched solitude, and he began to come less and less frequently to her window. In early August, he stood in her apartment, his back to the balcony, and confessed his plans for leaving Assisi. She asked when he thought he would return. He told her he supposed it would be months, long after she would have gone. She pretended to be upset, gazing out over his shoulder and through the window. She stared at the last pink begonia, and wondered whether she should move it into a pot of yellow to keep it alive. “Eva...? Eva...?” he had whispered, unsure whether she had been listening. And when she kissed him goodbye, he muttered past her cheek, “non era il destino,” and she smiled half-sincerely.
Below her, where she had spent the first month and a half of her visits to the cathedral, Giotto's Life of St. Francis encircled the walls surrounding the saints austere tomb.

She had arrived in May, and the old church seemed to become warmer by the hour. While within the cathedral walls, she was forced to wear long-sleeve and ankle-covering skirts, where the robed monks patrolled the scene and hovered around her, as if to prevent her from poorly portraying the cherished saint to whom their cathedral was enshrined.

Of the enfolding frescoes, colorfully and elaborately decorated, Eva preferred those that surrounded Francis with animals, the trait for which he became most famous. A sparrow would often perch on an uplifted finger, while perhaps a majestic eagle or a pure white dove would be landing on his shoulder, its wings spread out on either side of it, and its legs reaching down, inches above his arms. At his feet would lie together a lamb and a lion, a stallion and a donkey. And her sketches would be bordered with wooded paths, and flowerings, leafy stalks that twisted and wove around the ankles of the saint and his flock of "followers."

Eva's daytime was reserved for napping, reading, and flower-tending, where she could sit on her balcony and watch the people of Assisi, the tourists, and the monks clunk down the cobblestone road. The Italian she had met, Carlo, became a consistent part of her evenings, and one of the few people with whom she was in actual contact. His English was terrible, which was something she appreciated, and his smoking, which she had quickly come to accept as a critical component of Italian culture, was something that no longer bothered her, as it would have were he an American lover.

In July, he had bought her jasmines to put on her balcony, though she had hung them with masked disgust beside her begonias, where there was still room. "If you really wanted to be Italian, Se veramente volessi esser italiano," he had told her, "you would hang these (gelosamine) instead." She felt humiliated when he tried to "teach her the culture," and she found it unfair of him to pick most on her begonias, which seemed the one thing most right to her, the one thing he could never make her change. And so she purposely neglected his gelosamine, leaving them without water in the shade, where they knew they would not thrive. She commented nonchalantly one evening that his jasmines were not surviving as well as her begonias, that she supposed, "non era il destine, it wasn't meant to be."

Eva went wherever Carlo took her, and since he had grown up in this little town, they went to those places where the tourists thinned out, and the Italian became more fluent - where she was even more like a begonia among gingko leaves. "Una ragazza con occhi blu," he had bragged to his friends. A blue-eyed gingko leaf in her blue and gold and silver hair. I watched her not move for a while, until finally she began to float, her hands crossed over her chest, the cellophane sheets cascading down from her body in a liquid flow. Then the sheets crumbled into a fine powder that I swept up and swallowed. Everything got very bright, except that skin turned dark as a bruised apple. This nimbus of darkness floating in the middle of the light started to turn and spin and gyrate. It hovered in the air above me and beckoned with a dark hand. I was lifted up to her and brought to her side to join the darkness seeping like bloodstain. She smelled of warm ice-cream and when I saw her eyes they were melting into watery red splatches in a damp velvet green.

She crawled under my skin and hid there for a long time while the sun came up and cleaned the corners of scales and hair until everything shone. She hid and shuddered while the light got brighter and warmer, and shuddered and hid as the sun started its descent through the bright purple sky. In the last light, I felt her growing dimmer and brighter, as if she were a firefly of power, existing only the share it. And then she oozed out of my pores and onto the floor in time for the moonrise.

The moon stayed only a moment, before the deep orange clouds obscured its light. She put herself into a black dress that glittered with clam shell sequins and waited by the window for him. He came, carrying a hair pin made out of blue rose petals. He put it in her hair, and they danced, and began to fade a little. His red gingko leaves and her black clam shells swirled until they became one dark flame, ghosting up to the ceiling.

The curtains caught first. Patches of red-black fire licking up the greed broccoli until the ash was in my eyes and nose and ears and I licked my face clean. From there they spread themselves, he and she, to the couches olive cushions, and then to the emerald colored coffee table which had begun to walk around on five legs, knocking things over and into the spreading holocaust. The plants had long since added there livesto the storm, and her prized heirloom collection of jade figurines were marching, parade formation, to throw themselves into the center of the growing volcano. Lava was everywhere; black and red embers spotted the bare wood floor. The only light was hellish, casting shadows that didn't stay on the walls, but pulled themselves up and away, running into the flame that was she and the man in red gingko leaves. The fire danced wildly to dark Indian music with bells and stars and the music got louder and louder until at last, at its crescendo, the fire flared up to engulf the entire house, and the dark light was so brilliant that I had to turn away and when I turned back everything was quiet. The man in red gingko leaves was gone, and she was lying on the charred wooden floor, very very still and very
very white. I saw the line of false dawn grey in the east and a cold breeze came through the burnt walls. Her black dress fluttered in the breeze and I saw that there was a red gingko leaf over each eye. A thundering crash came once, again, and slowly, again. The house had been cleansed of all color, all warmth. Walking away, to the west of the moon, I blurrily saw the man in red gingko leaves with a jade figurine in each hand, whistling to himself, and planning another all expenses paid trip to the stars. Then her heart crashed one more time, and I faded with her mind.

“Manca”
Martha Lackritz

The fountain was the center of the piazza. And from the piazza, the cobblestones broke into several steep passages, whose stones were dark and slippery from rains that lasted most of the Spring and into Summer. The first street led straight up to a café, and just beyond that, her apartment, an old vine-covered brick building in this old town, where she hung begonias from the rusted balcony fence. It was large enough for only one chair, and all around it, she struggled to keep those begonias alive. “Manco,” he had called them, and she had to look in her Italian dictionary to find the meaning of the word: insufficient, lacking. Manca, because those begonias could not survive where they were so out of place. Eva had wanted them to bloom there as though begonias were always meant to grow in Assisi, as though they should have bloomed exquisitely. At home in the States, she had grown them freely, in luminous yellows, and bursting pinks and reds. And she had looked for their name in Italian, but the closest she found was le margherite, which, unlike her begonias, was plainer, and more commonplace, like teeming daisies. And she wished instead there were a real word for begonia.

“La ragazza con y fiori?” he had asked her the first night by the fountain - the girl with the flowers? - disappointing her with the realization that she could not possibly blend in amongst these dark-haired Assassins whom she strove to emulate.

“Begonias,” she had replied, pleased and embarrassed that they had stuck out so amidst the surrounding Italian-occupied apartments.

“Fiori americani?”

“Si,” she had nodded.

From the beginning, she could hardly believe how young he was; at nineteen, he was nearly four years her junior, yet he had thought her younger. She was petite, and rather timid; her straggly blond hair framed an angular face, and perfectly round blue eyes. Her nails were glassy, and rose-colored, and seemed to blush against his brown skin. As plain as she was, he found something alluring about her ivory paleness and fragile figure.

In the mornings, she drank espresso and sat in the grass outside of St. Francis Cathedral with her sketchbook and green pencils. Inside the massive stone structure, she sat on a pew in the upper level, sketching frescoes of the life of St. Francis depicted on the walls. The last five years of her life had been devoted to studying Italian artistic representation of monks, and she found St. Francis the most appealing for his dedication to natural beauty and humility.
Chloe Gonzalez

Airplane
Lia Romeo

I am flying through the inside
of the snowman we built together
a week ago when it snowed.
Everything white: whispery clouds above,
tree-speckled snow below.
This is the way these fields would look
if the world had ended with a whimper:
quiet and dusty- still.
and the same verse in my mind of the same song.

The last time I talked to you,
it didn't really matter what we said.
But now the thought of you sits
in the empty seat beside me,
as the airline wine fizzles fuzzy
and rueful to my head.

But maybe above these clouds
the rarefied air will melt the snow from my wings;
until the sheen of watery silver steel
dazzle reflecting back the light of the sun.
Torch Lake, Michigan

Lauren Bornschien

Sometimes I imagine the voices of stars.
On a clear night
when the reflection of Cassiopeia
washes through my body,
I listen to the low drone of a boat motor,
prop up, cross through the shallows.
I wonder, is this what a star sounds like?

II

Staring up at the Big Dipper
I imagine diving through
to the other side
where swimming in a clear lake isn't swimming,
but floating through space.
On the other side
I wash my reflection
on the surface of the glacier lakes.
Listening to the stars voices cross through to song.

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a STRAND of BUDDHA'S HAIR

inspired by a picture in National Geographic

Calgary Martin

They say the Golden Rock in Burma
is balanced with a single strand of Buddhas hair.

This rock looms and casts shadows over awed faces.
It is swollen with gold, tipped to one side of a cliff,
about to be released like lava to one side of a cliff,
its brilliant colors on fire and sparkling,
spilling from the mountain's throat.

I see Buddha so many centuries ago, his waif-like
body still young, a headful of black down
and eyes that seem to sting with a subtle
determination, like twin coals, smoking, burning
incense, settling pleasantly in the nostrils
of his disciples.
I see his ribs sticking through his skin,
a deep tan, almost golden like the
rock, testing itself,
teetering between the miracle of
balancing so many years in such a precarious spot
and freedom--
the moment we all turn our heads to the heavens
and watch the sun as it slowly rolls
out of the sky,
hangs suspended in the air for a split second, then
drops to the ground and shatters, breaking into
millions of pieces, a myriad of golden birds
all flown, uncaged.

I see myself at the top of the cliff with the best view of all,
watching the rock fly and then
reaching down, breathing the remnants of incense,
snatching that strand of hair,
slipping it into my pocket,
and running away
before anyone realizes what I've done.
You order wine, a red, almost black in the dim candlelight. You pour, we drink, we dine.

Bemused, I stare at your face, and lightheaded we leave, run against the city pouring over us my laughter trailing your speed, our sprint to the station.

I lean against the pillars, the poles yellow, red, you press your fingers to my lips.

We spend the evening still panting, our urgency to tell everything, fingers entwined.

The wine was magical, the city, the way two people reunite, like wine into a glass, its bouquet filling the empty air.
ger seat into the glove compartment so there would be a place for her to sit.

"Ready?" He asked.

"Yeah."

"So, tell me the rest of that story," Nigel said as they pulled onto the tree lined highway.

"Which one?"

"The one with the leopard."

"I don't really remember. Something with shadows falling onto his skin, for camouflage, so he can follow the prey," She said dryly and listened to the gentle hum of the tires skimming the highway.

Katherine looked out the car window and thought about all those stories she had told Amelia. The ones her mother had told her and the ones she had made up, based on her childhood fantasies. Her mother, a young striking woman, had left them with their uncle Mike, when Katherine was fifteen, to follow a man to Argentina. Almost a fairy tale, Katherine thought. And like her mother, Katherine wasn't sorry to leave, but she counted the infinite number of times Amelia had fallen asleep to her voice anyway. Such a small and lonely child curled with the blankets drawn over her chin, always expectant. Amelia seemed only an image to her now speeding down the highway, Katherine mused.

"Well, this is it, tonight New York City," Nigel interrupted her thoughts.

"Sure is."

"Excited?"

"I can't wait to get out of this hellhole," She said in a voice that seemed so far off, that Nigel believed he would never be close to her.

"It's not that bad here. Your uncle's been pretty cool."

"I just want to leave. Leave everything." Nigel nodded sympathetically to her declaration.

There in the car, Katherine's body was stained with shadows falling from the trees. Some shadows so dark and unceasing she could trace then with her fingertip around and around on her skin, attractive perfect circles. There were still traces from the shadows that her fallen on her as a child, when her mother had told her about the leopard. The kind of shadows that had fallen on Amelia that night and would darken if she sought only the comfort of repetition.

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The Rain in El Barrio

Jamie Morey

I loved it when it rained in the Barrio. It poured down in buckets from the sky, assuring me we were not completely forgotten. I loved the way the filth was washed straight into the gaping mouth of the sewer and only the smell of fresh air remained. After the storm passed the streets would sigh and I would run outside to feel the cooled asphalt on the flesh of my feet- the heat running deep below and already starting to rise.

Little Alex had just pulled me from my dream. I was sucked deep in it and awoke with its strings clouding my mind like cobwebs. I let the warmth from Alex's tiny body seep into my chest and ease away the longing for my dream that pulsed through my veins. The streets were already on fire with the summer sun, their glare sneaking through the cracks in my window shades.

I didn't have a clock in my room. "What time it is, baby?" I asked him.

It was well past three and mama and Christine, my sister-in-law and Alex's mother, were at a church picnic. I walked outside to the backyard, the smell of garbage burning my nose and chasing the sleep from my eyes. Next door Bedelia was hanging her laundry on the line, wiping the sweat from her face with the back of her hand while her babies played at her feet. The roses on her worn cotton dress added color to her yard and she looked broken and beautiful. Her husband sat in the lawn chair close by, staring at the alley and already drinking. She greeted me with a smile and he nodded without turning his head.

Christine and my brother lived on the other side of my house with their three young children. Christine and I were right although she'd dropped out of high school sophomore year and liked to pretend she was stupid. She'd shrug her fleshy shoulders and rest her hand on her belly all swollen with child. She made her eyes blank and her face was always flushed and pretty, but she told me once that with each new baby she prayed the life would be sucked from her, that Alex's cherry lips would attach to her aching breast and drink till she shrank away, her youthful beauty withered like a blackened rose. She'd stand swaying at the stove, bottle of gin in hand offering us the chorizo she'd been cooking all day. Juan, the oldest, would gently guide her to her bed holding the small of her back firmly as she threatened to tip over on her already shattered belly. I used to scold her for drinking pregnant but she argued that all her babies had turned out fine, ten fingers, ten toes. The wedding ring weighed heavy on her finger and throws pieces of cut glass into her heart.

I got dressed and decided to walk down to the corner store for some eggs.
to put in out empty fridge. I picked Alex up in my arms as we walked past the rail thin men that hang on the street corners and stare at the young girls through their clouds of cigarettes and marijuana smoke. "Oooooh baby, you sure is fine," they whistle at me. Their dirty words slither through the gaps in their mouths where teeth once were, the remaining jagged and yellow ones holding in what they really want to say.

I bought the eggs and a flower for mama and lazily walked back with Alex holding on to my middle finger and taking two steps for my every one. I crossed Lewis and walked down Kenwood Street to stop by Ernesto's house. We'd been friends for about a year; his mama had lost her job and her money so she packed up her four boys and sent them to live with their grandma. Ernesto would write her long letters and read them to me to see if theys all right before I send em he'd say. Once I opened his dresser drawer and saw them all sitting there, in a neat pile with a thick rubber band holding them tight-ly together. When I asked him why he hadn't sent them, he told me she couldn't read any ways. I used to day dream about reading them aloud to her, picturing how her face would light up with her babys poetic words.

He was sitting on the porch with one of his friends, both of the already blown on the Sunday afternoon. At first I'd tried to get to know all his boys, at least their names, but I rarely saw the same one twice. They were shady kind of guys with shifty eyes and faces that could be fifteen of 40. They'd sit silently and stare at me while Ernesto and I spoke, sometimes grunting at our conversa-tion to show they were listening. I could see into Ernesto's grandma's dark living room, lit faintly with the flickering blue-white light of the TV set. The sounds from the box swirled around the heads of her family and friends staring blankly at it, and drifted faintly to my ears.

Ernesto rose as I walked up the sidewalk and I followed him to the back-corner of the yard, where the dogs chain couldn't reach. Alex jumped from Ernesto's knee and waddled over to look at them, Ernesto reminding him not to touch them. There were about three patches of grass in the dusty yard, the rest dug up by the German Shepherd that was always tied to the chain link fence, even during the chilly winter days. His grandma had planted a flower bed in the north corner of the yard, where the dogs chain couldn't reach. Alex jumped from Ernesto's knee and waddled over to look at them, Ernesto reminding him not to touch them. We sat on the back stairs and listened to the sounds of the neighborhood- the barking dogs, giggling and screaming children, and the heat so thick it muffled everything. Alex played with the ants crawling through the cracks in the asphalt and Ernesto took my had.

I guess you could call Ernesto a troublemaker. He'd been with the Latin even remember most of those Just So Stories, and I could hardly think of any on my own tonight.

"At least you don't have to do that anymore." Nigel said stretching out his hand to squeeze her leg, but Katherine moved away to look out the front window.

"Is Mike home yet?" She asked distractedly.

"I think I just saw his headlights before you came out." They could hear Katherine's uncle shutting the cab door and fum-bling for his cooler from the bed of the truck. She did not move immedi-ately from the window. Instead she stood looking across the street and into their neighbor's windows. Nigel stared at the soft outline of her face, back lit by the porch light.

"Are you ready?" Nigel asked, shaking himself from his gaze and pointing to a black suitcase next to him on the couch, open with a pile of clothes sitting in it.

"Oh yeah... just a sec..." Katherine stepped back, pressed the clothes down, and snapped the top into place in three solid movements. "I just have to put my shoes on and say good-bye to him when he comes in."

"All right. We should hurry up though, the flight boards in an hour." "Thanks so much for taking me. He's usually dead tired after work."

"It's no problem. It's what I'm here for, right?" Nigel forced a laugh, tight and strained by a small measure of longing, which was immediately lost on her blank stare.

Katherine's uncle came in through the kitchen door and set his cooler down on the stained linoleum. Nigel picked up Katherine's suitcase and nodded to her uncle on the way out the back door. Her uncle moved quickly to the side of the door so she could follow Nigel, but she moved over to the side too so she could face him.

"Well, bye Mike."

"All right Kathy. See you in a few months for Christmas. And don't forget you can call collect anytime you want. You know Amelia will miss having a story before bed."

"Did you get your hours all straightened out?"

"Yeah, back to a normal eight to five."

"Then you can read to her now," Katherine said flatly.

"Ha! Maybe, maybe." He answered nonchalantly. "Okay Kathy, you better go."

"My boxes are by the front door, so if you could get them off tomor-row I'd appreciate it." She squeezed his arm and went out to the car.

Nigel had already started it and was stuffing papers from the passen-
"Tell me another story."

"No. It's time for bed. Besides Nigel's waiting to take me to the airport." Katherine was impatient to leave. She was flying that night to New York, where her cousin Julie would pick her up in only a few hours. Katherine would live with Julie in her apartment and believed that she could secure a modeling contract.

"Please..." Amelia whined.

"All right," Katherine traced a spot of moonlight that fell in through the window and barely illuminated part of Amelia's arm. Her skin was flawless, just like Katherine's.

"This is the last one, so close your eyes. It's How the Leopard Got His Spots. Mom used to tell me this story so pay attention. A long long time ago, when everybody started off clean and beautiful there lived the Leopard."

"Who'll tell me stories when you leave?"

"Amelia, you're twelve years old. You can read to yourself."

"But this is different."

"How?"

"Mom always read to you; you tell me all the time."

"Not when I was twelve. Do you want to hear it or not?"

Amelia pulled the blankets over her chin and in the dim moon light, Katherine could see tears welling up at the corners of her eyes.

"Uncle Mike is changing his shift, so he'll read to you. Now, the Leopard lived with the Giraffe and Zebra and all the other animals but they were incredibly scared of him because he blended right into the surroundings with his yellow brown coat..."

By the time Katherine had reached the point where the Leopard and Ethiopian meet the wise dog-headed, barking Baboon, Amelia lay curled up in her bed, fast asleep. Usually it only took a few minutes of a story for Amelia to drift off, but that night it had taken two and a quarter stories. Katherine slipped out of Amelia's bedroom and into the living room.

"Sorry I took so long. She had a hard time falling asleep tonight."

"That's all right. I never knew you told her stories before she went to bed," Nigel said from the couch.

"Yeah, otherwise she gets fussy. I started running out tonight. I don't Kings since he turned twelve and used to run drug deals for his mothers boyfriends. He dropped out of high school before moving here last year, saying he would probably be safer away from all the temptations tucked between the books or shoved in lockers. He'd decided to start over when he moved here- with a clean slate. So far, he told me, "I feel like a brand new person, I ain't messed up at all." I looked down at the hand holding mine, the LK sign tattooed between his thumb and forefinger. Inside his brother's girlfriend screamed, there was a crack, a baby cried in the background. Ernesto smiled at me and went inside to break it up, whatever was going on. I picked up Alex and we began walking home. Halfway there I tossed the rose into the street. It had become heavy and its thorns pricked my fingers.

Dusk came quickly and everything glowed as if a black light had been turned on the world. Fat mammas stood in the doorways holding to the frames and hollering for their children. The smell of frying meat drifted out in waves and there was always more than could be eaten. The women hurried to put their liquid-eyed brown babies to bed before the men came home with beer and tequila on their breath, spitting fire through the rooms where their children lay under the covers pretending to be asleep. As years of this pass, the lines from their little pinched eyes slowly become graven into their thick caramel skin and up when they laugh.

I retreated to my own room in the basement, kept the light off and shut the door. Thoughts that'd been shoved to the corners of my mind until they cluttered it like huge piles of junk began to spill out with the slightest nudge. I thought about the shit they'd taught us in school, useless rules that don't apply to this huge sea of pain cut into squares. What do you do when you're trapped, jammed onto a checkerboard when you don't belong and don't want to play. Do you hang your head or look to the sky that's so far away? Do you buckle under or pretend you know nothing and things can actually be blinked away? I wish I could run, wish my legs would take me to a place my mind doesn't know exists. But I can still feel me, all soft inside promising to remind me of who I am and what I've seen... in this place where your future had been decided long before you're born. I know all I'll ever do is flee to my black room to dream of all the things I wish I could be and maybe could if things were different. All I know is that there's a life that blooms in all of us that we share- that flowers or withers without our consent. Some hideaway, trying to smother it although it grows strong inside. Others grasp for the sunlight beyond the shadows and pray the light will penetrate the windows clouded with dirty air. And me? I fall asleep to dream of the pain on our skin, the poison in our blood, and the love that runs deep through it all.
I found a china doll on the sand and thought about how it belonged to a young girl, and how she must have cried when the waves rolled up and carried it away.

I would like to know the story, of how she washed up on the beach, but I want to make it up. She has been so long in the water that her eyes which once shone like wet fire have been erased like beach glass; in the apparitions of the white lilies underwater.
All I want is to touch a tree
all I need is to sleep in its branches
with the dark wind in my hair
and around my neck
and its thick arms and knobbes
behind my back
and around me,
To have the leaves kiss me
and their blowing in my ear
and I could drift forever
and never climb down
from its bark-black night.
Ancient Trees
Evie Farmer

This twisted trunk leans
as an old man
whose spindly elbows are white and bare
beneath the scarred bark of his woolen sweater.
He embraced a kindred tree long ago,
and the two trunks tangled.
They are ancient lovers with wrinkled faces
who have forgotten everything
but their perpetual embrace.

Chloe Gonzalez
I Walk Slow

Lillia B. Wade

I walk slow.
Like the pouring of sweet molasses,
I walk slow.
To feel the wind blow softly across my skin,
I walk slow.
To spy on small black squirrels,
or to hear the calming rumbling
of a not far away storm
or to taste a single snowflake
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Like immense glaciers
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I walk slow
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Eyes Like Those

Andy Buchner

I was walking out to get the mail and this Consumers Power truck, you
know the kind that lift and the basket on back, pulls off on the shoulder. This
guy leans out the window and says, “You a hunter?”

“Yeah,” I say. I was wondering why the hell a Consumers Power guy wanted
to know if I was a hunter. I just figured he wanted to know if I got one or if
I knew of any good spots that he could hunt. That kind of thing is common
enough but I’d never heard of no one pullin’ off the road to ask anything like
that. Especially no power guys.

This guy’s face gets real serious. I noticed that most of his face got real
tight but his eyes got this real soft look in them, and he says, “Some one hit a
deer about a fourth of a mile up the road. It was a hit and run and the deer is
hurt pretty bad. I don’t think it will die for a long while yet. Maybe you could
take a gun up there and...”

He left it hanging but I knew what he meant. To be honest, I wasn’t sure
right then what I was gonna do. I’d heard stories about people doing that sort
of thing. And I remember my dad saying he had to do it once or twice. He
said it was illegal because the DNR didn’t want nobody shooting deer and then
saying they got it in a car accident so they wouldn’t have to waste a tag.

But I figured what’s the big deal? I’d never seen a DNR officer bust nobody.
He’ll, I’m seventeen I don’t even think they can bust you when you are that
young. Besides nothing deserves to die in any amount of pain. So I said, “No
problem.”

The guy said they would meet me down there and he took off down the
road. I went inside and grabbed my 9mm from the basement and started walk-
ing down the road the way the guy had gone.
I wonder what all those people in their cars thought when they saw this kid in
basketball shorts, walking down the road with a rifle in his hands?

Just bout shit their pants I’d bet. I was waiting for some old guy to cruise
by in his Caddy and at the sight of me pick up his cell phone and dial 911. Or
maybe just keel over dead of a heart attack right there and crash into a tree.
But nothing like that happened and I got down to where the Consumers Power
guy was with no hassle.

I could see he was staring at something laying down in the ditch and his
shoulders were all pulled up over his neck. “I’m glad you got here so quick.
She’s in pretty bad shape,” He nodded towards the ditch.
I looked down and there was this doe lying in the grass that was all red
with her blood. And it was in bad shape: its front legs was cut nearly all the way off, they was only hanging on by these little strings of muscle. It didn't even try and crawl away from us. You know a deer is tired when it doesn't try and up and run away from people.

It shoul'a been easy enough to do it. I'd killed deer before and gutted them. But there was something wrong with the way this was. It's damn hard to hunt down a deer. You gotta sit real quiet before one will even come close to where you're sitting. And even then there are no guarantees. Deer ain't stupid; they know you are there and something is wrong and if they get the smallest hint you're there they take off like a shot. But this was like... like shooting fish in a barrel or something.

I slapped my magazine in and racked up a bullet. The deer didn't even raise an ear or nothing. She just sat there, head in the grass, watching us real close. I raised my rifle and put the cross hairs right dead center on her head.

I couldn't fire. There was just something not right about it. I lifted my rifle again and dropped it. I did this a couple more times until the Consumers Power guy gets this annoyed look on his face and says, "If ya ain't gonna shoot it give me the gun and let me do it."

I looked at him and yelled, "I don't got to take this man. I ain't gonna shoot it. Go get your own damn gun and do it cause I ain't gonna." I just about walked away right there but the deer raised its head up and looked into me. I say into me cause I'd never seen eyes like that before and I've never seen eyes like that again. Those eyes was so direct they stared a hole into me and grabbed a hold of my insides. And they was clear like the water on Torch Lake, where you can see all the way to the bottom.

When I lifted my gun she put her head back down on the grass and shut her eyes. This time I just aimed and put one round into her brain. She died real peaceful, she didn't shake or nothing like that. She just tensed up a second when the bullet went in and then just kinda released her body.

The Consumers Power guy apologized after the deer was dead. He said he just got real caught up in it and he couldn't stand watching that deer die like that. I could tell he was shaken up in it and he couldn't stand watching that deer like that. I could tell he was shaken up by the whole thing cause he was talking to himself and shaking his head on the way back to his truck. He waved and smiled as he drove away but I didn't feel much like doing either.

After he left, I dragged the deer from the ditch and into the woods. I thought she would be better off there. Besides I couldn't leave her to the sun and the crows; it just didn't seem right. I didn't bury her because the way I see it all she's ever known was above ground.

I don't know what you'll make of this story but I know one thing: nothing deserves to die in any pain. And to this day I swear those eyes were trying to comfort me.
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I Walk Slow

--- Ullia B. Wade

I walk slow.
Like the pouring of sweet molasses,
I walk slow.
To feel the wind blow softly across my skin,
I walk slow.
To spy on small black squirrels,
or to hear the calming rumbling
of a not far away storm
or to taste a single snowflake
melt upon my tongue,
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Like immense glaciers
across deep oceans,
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I walk slow
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as small children do
while the rest of the world
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Eyes Like Those

--- Andy Buchner

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know the kind that lift and the basket on back, pulls off on the shoulder. This
guy leans out the window and says, "You a hunter?"

"Yeah," I says. I was wondering why the hell a Consumers Power gut wanted
to know if I was a hunter. I just figured he wanted to know if I got one or if
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tight but his eyes got this real soft look in them, and he says, "Some one hit a
deer about a fourth of a mile up the road. It was a hit and run and the deer is
hurt pretty bad. I don't think it will die for a long while yet. Maybe you could
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right then what I was gonna do. I'd heard stories about people doing that sort
of thing. And I remember my dad saying he had to do it once or twice. He
said it was illegal because the DNR didn't want nobody shooting deer and then
saying they got it in a car accident so they wouldn't have to waste a tag.

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He'll, I'm seventeen I don't even think they can bust you when you are that
young. Besides nothing deserves to die in any amount of pain. So I said, "No
problem."

The guy said they would meet me down there and he took off down the
road. I went inside and grabbed my 9mm from the basement and started walking
down the road the way the guy had gone.
I wonder what all those people in their cars thought when they saw this kid in
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Ancient Trees

Evie Farmer

This twisted trunk leans
as an old man
whose spindly elbows are white and bare
beneath the scarred bark of his woolen sweater.
He embraced a kindred tree long ago,
and the two trunks tangled.
They are ancient lovers with wrinkled faces
who have forgotten everything
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Night-Tree

Erin O'Neill

All I want
is to touch a tree
all I need is to sleep in its branches
with the dark wind in my hair
and around my neck
and its thick arms and knobbies
behind my back
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To have the leaves kiss me
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and I could drift forever
and never climb down
from its bark-black night.
China Doll
Sheetal Dingrani

I found a china doll on the sand and thought about how it belonged to a young girl, and how she must have cried when the waves rolled up and carried it away.

I would like to know the story, of how she washed up on the beach, but I want to make it up. She has been so long in the water that her eyes which once shone like wet fire have been erased like beach glass; in the apparitions of the white lilies underwater.
"Tell me another story."
"No. It's time for bed. Besides Nigel's waiting to take me to the airport." Katherine was impatient to leave. She was flying that night to New York, where her cousin Julie would pick her up in only a few hours. Katherine would live with Julie in her apartment and believed that she could secure a modeling contract.

"Please..." Amelia whined.
"All right;' Katherine traced a spot of moonlight that fell in through the window and barely illuminated part of Amelia's arm. Her skin was flawless, just like Katherine's.

"This is the last one, so close your eyes. It's How the Leopard Got His Spots. Mom used to tell me this story so pay attention. A long long time ago, when everybody started off clean and beautiful there lived the Leopard;"

"Who'll tell me stories when you leave?"
"Amelia, you're twelve years old. You can read to yourself."
"But this is different."
"How?"
"Mom always read to you; you tell me all the time."
"Not when I was twelve. Do you want to hear it or not?"
Amelia pulled the blankets over her chin and in the dim moon light, Katherine could see tears welling up at the corners of her eyes.

"Uncle Mike is changing his shift, so he'll read to you. Now, the Leopard lived with the Giraffe and Zebra and all the other animals but they were incredibly scared of him because he blended right into the surroundings with his yellow brown coat..."

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"Sorry I took so long. She had a hard time falling asleep tonight."
"That's all right. I never knew you told her stories before she went to bed," Nigel said from the couch.
"Yeah, otherwise she gets fussy. I started running out tonight. I don't

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I guess you could call Ernesto a troublemaker. He'd been with the Latin guys with shifty eyes and faces that could be fifteen of 40. They'd sit silently through their clouds of cigarettes and marijuana smoke. "Oooohh baby,you sure is fine," they whistle at me. Their dirty words slither through the gaps in their mouths where teeth once were, the remaining jagged and yellow ones holding in what they really want to say.

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"Are you ready?" Nigel asked, shaking himself from his gaze and pointing to a black suitcase next to him on the couch, open with a pile of clothes sitting in it.

"Oh yeah. Just a sec..." Katherine stepped back, pressed the clothes down, and snapped the top into place in three solid movements. "I just have to put my shoes on and say goodbye to him when he comes in."

"All right. We should hurry up though, the flight boards in an hour."

"Thanks so much for taking me. He's usually dead tired after work."

"It's no problem. It's what I'm here for, right?" Nigel forced a laugh, and into their neighbor's windows. Nigel stared at the soft outline of her face, back lit by the porch light.

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Katherine's uncle came in through the kitchen door and set his cooler down on the stained linoleum. Nigel picked up Katherine's suitcase and nodded to her uncle on the way out the back door. Her uncle moved quickly to the side of the door so she could follow Nigel, but she moved over to the side too so she could face him.

"Well, bye Mike."

"All right Kathy. See you in a few months for Christmas. And don't forget you can call collect anytime you want. You know Amelia will miss having a story before bed."

"Did you get your hours all straightened out?"

"Yeah, back to a normal eight to five."

"Then you can read to her now," Katherine said flatly.

"Ha! Maybe, maybe." He answered nonchalantly. "Okay Kathy, you better go."

"My boxes are by the front door, so if you could get them off tomorrow Id appreciate it." She squeezed his arm and went out to the car.

Nigel had already started it and was stuffing papers from the passen-
ger seat into the glove compartment so there would be a place for her to sit.
"Ready?" He asked.
"Yeah."
"So, tell me the rest of that story," Nigel said as they pulled onto the tree lined highway.
"Which one?"
"The one with the leopard."
"I don't really remember. Something with shadows falling onto his skin, for camouflage, so he can follow the prey," She said dryly and listened to the gentle hum of the tires skimming the highway.

Katherine looked out the car window and thought about all those stories she had told Amelia. The ones her mother had told her and the ones she had made up, based on her childhood fantasies. Her mother, a young striking woman, had left them with their uncle Mike, when Katherine was fifteen, to follow a man to Argentina. Almost a fairytale, Katherine thought. And like her mother, Katherine wasn't sorry to leave, but she counted the infinite number of times Amelia had fallen asleep to her voice anyway. Such a small and lonely child curled with the blankets drawn over her chin, always expectant. Amelia seemed only an image to her now speeding down the highway, Katherine mused.

"Well, this is it, tonight New York City." Nigel interrupted her thoughts.
"Sure is." "Excited?"
"I can't wait to get out of this hellhole." She said in a voice that seemed so far off, that Nigel believed he would never be close to her.
"It's not that bad here. Your uncle's been pretty cool."
"I just want to leave. Leave everything." Nigel nodded sympathetically to her declaration.

There in the car, Katherine's body was stained with shadows falling from the trees. Some shadows so dark and unceasing she could trace them with her fingertip around and around on her skin, attractive perfect circles. There were still traces from the shadows that her fallen on her as a child, when her mother had told her about the leopard. The kind of shadows that had fallen on Amelia that night and would darken if she sought only the comfort of repetition.

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The Rain in El Barrio

Jamie Morey

I loved it when it rained in the Barrio. It poured down in buckets from the sky, assuring me we were not completely forgotten. I loved the way the filth was washed straight into the gaping mouth of the sewer and only the smell of fresh air remained. After the storm passed the streets would sigh and I would run outside to feel the cooled asphalt on the flesh of my feet- the heat running deep below and already starting to rise.

Little Alex had just pulled me from my dream. I was sucked deep in it and awoke with its strings clouding my mind like cobwebs. I let the warmth from Alex's tiny body seep into my chest and ease away the longing for my dream that pulsed through my veins. The streets were already on fire with the summer sun, their glare sneaking through the cracks in my window shades.

"What time it is, baby?" I asked him.

It was well past three and mama and Christine, my sister-in-law and Alex's mother, were at a church picnic. I walked outside to the backyard, the smell of garbage burning my nose and chasing the sleep from my eyes. Next door Bedelia was hanging her laundry on the line, wiping the sweat from her face with the back of her hand while her babies played at her feet. The roses on her worn cotton dress added color to her yard and she looked broken and beautiful. Her husband sat in the lawn chair close by, staring at the alley and already drinking. She greeted me with a smile and he nodded without turning his head.

Christine and my brother lived on the other side of my house with their three young children. Christine and I were right although she'd dropped out of high school sophomore year and liked to pretend she was stupid. She'd shrug her fleshy shoulders and rest her hand on her swollen belly with child. She made her eyes blank and her face was always flushed and pretty, but she told me once that with each new baby she prayed the life would be sucked from her, that Alex's cherry lips would attach to her aching breast and drink till she shriveled away, her youthful beauty withered like a blackened rose. She'd stand swaying at the stove, bottle of gin in hand offering us the chorizo she'd been cooking all day. Juan, the oldest, would gently guide her to her bed holding the small of her back firmly as she threatened to tip over on her already shattered belly. I used to scold her for drinking pregnant but she argued that all her babies had turned out fine, ten fingers, ten toes. The wedding ring weighs heavy on her finger and throws pieces of cut glass into her heart.

I got dressed and decided to walk down to the corner store for some eggs.
The Reunion

Marie Bernard

You order wine, a red,
among black in the dim candlelight.
You pour, we drink, we dine.

Bemused,
I stare at your face,
and lightheaded we leave,
run against the city pouring over us
my laughter trailing your speed,
our sprint to the station.

I lean against the pillars,
the poles yellow, red,
you press your fingers
to my lips.

We spend the evening
still panting,
our urgency
to tell everything,
fingers entwined.

The wine was magical, the city,
the way two people reunite,
like wine into a glass,
it's bouquet filling the empty air.
Torch Lake, Michigan
Lauren Bornschien

Sometimes I imagine the voices of stars.
On a clear night
when the reflection of Cassiopeia
washes through my body,
I listen to the low drone of a boat motor,
prop up, cross through the shallows.
I wonder, is this what a star sounds like?

II
Staring up at the Big Dipper
I imagine diving through
to the other side
where swimming in a clear lake isn't swimming,
but floating through space.
On the other side
I wash my reflection
on the surface of the glacier lakes.
Listening to the stars voices cross through to song.

a STRAND of BUDDHA'S HAIR
inspired by a picture in National Geographic
Calgary Martin

They say the Golden Rock in Burma
is balanced with a single strand of Buddhas hair:

This rock looms and casts shadows over awed faces.
It is swollen with gold, tipped to one side of a cliff,
about to be released like lava to one side of a cliff,
its brilliant colors on fire and sparking,
spilling from the mountain's throat.

I see Buddha so many centuries ago, his waif-like
body still young, a headful of black down
and eyes that seem to sting with a subtle
determination, like twin coals, smoking, burning
incense, settling pleasantly in the nostrils
of his disciples.
I see his ribs sticking through his skin,
a deep tan, almost golden like the
rock, testing itself,
teetering between the miracle of
balancing so many years in such a precarious spot
and freedom--
the moment we all turn our heads to the heavens
and watch the sun as it slowly rolls
out of the sky,
hangs suspended in the air for a split second, then
drops to the ground and shatters, breaking into
millions of pieces, a myriad of golden birds
all flown, uncaged.

I see myself at the top of the cliff with the best view of all,
watching the rock fly and then
reaching down, breathing the remnants of incense,
snatching that strand of hair,
slipping it into my pocket,
and running away
before anyone realizes what I've done.
I am flying through the inside
of the snowman we built together
a week ago when it snowed.
Everything white: whispery clouds above,
tree-speckled snow below.
This is the way these fields would look
if the world had ended with a whimper:
quiet and dusty- still.
and the same verse in my mind of the same song.

The last time I talked to you,
it didn’t really matter what we said.
But now the thought of you sits
in the empty seat beside me,
as the airline wine fizzes fuzzy
and rueful to my head.

But maybe above these clouds
the rarefied air will melt the snow from my wings;
until the sheen of watery silver steel
dazzle reflecting back the light of the sun.
very white. I saw the line of false dawn grey in the east and a cold breeze came through the burnt walls. Her black dress fluttered in the breeze and I saw that there was a red gingko leaf over each eye. A thundering crash came once, again, and slowly, again. The house had been cleansed of all color, all warmth. Walking away, to the west of the moon, I blurrily saw the man in red gingko leaves with a jade figurine in each hand, whistling to himself, and planning another all expenses paid trip to the stars. Then her heart crashed one more time, and I faded with her mind.

"Manco"
Martha Lackritz

The fountain was the center of the piazza. And from the piazza, the cobblestones broke into several steep passages, whose stones were dark and slippery from rains that lasted most of the Spring and into Summer. The first street led straight up to a café, and just beyond that, her apartment, an old vine-covered brick building in this old town, where she hung begonias from the rusted balcony fence. It was large enough for only one chair, and all around it, she struggled to keep those begonias alive. "Manco," he had called them, and she had to look in her Italian dictionary to find the meaning of the word: insufficient, lacking. Manca, because those begonias could not survive where they were so out of place. Eva had wanted them to bloom there as though begonias were always meant to grow in Assisi, as though they should have bloomed exquisitely. At home in the States, she had grown them freely, in luminous yellows, and bursting pinks and reds. And she had looked for their name in Italian, but the closest she found was le margherite, which, unlike her begonias, was plainer, and more commonplace, like teeming daisies. And she wished instead there were a real word for begonia.

"La ragazza con y fiori?" she had asked him the first night by the fountain - the girl with the flowers? - disappointing her with the realization that she could not possibly blend in amongst these dark-haired Assassins whom she strove to emulate.

"Begonias," she had replied, pleased and embarrassed that they had stuck out so amidst the surrounding Italian-occupied apartments.

"Fiori americani?"
"Si," she had nodded.

From the beginning, she could hardly believe how young he was; at nineteen, he was nearly four years her junior, yet he had thought her younger. She was petite, and rather timid; her straggly blond hair framed an angular face, and perfectly round blue eyes. Her nails were glossy, and rose-colored, and seemed to blush against his brown skin. As plain as she was, he found something alluring about her ivory paleness and fragile figure.

In the mornings, she drank espresso and sat in the grass outside of St. Francis Cathedral with her sketchbook and green pencils. Inside the massive stone structure, she sat on a pew in the upper level, sketching frescoes of the life of St. Francis depicted on the walls. The last five years of her life had been devoted to studying Italian artistic representation of monks, and she found St. Francis the most appealing for his dedication to natural beauty and humility.
Below her, where she had spent the first month and a half of her visits to the cathedral, Giotto’s Life of St. Francis encircled the walls surrounding the saints austere tomb.

She had arrived in May, and the old church seemed to become warmer by the hour. While within the cathedral walls, she was forced to wear long-sleeves and ankle-covering skirts, where the robed monks patrolled the scene and hovered around her, as if to prevent her from poorly portraying the cherished saint to whom their cathedral was enshrined. Of the enfolding frescoes, colorfully and elaborately decorated, Eva preferred those that surrounded Francis with animals, the trait for which he became most famous. A sparrow would often perch on an uplifted finger, while perhaps a majestic eagle or a pure white dove would be landing on his shoulder, its wings spread out on either side of it, and its legs reaching down, inches above his arms. At his feet would lie together a lamb and a lion, a stallion and a donkey. And her sketches would be bordered with wooded paths, and flower-leaves that twisted and wove around the ankles of the saint and his flock of “followers.”

Eva’s daytime was reserved for napping, reading, and flower-tending, where she could sit on her balcony and watch the people of Assisi, the tourists, and the monks clunk down the cobblestone road. The Italian she had met, Carlo, became a consistent part of her evenings, and one of the few people with whom she was in actual contact. His English was terrible, which was something she appreciated, and his smoking, which she had quickly come to accept as a critical component of Italian culture, was something that no longer bothered her, as it would have were he an American lover.

In July, he had bought her jasmines to put on her balcony, though she had hung them with masked distaste beside her begonias, where there was still room. “If you really wanted to be Italian, Se veramente volessi esseri italiano,” he had told her. “You would hang these (gelosamine) instead.” She felt humiliated when he tried to “teach her the culture,” and she found it unfair of him to pick most on her begonias, which seemed the one thing most right to her, the one thing he could never make her change. And so she purposely neglected his gelosamine, leaving them without water in the shade, where she knew they would not thrive. She commented nonchalantly one evening that his jasmines were not surviving as well as her begonias, that she supposed, “non era il destino, it wasn’t meant to be.”

Eva went wherever Carlo took her, and since he had grown up in this little town, they went to those places where the tourists thinned out, and the Italian became more fluent - where she was even more like a begonia among legs of jade figurines were marching, parade formation, to throw themselves into the center of the growing volcano. Lava was everywhere; black and red embers spotted the bare wood floor. The only light was hellish, casting shadows that didn’t stay on the walls, but pulled themselves up and away, running into the flame that was she and the man in red gingko leaves. The fire danced wildly to dark Indian music with bells and stars and the music got louder and louder until at last, at its crescendo, the fire flared up to engulf the entire house, and the dark light was so brilliant that I had to turn away and when I turned back everything was quiet. The man in red gingko leaves was gone, and she was lying on the charred wooden floor, very very still and very...
A Man in Red Gingko Leaves
Rowan McMullin

She used to be all apples and spice, but then she met a man in red gingko leaves, and he gave her exotic perfumes and flowers for her neck and treated her to an all expenses paid trip to the stars, and she came back exhausted. Said her week had been great, but she was tired, and could we talk about it another time.

That was when the nightmares started. I woke up to a house of dim shapes with scales and spindly, hair-covered legs. She was standing in the middle of them, singing a lullaby at the top of her lungs. One of them stepped closer to her and brushed her face gently with one of its legs. Her voice faded into the night and up to the stars.

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apartment. Exhausted, she began to head up the cobblestone toward it, and
took her time, strolling up the hill. Before she had reached a halfway point, she
glimpsed a flash of yellow beyond the café. The apartments were all dark and
the street quiet, but that spot of yellow seemed to sing out, disturbing the
peace. And it didn't take long for her to realize what it was, that yellowish
splotch, because a part of her already knew. Her last pot of yellow begonias
were there - struggling, singing, and swelling out of the darkness of its neigh-
bors, and of the entire street, and the entire town.

I'd like to trace the way they dance,
carve small circles into the ground,
small moons, small spectacles, small records
that play and play and play.
After 35 Years, My Parents Slow Dance Again

Beth Bigler

for the first time we heard Blue Moon

His breath rushes into her ear, sounds like a distant tornado, woosh, as if it were coming from Manchester or Muskegon, swooping through Ann Arbor and into their basement. Blue Moon is on the radio, they are transported back to high school-varnished floors, slick as grease, record players playing vinyl and pedal pushers of every color.

He rubs his bare hands down her back, cradles his palm around the crescent beneath her skirt. Now, it is rounder than he last remembers. He thinks of when that curve was forbidden, remembers tickling her there, that tender flesh where thigh meets bottom.

Her manicured nails hold tight onto the place she thinks his shoulder blades should be. She's not sure she can feel the outline of his bones, but presses her fingers into his flesh, they are cushioned and warm.

Their hips don't quite move together anymore; they even step on each other toes. Her thick heels are wood blocks on the floor, they don't click like they used to. Her feet used to be delicate, they used to slip into satin pumps that matched her skirts. Now, they squeeze into scuffed dancing shoes.

He can't tell what color they are anymore. His temple meets hers, the plastic of their glasses catch each others strand of hair. Their eyes open at the same time. Leaning into each other, they sway in small circles.

Improv in the Jazz Club

Jesse Lott

I'm sitting in a downtown club listening to red jazz, a saxophone player lighting up between solos, a 19-year-old guitarist with a scotch sitting on his amp. And the dancers, women in tight dresses with sweat running down their legs, men in their Bogart hats with their drinks in one hand. A girl sits in the corner, her red hair cascading down her shoulders. The trumpet player stands up, plays, the ends of his fingers on fire. I wave to her, half-grin on my face. She laughs and waves back, a short finger-wave. I beckon her over, stand up to meet her halfway on the floor. We dance, her shoulder digging into my chest, the folds of her smile spread across my palm, eyes half-open- the drummer closes it, his long wooden fingers pounding on the skins. She takes my hand and laughs the laugh that breaks the heart of every other guy at the club, takes me back to his table and pulls an ice cube out of her Manhattan, runs it down the crevasse of her neck. The sax player opens up his fingers at both ends of the scale, skipping octaves like a needle. I take the drink and down it, lead her back to the floor. She smiles and pulls me close, and the sax player flips over his stand, because he doesn't need the music anymore, and she doesn't need the music anymore, and the trumpet player pulls his solo from beneath his tough. And I can feel the thin black strap of her dress between my fingers, and I don't need the music anymore, and I pull her close and take her neck in my mouth, and the guitarist sips and waves to the drummer, picks up the line. We dance kissing, we dance the dance of filthy jazz, inside her mouth are a million beams of light, and her shoes fall off, and no one needs the music anymore, and glasses melt out of the hands of the men, and no one is thinking, they dance with their fingers and their mouths, they dance with sweat beading into their eyes. The music has stopped coming out of them, and the music is heat and water. This is for the lovers, the sax player says, and he reaches down his throat and pulls out fire.
Editors:
Jaimien Delp
Amy Grugel

Faculty Advisor:
Mr. Delp

cover photo by Sam Vaneman
The Red Wheelbarrow
William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

The Red Wheelbarrow
Spring, 1999