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florida literature and art



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## Editor's Note

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As Samuel Johnson once said, “the two most engaging powers of an author are to make new things familiar and familiar things new.” That’s exactly what the contributors to this issue of *Saw Palm* have done with their work – they depict the Florida that outsiders expect, replete with palm trees and housing developments, while also describing the Florida that only a native could appreciate. They write of forgotten Indian burial grounds, rotting oranges and insect carcasses, the stink of sweat on Miami public transport. Florida is by turns an aerial map of water and land, an Eden of temptation, and a hell filled with reminders of time passing, of death.

In interviews with Connie Mae Fowler and Peter Meinke, we get a glimpse into the perspectives of two accomplished writers on what it means to live and write in Florida, and what it means to write about Florida after moving away. In poetry, stories, essays, and artwork, our talented contributors plant seeds of what Florida means to them. We hope that those will take root with you as the reader, and will wind and grow in your imagination of what this tragically beautiful state has to offer other than hurricanes and Disneyworld.

This is our inaugural print issue of *Saw Palm*, and we couldn’t be more excited about the final product of so many fine submissions and hard work. The editors and staff that I’ve had the honor of working with are passionate about Florida literature and art – they’d have to be, for all the hours spent reading submissions, designing web pages, editing layout, and managing distribution. Perhaps that’s why this issue crackles with an indescribable energy for us, as though the combination of these words and pictures can form the bolts of lightning this Tampa area is so famous for. As you turn these pages, we hope that you feel it, too.

Alicia Thompson

# Ms. Chisholm

James Whorton Jr.

Ms. Chisholm gave students the impression that she was constructed mostly of elbows, ankles, floating bangs, and printed muslin. Her mouth stayed chapped all winter, and her knuckles were red. She carried raisins in her purse and wore black canvas slip-on shoes—"People's Revolutionary Shoes," her wisecracking former boyfriend had called them—and she drove a Ford Escort with boxes of papers in the back. The tires didn't match. She taught English at the community college for \$1200 a course.

A full-time position was advertised, and she applied in a spirit of despair. She didn't dare hope. But a month into spring semester, Dr. Bud Stripe, the humanities division chair, waved her down in the parking lot to say they wanted to schedule an interview. It was February, and the freezing air was blowing her bangs around. Dr. Stripe showed her his yellow teeth in a smile, and Ms. Chisholm gasped and felt that she might cry.

She strode into class a minute and a half late and swung her large purse and her large tote bag onto the table. She shed her knee-length, off-white quilted nylon coat but kept the knit hat on her head. The night before, alone and pretty well drunk in the kitchen of her rented house, she had made up her mind to quit teaching. Then she had dyed her hair red.

She dug an erasable marker out of her purse and turned her back to the class, trying to hold her hips still as she wrote on the board. Someone snickered, but there were many things a student might be snickering about.

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Ms. Chisholm taught four classes, all composition. Each class had 24 students, and each student wrote five essays. That made

480 freshman essays to mark up and grade in the months between January and May.

It's not bad work. Each four-page essay tugs, taps, or scratches at the heart to some degree. A person could fall in love 480 times a semester, if her heart were kept available.

The full-timers were a jaded, sorry, mostly unavailable bunch. Dr. Stripe, the chair, was kindly but seemed often on the verge of tears. Kandy Raddich taught poetry and business communications and had fourteen Dilbert cartoons taped to her office door. Judith Klam was on crutches since her fall. Tim Wilkey wore a pony tail and a fanny pack. They made good money and had health insurance and retirement plans.

The thought of it made Ms. Chisholm grind her teeth.

Mel Bonnyman, another part-timer, had been interviewed twice. "They will read you a list of questions," he said. "Number one, your philosophy of teaching. Number two, the mission of the community college. Number three, what you do with your student evaluations. Hint: you read them."

"Of course I read them," Ms. Chisholm said. "Don't you?"

They shared an evil laugh.

"Finally they will ask you what you are reading. Are you reading something?"

She ducked her head to indicate the desktop covered with four-page essays in double-spaced Times New Roman. It resembled the floor of a recycling bin.

"Be ready for the What Are You Reading question. Say something intelligent."

"Maybe they'll change the questions this time."

"They will not. Sharon Sturdivant was reduced to tears by the What Are You Reading question. She told them *Misty of Chincoteague!* How's Alistair?"

"Fine," she said. In fact she'd heard nothing from her wiseacre former boyfriend since moving out just after Christmas. Her new address and number were unlisted.

Behind Mel Bonnyman, a boy coughed. Mel Bonnyman



frowned at his watch. He and Ms. Chisholm shared the desk on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The desk was hers for another twenty minutes. He backed out the office door, and the boy stepped in. He offered Ms. Chisholm an essay.

"That was due in class," she said.

"I was vomiting."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

The boy wore scuffed zipper-boots that were surely too big for his feet. He had skin like 2% milk and was not very tall, but his brown plaid sport coat was still too short in the sleeves. His blue jeans had a yellowish tinge. He sat down.

"Did you bring a doctor's excuse?"

"I didn't go to the doctor," he said.

She glared at him, trying to communicate something he ought to have learned a long time ago. She plucked the essay from his fingers and scanned the top page with her trained eye. "No comma *here*," she said, and she circled the superfluous comma with her pen. The trained hand slid down the page. "Or *here*, or *here*, or *here*, or *here*." The essay went sailing back.

He put his face close to study the marks Ms. Chisholm had made on the page. "Really?"

"You want me to show you the rule?" She reached behind her head and pulled a handbook from the shelf.

The two human beings locked eyes until the boy's gaze fluttered and he gave in. Then he did something that surprised Ms. Chisholm. He asked whether she had some Wite-Out.

"Yes."

"May I borrow it?"

She gave him the bottle from the top desk drawer. He shook it then screwed the cap off, and using childish care, hunched at the other side of her desk, he dabbed the black comma out of each magenta circle and then went back and dabbed out the circles. His hand trembled. When he was done he screwed the cap back on and blew on the page. The only bits of magenta left were the

ones that had crossed the letters at the ends of some words.

A tiny chip flew off Ms. Chisholm's heart as though it had been struck with force by something small, like a rock thrown from a car.

\*\*\*

A week went by and the weather turned warm. The rented daffodils in front of her rented house bloomed early, and then the cold came back and zapped them. P-zow! Back into the earth, foolish optimists! It snowed. The house was heated by an oil furnace supplemented by electric baseboard heaters that were devilishly expensive to run. Her January electric bill was \$312, and that was only for the final three weeks of the month. She wore her knee-length off-white quilted nylon coat in the house like a bathrobe. It had synthetic down inside and was very warm, though it left her face, hands, and calves cold. Her feet were OK in the Nepalese fleece house shoes that Alistair had given her on their final, fatal, seventh Christmas together.

Being alone made her feel queer. One night she walked laps in her bedroom. She had a new futon mattress in the corner with a lamp and a magazine on the floor next to it, and otherwise the room was empty. She walked perhaps ninety circuits at a quick pace, droning to herself in a mantra-like way as though she were losing her mind. She was only pretending to lose it, but why was she even pretending? What is to be gained from such an experiment? She bit a piece of banana peel to see how it tasted. She put the knives on a high shelf.

When you live alone, she discovered, you spend a lot of time trying to arrange two mirrors so you can see the back of your head.

The search committee wanted a sample assignment, so on the afternoon before the interview she sat down to pick something. She had dozens of old handouts on her computer, mostly things she'd thrown together in fits of inspiration or pique. Each one seemed to have something quirky and disqualifying about it.

“Describe the largest insect you have ever seen.” What kind of a writing assignment was that?

Her computer was a big desktop PC that she had used since graduate school. The case was ivory-colored and had yellowed like old ivory, and the hard drive rattled. Something hit her and she got up that moment, got in the car, and bought a new laptop on her credit card. Back home she took it out of the box and wrote up a new assignment. It looked smart. She saved it. She read it again, changed a word, and saved it again.

Ms. Chisholm had abilities, but somehow over just a few years she had gotten down on herself. Surely she’d had ambitions, once; or else she would not have borrowed the money that she had borrowed to get through graduate school. When she got her first job teaching part-time, she was proud and excited. She began to dress in a way that made her look older and, she thought, more professional. She had taught that first class at the age of 23. She didn’t worry about looking too young anymore.

She did some math in her head. She still owed fifteen thousand dollars in student loans. She now had nine on the credit card. Alistair owed her twenty-four hundred that she would never see. The Escort was paid for, but its days were short.

She knew from Mel Bonnyman that the committee had scheduled three interviews. Both other candidates were from out of town. There was a sense that the division preferred to hire a new face when it could but also felt obliged to interview an adjunct out of loyalty, or something. Adjuncts taught half the classes; their pay per course was much less than half. No one felt pleased with the arrangement, but of course it would continue as long as there were people like Ms. Chisholm, who had double-majored in English and French then borrowed to stay in school because she admired her professors and had no very clear idea what life outside of school would consist of. Teaching adjunct was another way of borrowing; it was putting something off.

On her new laptop the windows opened differently, as though they were cushioned. It was almost luxurious. She Googled an old

French professor she'd been in love with, and then she Googled the Chamber of Commerce of the city of Pensacola, Florida, a place she'd never been to but liked the name of. She checked the weather: sunny and 65. If she didn't get the job she could go there and be a secretary or do telemarketing or maybe just dress slutty and run for city council.

She started a letter using the Elegant Letter template. "Dear Pensacola Chamber of Commerce: I may take up whoring in your town."

She could type pretty fast. The keyboard of the new laptop had a velvety touch. But she noticed the letters stopped appearing on the screen. The screen froze up, and then nothing happened.

Alistair was the one who had kept the old desktop running all those years. She almost called him; but no. She called the computer store, and they said they would send a Rent-A-Geek on the double. Not ten minutes had passed when there came a soft rap at the door. It was the boy with the zipper-boots.

"It's you," she said. She knocked the screen door towards him, he jumped back, and she pulled him inside and showed him the frozen laptop. He put his finger on the power button and held it there. He did some other things, and ninety seconds later he was perusing her letter to the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce.

"Thank you! That's a private joke," she said.

"I don't think there was anything wrong," the boy said. "Am I going to fail your class?"

"If you don't start showing up, you will."

"I've been working nights. You don't have any furniture in here."

"Right."

"I like it. It's like a Seventies album cover."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I'm talking about, how in the Seventies it was the thing to have a picture of yourself in an empty house on the cover of your record. Maybe one chair."

She could think of examples—Carole King, Gram Parsons.

Evidently she did know what he was talking about.

"I like your look, by the way," he said.

"What look? Describe my look."

"Dowdy. But it's on purpose, right?"

She felt as though she were rising physically quite outside of herself. She went into the kitchen, asking the boy as she walked would he like something to drink.

"Some grapefruit juice?"

Quickly, before he followed, she poured a few ounces of bourbon into an unrinsed teacup. She drank it away with her backside against the sink rim, and she was watching the kitchen doorway when he appeared in it.

"I don't have any grapefruit juice in here," she said. "There is a V-8 in the fridge."

She watched him open the refrigerator door and inspect the contents as though he were at his friend's mother's house. He pulled out a V-8 and began shaking it.

"Reading anything good?" she asked.

He blinked slowly like some kind of scaled thing. "I'm rereading all of my notebooks in order."

"What kind of notebooks are these?"

"Thoughts. Songs I have written. Some class notes. I have sixteen notebooks."

He had certainly never taken notes in her class. He took a sip of V-8, then coughed and let some of it dribble over his chin. "This is awful!"

She set her teacup in the sink and stepped close to him. She took the V-8 bottle and sipped from it. "It tastes like V-8."

He narrowed his eyes at her, getting the message ever so slowly. She was trying to send the message telepathically, but she was light-headed. "What is happening right now?" he said.

"If it looks like a duck, it's a duck," she said.

He kissed her.

She was startled. She reeled backwards a bit.

The door bell rang, and Ms. Chisholm clapped her hand over

her chapped mouth. Should I get it? she wondered. She looked down at herself—she was wearing the long coat and slippers. She went to the door. It was Alistair, dressed in a yellow polo shirt that had “Rent-A-Geek” embroidered on the breast.

“Melissa!” he said.

She stared at him. She turned to look at the boy in zipper-boots standing in her kitchen doorway. “Why did you come here?” she asked the boy.

“To see you.”

“How did you find me?”

“I followed you home.”

“Both of you go,” she said. She saw them out the door—saw the boy onto his bicycle and watched him pedal away, and saw Alistair into his Escort, which happened to be the same year as hers, but with fewer miles on it. She told him her number in exchange for his promise to not come back, not until he’d been invited. “Goodbye, go,” she said, and she walked back inside her house without watching him leave. She sat up very late Googling all of her old professors, finding pictures and citations and obituaries. She had loved many of them, and her life was what it was because of that.

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“I don’t really have a philosophy of teaching,” Ms. Chisholm said. Kandy Raddich had read the question aloud. “I correct mistakes. I try to help.”

Tim Wilkey asked her to describe her understanding of the mission of the community college. “I like how the catalog puts it,” Ms. Chisholm said. She asked to borrow a pen, and Tim Wilkey’s hand disappeared. He brought a Bic from his fanny pack and rolled it across the conference table.

Judith Klam read out the question regarding Ms. Chisholm’s use of the information received on student evaluation forms.

“Honestly I just skim through to see if they’ve said anything good about me,” Ms. Chisholm said. “I read them and cry, if you

want to know the truth. I save them in a folder.”

It was about as bad an interview as the committee had seen. Ms. Chisholm was wearing on off-white quilted winter coat buttoned up past the middle of her blouse and what appeared to be house shoes, though they were unusual ones, possibly handmade. It occurred to Kandy Raddich that Ms. Chisholm might not *know* that the things on her feet were only meant for home. There were no follow-up questions. Liselle Perry, the division secretary, came in with a plastic cup of water for the candidate, but when she saw the look on Judith Klam’s face she turned around and walked back out without having set the cup down.

“Anything else?” Ms. Chisholm said. “Surely there is more!”

“That’s about it,” Kandy Raddich said.

“One more question,” Ms. Chisholm said again.

Dr. Stripe smiled kindly. He was a nice old man, Ms. Chisholm thought. He asked to know what she’d been reading. “Aside from all those freshman essays, of course.”

“*Boule de Suif*,” she said throatily.

“Say what say what?” Tim Wilkey said. He laughed, but no one joined him.

“It’s a short story by Guy de Maupassant. ‘*Boule de Suif*.’ It is his masterpiece.”

From her large purse she produced a very worn paperback with the words running upside-down on the spine. She read some of the story out loud, in the French—a full minute’s worth. She had a fine way with the language from her six semesters in college plus a semester abroad, sort of, in Canada.

At the end of the minute Judith Klam gave a snort, got up on her crutches, and left. Kandy Raddich followed her out. Tim Wilkey stared at the table, mystified. Bud Stripe had tears in his eyes.

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“Tell us what it means,” Bud Stripe said.

“Her name means Ball of Fat. That’s what she’s called,”

Ms. Chisholm said. “She’s crammed in this coach with a count and countess, some rich businessmen, a couple of nuns—no one will speak to her, they only stare, because she’s a prostitute. The Prussians have taken Rouen, and it’s snowing, and they’re trying to escape, and no one has thought to bring something to eat. They’re riding all day. It’s freezing, they’re stuck in the snow. Then Ball of Fat pulls out a huge basket of food, and she shares it.”

She told them about the straw on the floor of the coach, stacked thick for insulation; the copper foot-warmers; the chickens in jelly; the Prussian officer at the inn. “He wants her to come to bed with him,” Ms. Chisholm said. “To have sex, I mean. She won’t, because he’s Prussian. But the others tell her to do it, because then he’ll let them go. And she’s a prostitute anyway, so why not?”

“So she does it?”

“I won’t spoil the end,” Ms. Chisholm said. “But you can probably guess. The sad part is what happens after.”

It all goes back to the way it was before, of course. Only this time it is Ball of Fat who hasn’t got any food.

Stripe was easily moved, and this moved him. But the interview was already tanked. The job went to one of the out-of-towners. The boy in zipper-boots never returned; spring came, then summer, with its three reduced paychecks. Ms. Chisholm ate ramen noodles. She applied at other schools. In fall she got her four courses again. Life ground on.

In October, halfway through the semester, Dr. Stripe called her into his office. The full-time French instructor was moving to China to marry a man she’d met online. “You’d be doing the college a favor if you would agree to take on her classes,” he said.

“I don’t teach French,” Ms. Chisholm said.

“Your French is beautiful. What else can we do? I can give you what we call a temporary full-time contract.”

“What about the permanent position?”

“You’ve been loyal. We’ll do what we can,” he said.



It was fall; her hair was brown again, and the bangs were pulled back under a plastic band with a tortoise-shell pattern. Ms. Chisholm had a clear, pretty forehead. She looked nice in her blue cardigan sweater. She'd put a treadmill on her credit card; she'd been running.

"I give you my promise: if you'll do this for me, I will do everything I can," Dr. Stripe said.

He meant it, of course. Why wouldn't he mean it? Ms. Chisholm took the courses, and in time she got the job: she became a full-timer. You can guess what happened after that.

# Coastland

Susan Meyers

When the wind gets up and the water rises,  
those who live on higher ground, at a distance  
from the pinched smell of pluff mud,  
from spartina marshes and swamps of cypress knees,  
upland from the tannin-black tributaries  
where through the bottoms, among the wet-footed  
spider lilies, one barred owl  
calls another, one to the other till there's little left to say,  
upland from the cottonmouth and the brown water snake  
coiled and rooted by the tupelo  
and the alligators logging across the slough,  
upland from the deer hound pens full of yelps—  
full of naps and pacing, full of cedar-thicket dreaming—  
and the dirt yard's milling of gray cats  
and striped kittens yawning by the palmettos,  
upland from the sea sky sea—the horizon  
a fine line polished away—  
from the shrimp boats shrinking smaller and smaller  
on their way to their serious work of gathering,  
from the smooth, quick balancing act  
of the sun—heavy and orange—riding the waves,  
upland from salt myrtle and the season's second growth  
of trumpet honeysuckle, those who live at a distance  
from the band of quick, dark clouds blooming at sea,  
upland from the bang and whirl, clatter  
and shake of the wind when it's up,  
those who live on higher ground ask  
of those who live by the flats and shoals,  
the shallows and bogs, Why, and again, Why, O why.

# Living and Writing in a 'Land of Memory Stealers': An Interview with Connie May Fowler

Erin Trauth

Connie May Fowler, a Florida native, is a novelist, memoirist, and screenwriter. She is the author of several novels, including *The Problem with Murmur Lee*, a Redbook premier book club selection; *Remembering Blue*, a Chautauqua South Literary Award recipient; and *Before Women had Wings*, winner of the 1996 Southern Book Critics Circle Award and the Francis Buck Award from the League of American Pen Women. She also published a memoir titled, *When Katie Wakes*.

Three of Connie May Fowler's novels have been nominated for the Dublin International Literary Award. Her essays have been published in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The London Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, and *Oxford American*. Her work has been translated into 15 languages and is published around the world. From 2003-2007, she served as the Irving Bachellor Professor of Creative Writing at Rollins College. She is the founder and CEO of Below Sea Level: Full Immersion Workshops for Serious Writers.

Currently, Connie May Fowler lives in Northwest Florida with her husband and three dogs. She recently finished her seventh book, a novel titled *How Clarissa Burden Learned to Fly*.

**ET:** How do you feel living in Florida has influenced your writing?

**CMF:** I think if you live in Florida for any length of time, you're struck with how easily we abandon memory. Our cultural, sociological, and historical memories seem to vanish with each

new skyscraper. It has been our way to allow others to define us and rewrite our narratives. It's as if we live in a land of memory stealers. So for me, writing is a madwoman's attempt at trying to remember what is and was real in a place whose primary constant is change.

**ET:** What would you consider your most inspired "Florida" setting?

**CMF:** Probably Poor Spot Cemetery in my upcoming novel *How Clarissa Burden Learned to Fly*. There really is a Poor Spot Cemetery and it is, sad to say, aptly named. I took poetic license and moved it to fictionalized North Florida county. In the book, the graveyard is populated with ghost women and their female ghost children. Clarissa believes she has, as she puts it, stumbled onto her own private Salem.

**ET:** For your novel, *Before Women Had Wings*, did you revisit Tampa to make sure you got the details of place just right, or did you base your description solely off of memory?

**CMF:** I wrote it from memory. But because I'm always second-guessing myself, I revisited the places I wrote about prior to turning in my final draft.

**ET:** How important do you think an author's connection to place is? Must a writer be from the place his or her novel takes place?

**CMF:** Connection to place is an extremely important tenet for a writer. Imagine if a writer said, "I have absolutely no idea who my character is, nor do I feel any connection to her; I just wrote down a bunch of random words and hoped for the best." It's the same with place—it's part of the cellular make-up of our narratives. I don't think a writer must be from the place she is writing about, but she needs to understand it holistically.

**ET:** How does Florida compare to other places you've lived and worked?

**CMF:** Florida is a huge state, wildly diverse in its landscape and peoples, so it's difficult for me to make broad comparisons. I do think, however, that some states do a better job recognizing and supporting its writers. On the plus side, The Florida Center for The Book is an extremely important resource. The Florida Humanities Council does an immense job of educating Floridians about Florida writers. Their summer Florida reading issue of *FORUM* is a wonderful contribution. And I hope the regional book fairs continue to grow and flourish. Part of the challenge, I suppose, is the dichotomy that exists between North and South Florida and that willful cliché that South Florida is Cuba and North Florida is Georgia. If we continue to view the state as two independent entities sharing an uneasy border with Disney World, how will we ever properly recognize and celebrate the diverse writers who call this place home? We may have disparate parts that form an imperfect union, but we are forever bound by history and legacy.

**ET:** What are your five favorite Florida-based attractions and/or events (restaurants, museums, theme parks, beaches, bed and breakfasts, manatee tours, dolphin cruises)? Have any of these five places or events influenced your writing in any way?

**CMF:** I love uncrowded spots . . . that's why I stay home a lot. Although, I have to say, nothing tops the Sopchoppy Worm Grunting Festival. And, oh yes, the Alligator Farm's swamp in the springtime—it's an extraordinary place to watch nesting and hatching egrets, herons, anhingas and more. Let's see . . . then there's Wakulla Springs and St. Marks and the 'glades. We have amazing rivers and a few barrier islands not yet paved over. Payne's Prairie and the savannahs south of Orlando are devoutly beautiful. I think that's more than five, but La Florida is rare and lovely and is the backbone of many of my stories.

**ET:** Where is your new novel, *How Clarissa Burden Learned to Fly*, set? Why did you choose to set it there?

**CMF:** It is set in North Florida in, as I mentioned, a fictional

county. Tallahassee and Mashes Sands make cameo appearances but I might write them out. I set the novel there because, quite simply, the story demanded I do so. I thought it was going to take place in Tampa but once I started writing, a mythological village named Hope, Florida emerged.

**ET:** How do you write (where, when, for weeks at a time, in short bursts, etc.)?

**CMF:** It depends on whether I'm teaching or not. When I'm teaching, I tend to be solely focused on my students. When I'm not teaching, I live the life of a hermit and write daily, for as many hours as I can bear it. There is truly something insane and terrifying about the process. But it's exhilarating, as well. I work at home, in my studio, and spend much of the time staring into space, mumbling, replete in my tattered pajamas and tangled hair. Oh, yes, writers are so damned sexy.

**ET:** What advice do you have for beginning writers?

**CMF:** Read, read, read. Keep your butt in the chair and do the hard work. Read your work aloud: You must develop an ear and an eye for the language. Revise, revise, revise, revise. Read some more.

**ET:** How do you think a beginning writer can get Florida (as a setting) just right?

**CMF:** The same way an established writer does: Immerse Thyself.

# Oranges

Genanne Walsh

The boy was pilfering her tree again. She set down the coffee pot and slammed out the back screen door, ready to scare the kid straight, knowing full well her witchy reputation in the neighborhood. “Hey,” she called. “Hey, thief!”

Startled, he stood in place under the branches, swaying slightly, squeezing chubby thighs together as if pressing hard enough might propel him right off the ground. Muddy brown hair framed his face pale. A pillowcase hung from the waistband of his jeans, holding about a dozen of her late-season citrus.

“What’s your name, kid?”

“Arnold.”

“Good God.”

His eyes weren’t dull, and there was a slyness in them—he may or may not have been lying about his name. For his sake, she hoped so. “Arnold, I am going to give you a present of those oranges. But if you take more without asking, I’ll call the police and you’ll rot in jail until college. Understood?”

He blinked, mute. The trouble with this new generation, among other things, was that it had absolutely no sense of humor.

“Come here.” She turned to the window ledge, where she had set the hard, glossy outer casing of a mole cricket. It was the biggest she’d ever seen, more than three inches long, the small wings on its back dwarfed by monstrous front legs. She’d stepped into her yard that morning and her sandal had come down on the thing’s end in just the right place—or the wrong place, depending on how you looked at it.

Its guts shot forward under the force of her weight, jet-propelled out the mouth with a vital pop, leaving the exoskeleton perfectly intact and empty as a dress-up pocketbook. She’d bent

over the thing, shuddering, her blood zinging. Now she held up the husk like a scepter and presented it to the boy.

“No guts but a little glory,” she said, telling him what had happened to the innards, pointing vaguely toward a spot on the ground while the kid squinted suspiciously

At her urging, he took it. “Jane,” the kid said.

“That’s my name.” Her white hair hung in two braids down her skinny back. She favored loose cotton trousers and cork-soled sandals. A relic.

He didn’t say more. She gestured to the husk of the mole cricket. “Want it?”

Arnold held it gingerly and, looking into her eyes, smashed the thing between his thumb and index finger. It crackled dryly.

“What’d you do that for?”

“It was already dead,” the boy said.

She sent him off, then moved quickly through the house to stand at her front window, next to the mahogany table clustered with photos from Steven’s youth. Her boy had nothing in common with this little turd, whom she now watched tripping up the street, pants sagging, belly hanging under his shrunken shirt and dirty pillowcase thumping behind him. She knew where he was headed. He turned up a driveway five houses down. Like all the other houses on the block except Jane’s, Arnold’s was new, oversized, with the faux-Spanish style of the Gulf Coast nouveau riche. A special ed school van picked him up every weekday.

Two other kids lived in that house, quick blondes with silvery voices—they took the regular bus to school. She thought that if he developed homicidal tendencies, he’d probably kill his own family before moving on to the neighbors.

As soon as the sun set she drove out to Lido Key. Not much traffic on the road, which was just as well since she wasn’t supposed to drive at night. Buffeted by balmy air, she streamed past condos and strip malls and houses masked by tall fences, then onto the bridge, wheels trammeling, ending with a thunk on seamless Lido Drive.



To the right, the Gulf swayed in its own darkness and the past swam up through layers of sediment to dart through her head. “Are we there yet?” Steven would ask every time, though he knew exactly how long it took to drive from their house to the beach at the end of the key.

“Yet we are,” she’d reply, as if it were a place and they were in it.

Her son in his perfect boyhood, a sandy stretch of time eclipsed by the blackouts and rages of his teen years, the 2 a.m. calls from jail, from roadside taverns, and her by the phone, helpless. His silences worst of all. Finally, “fixed” by a psychotropic cocktail and living in halfway house for stability. Her boy—middle-aged now—and his half-life. He might lapse, the shrink had warned. Don’t push. And her life: pinwheeling over the days until their scheduled phone calls.

Yet we are, she whispered now. She parked where they always had, next to a dumpster at the far end of the lot, then strode down a small path to the beach. The white sand reflected the moon, and she could see two guys drinking beer. Further on, a couple made out and some kids, probably from the art school, were flinging fistfuls of water into patterns on the sand and giggling. She kicked off the sandals and her calluses hit the powder in squeaky puffs.

She hoisted her pant legs and waded into the Gulf, not shuffling to ward off stingrays, just kicking the water so it loosened and collapsed back into itself in a shimmer. The phosphorescent phytoplankton was out—the art kids had tipped her off. It rode the shore some nights, looking like nothing until, sparked by motion—cupped hands, a swimmer’s arm, a boy’s shoulder blade, a flicking fin—it glowed, then subsided.

In those days, she and Steven would splash in, shuffling until they lifted off, kicking into blackness, the water just an extension of their own aliveness. Once a gray fin had arced two feet from Steven’s head and she’d watched dumbly. A dolphin or a shark, they never knew. He saw it too, and looked at her, both of them treading water and waiting for something else, something

definitive that never came. His cheeks were incandescent.

The risks she had taken then had seemed apiece with the water and the light—necessary and benevolent. They'd walked unscathed from the Gulf and her son turned cartwheels on the sand to dry himself while she watched, trembling. Now the beach stretched out like an empty palm and she risked in different ways. She walked, kicking and kicking the sparks along the shore until soon enough she grew tired. Finally she sat in the sand, watching the glow wane, and no one bothered her or said her name.

Driving home, the black road absorbed the moon's thin light and she imagined what she would say to Arnold the next time—there had to be a next time—she caught him stealing.

“What, do you think oranges grow on trees?” Then him, the kid, pushing hair off his forehead, and grinning.

# Florida Flash with Peter Meinke

Daniele Pantano

## 1) Why Florida?

I'd just finished my PhD at the U. of Minnesota (1965), and a friend called offering me a job at what was then called Florida Presbyterian College (now Eckerd). My first reaction was to say, "Jesus, Jim, FLORIDA PRESBYTERIAN?!" But I went to the interview just to see some sunshine; I loved it immediately.

## 2) Your best-kept Florida secret?

Although we've gradually become devout St. Petersburgers, Jeanne and I both believe we wouldn't have stayed these 40+ years if we hadn't found, accidentally and early on, our dream house, a Wordsworthian cottage surrounded by oaks and azaleas, which we bought for \$14,000. We often refer to it (looking uxoriously around) as our "sweet trap."

## 3) Your strangest Florida?

Florida grows strangeness like Spanish moss, but the strangest to us has been its political backwardness, mendacity, and mind-boggling ineptness.

## 4) Your silence before the storm?

Sorry for thinking so politically, but it can't be helped these days (a week before the election): If the Democrats lose this time, we'll look into leaving, not just Florida, but the country. We thought of doing this before, during the Vietnam war, but then we had four children with us. Now it's just us. Even poets should take moral positions now and then.

## 5) Your six-word Florida memoir?

St. Petersburg welcomed and surprised us.

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*This interview was conducted on 25 October 2008 via email.*

# Secret Garden

Barbara Crooker

Sitting here at a small green table  
surrounded by banana trees, palms,  
and a big gumbo-limbo; palmettos  
and giant ferns filling in the under  
story, I think I've stumbled back to Eden,  
and, like Adam, have had to name the plants:  
Red Hot Firecrackers, Fanfare-of-Trumpets,  
Shrimp-on-a-Stick, Flaming Torch, Parrots' Claws,  
Stars-in-the-Night-Sky. I'm in a painting  
by Henri Rousseau, every frond edged in black,  
green Venetian blinds, filtering out the sun. And  
then there was evening, and then there was morning,  
a sixth day.

# Bones

Wendy Thornton

I never meant to freak out the Indian. He's just a kid who works for me in my (very) small construction firm. We've been fishing a few times. I've never known him to be especially deep. Most of the time he's pretty quiet, or I wouldn't take him fishing. He's a good worker, steady, cooperative. And he certainly never seemed that attached to his heritage, not till I moved the bones.

I, of course, am very attached to my heritage. I've lived here all my life and my daddy before me and his daddy before him. There aren't too many people in Florida who can say that. The bumper sticker on the back of my truck says, "Home Grown," and we're not talking my side business. Daddy is an environmental engineer for the Water Management district and Granddaddy was an alligator hunter in the Okefenokee Swamp. Last year when it burned, you could see the fires as far away as Orlando and Atlanta. I hear tell the volunteer fire fighters in Baker County were so desperate to put out that fire, they even used Granddaddy's old Ford truck to haul water to the area.

Turns out Mic's grandfather was an alligator hunter, too. And I guess one of his great-great-however-many-times-great grandfather was an Indian chief, which mine wasn't. So, I guess that makes him even more of a local than I am. But he never mentioned any of this before I found the bones.

He did tell me he was named after the town of Micanopy, and I knew the town was named after an Indian chief, but, call me stupid, I never made the connection. Anyway, he went north to college instead of going to the state university and the bumper sticker on his beat-up old Toyota has a picture of the earth and "Citizen of the World" printed on it. So it's not like he made himself known as a Seminole rabble rouser. He didn't even seem

very interested in my arrowheads.

Collecting arrowheads is my hobby. These aren't like what you would think from seeing TV Indians riding wild mustangs on a wing and a prayer, zipping off zingers at the invading wagon trains full of potential settlers until the cavalry comes in and massacres them all. John Wayne never pulled one of these suckers out of his bloody side. These are made of limestone, hand-hewn and rough, and the points aren't sharp enough to stab anybody. But I guess they worked well enough for killing animals.

On Saturdays, I go out with my thigh-high waders into the muck at the edge of the lakes and drop handfuls of mud into my home-made sieve box. I shake out the mud and trash—you would not believe what people throw in these lakes—and come up with the triangular pieces of stone that are so rough most people don't even recognize what they are. Some have edges that look like fingerprints pressed into them, and now, since the night of the bones, I like to imagine some brightly clothed, brown-skinned kid holding the piece as he chips away at the point with another rock and his fingers leave permanent marks in the soft stone.

I take them home, clean them up, mount them in shadowboxes lined with velvety-looking material and covered with glass. I have the boxes all over the walls of my house instead of pictures. I like to throw in some sharks' teeth, even though they're common in these parts. The teeth impress women more than the arrowheads.

Once a friend of mine brought some hot-shot grad student from the State Museum to buy pot. He was flabbergasted when he saw my collection. Even tried to buy it from me. I said no way. He said he could have me arrested for stealing archeological artifacts. I told him I could get him fired for buying pot. Fuck! Then I threw him out empty-handed. I kind of understood his concern, though. Used to be, I was the only one sifting through the silt for treasures, but now there's a whole gang of people out there on the edge of the lakes every afternoon.

By profession, I'm a roofer. Got my own company and it's pretty successful. My secret is, I put bids on roofs when the buildings

are at the foundation stage. My dad, before he had his stroke and was mercifully unable to talk, told me I was contributing to the “Miami-ization” of North Florida. This really hurt me. I thought he’d be proud of my success. But it’s not the kind of success he wanted, not like my brother, Bob, who’s a historical preservationist in St. Augustine, or my sister Rose, who’s a wildlife biologist in the Everglades. I myself never finished college. I went for a couple of years, but didn’t really enjoy it. I like working with my hands, which is something you’d think my old man would appreciate. But he says, “I didn’t pull myself out of the swamp so my kid could play with tar.” Or he used to say that.

Roofing is honest work. The Saturday I found the bones, I was on my way to Orange Lake to look for arrowheads, maybe get in some fishing, when I saw this huge backhoe hole behind the tree line off 441. Thinking it might lead to a job, I pulled off and looked for a contractor sign, but there was nothing. I mean this hole was big. I knew it had to be for a supermarket or apartment complex. I climbed down into the pit and started marking it off with my feet.

The sun was punishing, and I doubt I would even have seen the bones in that glare if I hadn’t been shuffling through the dust in my waders. First I found a shard of pottery. I knew what it was right away, because I’d seen the same kind of thing at the Museum. And then I found a leg bone. The phalanges of a hand. By this time I was so excited, I started digging like a dog in the dirt. I went back to the truck and got my sieve and within minutes I had found not one skeleton, but many. I found skulls, feet, ribs, thigh bones. I had these visions of reconstructing the skeletons like museum scientists reconstruct dinosaur bones. I’d have real live skeletons hanging all over my house!

I had some boxes in my truck. I put four boxes of bones, pottery, and tools into the back of my truck and headed back to town, whistling.

Oh, I knew in the back of my mind this was a burial ground I’d found, but you don’t really think about it, you know. It’s not like,

here is the final resting place of these men, women, and children who once laughed and played and hunted and slept near here, who loved and hated the way I do, whose flesh became bones and whose bones were preserved in the limestone dust of their grave. I didn't think of it like that. They were just part of my collection, no more significant than a bunch of new, exotic stamps would be to someone who collects stamps or a new butterfly to an insect collector.

By the time I'd found everything there was to find, it was late afternoon. Shadows filled the hole and there were hardly any cars on the road. The heat was oppressive as a sauna so I decided to stop off for a beer before I brought my newfound treasures home.

I always go to the same bar, Eddie C's Pub. Ed has dart boards and pool tables. Other than that, it's like every other bar, dark, neon-lit. There's a promo Budweiser wagon over the bar that looks like the horses are running. Ed uses the wagon to hold his personal darts. Regular customers get their own beer steins—we like to recycle. Ed cashes checks for people he knows, even if they're post-dated. The music is loud, the air is cool, and the people are friendly.

The first person I saw inside was Mic, throwing darts. "Hey, Mic," I shouted, happy to see someone I could brag to. He missed his shot and turned towards me with a glare, but when he saw me, he smiled.

"Take me on?" he said over the music.

"Feel like losing?" I shouted back. I put my beer down on a table and Ed hands me my dart case from the shelf behind the bar where the regulars keep their stuff. Mic and I played for a few minutes, practicing, not talking. I felt lucky. I was hot, hit a ton twenty and a ton forty while we were warming up. Watching the other players, I figured Mic and I could pick up a couple of bucks hustling somebody. But first, I had to beat him. Let him know he wanted to be on my team.

The bones made me feel like I had a truck full of rabbits' feet.



Mic shifted uncomfortably and groaned when I hit a trip twenty. I was dying to tell him my secret, and I blurted it out when it was his turn, even though I knew it would break his concentration. I told him about the number of bones, the pottery pieces, the arrowheads.

Mic stopped and stared at me. "Where'd you find these bones?"

"You want to see them?" I asked, hoping he'd say yes. Boy, did I want to show off.

"Naw," he barked. "Just play."

When it was my turn, I hit the first ton eighty I'd hit all month, which got me entered into the Tuesday night masters tournament. I shouted to Ed and he wrote my name in the book. Mic wasn't having any luck at all. His darts were so wild it was painful. Sometimes he didn't even hit the board, which is real unusual when you're a good player like Mic. I started watching him out of the corner of my eye. He looked like someone aiming at a picture of his ex-wife, going all squinty-eyed and throwing the darts with such power I had trouble yanking them out of the board.

"Take it easy," I said, pulling one out of the wall. "This ain't hardball."

"Shouldn't have touched those bones," Mic said.

"What?" I honestly didn't think I'd heard him right, what with the music and all.

"You shouldn't have moved them," Mic said. "That was sacred ground."

"You didn't mind when I showed you the arrowheads."

"Arrowheads aren't sacred."

"Neither are these goddamn bones," I shouted, hurling my next dart right into the wall. Mic smirked as he pulled the dart out, but he didn't say anything. "I don't even know if they're Indian bones."

"Did you find a coffin?"

I didn't answer. Smart-ass Indian. Couldn't even let a man savor his one small victory. "It could have been the gravesite of a

mass murderer, for all you know. Anyway, I'm going to take them to the museum, have them checked out."

There was a lull in the music as Ed put in another disc. "The museum will take them from you," Mic said softly. "They'll put them on display like dinosaur bones." That kind of embarrassed me, since I'd been thinking of doing the exact same thing myself.

"They're not taking them from me. I found them. They're mine."

Mic said, "You should have left them alone." He eyed the dartboard, then opened his hand and let fly, taking out a double bull. He turned to Ed, who gave him the okay sign and wrote his name in the Tuesday book. "Mugs away," says Mic. "Loser starts the next game."

I was getting pissed. "Goddam you, Mic, if I'd left them alone, some backhoe operator would be grinding them to dust on Monday morning without even knowing they were there."

"I would rather they be dust than dinosaurs on display."

"Yeah, you're a dinosaur," I growled, getting irritated.

Mic stared at me, his dart at the ready. For a minute, I thought he was going to throw it at me, but he just threw it at the board. Another ton. I swallowed my beer and signaled Ed for another.

The tenor of the game had changed. I couldn't do anything right for love or money. No matter where I aimed, the darts ended up on the wrong side of the wire. When Mic threw another winner, I said, "Game's over, asshole."

"You gonna take your football and go home?" he taunted me.

"You gonna get all high and mighty over a few old bones? I don't understand it."

"You don't feel," Mic said. "Even in death, my people can't rest in peace."

"Yeah, well, I guess that just goes to show, they shoulda buried themselves in coffins."

"Grave robber."

"I'm not a grave robber."

"Thief."

"You mother, I'm not a thief. You want to talk about this outside?" I shouted. I knew he wouldn't mess with me. I'm twice his size, twice his age, a renowned scrapper in these parts.

To my surprise, he said, "yeah," and sauntered towards the door. I looked over at Ed, who shrugged. I looked at the other darters, who had stopped their games and were watching me. What could I do? I didn't want to hurt the little guy, but what the hell.

Out in the parking lot, it occurred to me that I'd had a lot of beers on an empty stomach. I walked into heat like a fireball. "Jesus," I muttered as I watched Mic strip off his t-shirt and take the belt out of his jeans. This kid was serious.

The other patrons followed us. A fight on a hot Saturday afternoon—good entertainment.

"I don't want to fight you, man," I said.

"Grave robber," he snarled, extending his arms and arching his back like some kind of bird drying his wings on a branch.

"Look, Mic, you're a friend. I don't want to hurt you, okay?"

"Thief," he roared, and came at me, swinging. I had no choice but to hold him off. I didn't hit him back, though, and he landed a punch on my arm that made me wince.

The sweat was pouring off. I said, "Look Mic, I'll let you get a lick in, and then let's call it quits before somebody—you, boy—gets hurt."

"Coward!" he shrieked.

That did it. I popped him neatly on the nose, and it started bleeding. He became a wild man, swinging and flaying his skinny arms in the direction of my face. I hit him across the jaw, not very hard, but he managed to land a punch in my stomach that hurt. I hit him on the other side of his face, this time harder. He reeled away across the parking lot. The crowd shouted behind us. I could hear Ed muttering, "you guys, you guys," over and over like an incantation. He's an old surfer; hates to see friends fight. Me, too.

“Quit, kid,” I said.

But he gathered up his strength and surprised me with a left hook I didn’t even see coming. I felt cartilage bend under the pressure, and blood spurted out. Now both of us looked like kids with nosebleeds and I was pissed. I popped him in the mouth and cut his lip. Then I punched him above his eye and his eyebrow began to bleed. He put his hands up to his face and I grabbed him around the waist and flung him down onto a patch of grass on the side of the parking lot. Jumping on his back, I grabbed one arm and twisted it behind him, then caught a handful of his hair and pulled his head up towards my chest. “I’m telling you now,” I hissed at him through clenched teeth, “I want you to quit. You’ve made your point.”

I let go of him and stood up with a groan. Some of the guys in the parking lot cheered. “Don’t you assholes have anything better to do?” I asked. The guys looked glum and shuffled towards the bar. I could hear them talking about the fight as they left. “Kid is lucky,” they said. “Old Jack was nice to him—he’s still breathing.” I put my hands on my hips and shook my ringing ears.

Mic didn’t look lucky. He lay in the grass with his head down. I knelt down beside him. “Are you okay?”

Enunciating clearly, he said, “Fuck you.”

I stood up. “Right,” I snapped, “let me know when you’re ready to get up and I’ll give you a hand.”

Mic mumbled, “They are my ancestors.”

“You don’t know that.”

He rolled over, looked up at me. Through his split lip he said, “Don’t know they’re not.”

Won the battle, lost the war. “Okay,” I said. “Say they are. What do you want me to do, drop them back in that hole so they’ll be part of a shopping center? I mean, I’ll do that if you want me to. I didn’t know this was going to make you crazy or I wouldn’t have touched the damn things.”

I took off my shirt and handed it to him, and he wiped the blood off his face. Then I wiped the blood off mine with the same

shirt and tied it around my waist. "Guess this makes us blood brothers, right?" I said. He started to smile, then spit into the grass and sat up. "Seriously, man," I continued, encouraged by the almost-smile, "what do you want me to do about this? Maybe I should just take them to the museum? I know a guy—they'll probably put me in jail for stealing archeological artifacts. You can come visit me, bring cigarettes."

"Not a chance," Mic said.

"Well, hell, that's not very nice."

"I don't go near white man's jail."

It's funny, up to that point, I'd always thought of Mic as a white man. I mean, his skin isn't any darker than my granddaddy's was. He just looked tan. "I could drop the boxes off anonymously," I volunteered, though I hated the thought of that hot-shot grad student claiming my treasure.

"No," Mic said, "they'll just make an exhibit out of them."

"So you take them."

"Hell, no. They'd give me the creeps to have in my house. Could be my great-grandfather or something."

"Well, hell, Mic, what do you propose we do, then?"

He thought for a moment. Then he said, "We give them a proper burial."

"You mean in a coffin? With words?"

"Naw," Mic said. "In the open. Somewhere where they're protected."

I sat down next to him. Finally I said, "Newnan's Lake?"

"Naw, they're dredging it to clean out the pollution."

"Suwannee?"

"Perfect, drop 'em in the river made famous by a white northerner who wrote a song about it even though he never saw it."

"Well, what the hell." I was frustrated, hot, tired and sore. "What about the Okefenokee? Nobody will find them in that swamp. Not many tourists since the fires."

He considered this for a moment. “The swamp would be good,” he said.

“Let’s have a beer and plan our strategy.” I helped him up and we went back into Eddie C’s. Everyone cheered when we came in the door. In the bar over the mirror, I could see that we looked like shit. But by the time we left the bar several hours later—at closing time, actually—we were lit on free beer and didn’t care.

We drove to my house, hitched up the boat to the truck and headed out of town. By the time we got to the swamp, it was almost daylight. In the headlights, we could see the devastation wrought by the fires. But already things were blooming, trying to come back. The air smelled acrid, like burned wood. We backed the truck up to a boat ramp and Mic jumped out to guide me as I maneuvered the trailer closer to the water. I heard little splashes all around us, and I regretted not bringing my pole. But hey, this was a sacred occasion.

I helped Mic transfer the boxes of bones into my boat. We paddled off across the dark water, and when we were in the middle of the inlet, we started the motor and idled away from shore. Spanish moss draped the oaks and dangled to the water like shawls. Cypress knees stuck out of the mud around us. I handed Mic a beer and passed him a bag of chips.

We sat in the middle of the dark water, drinking and munching, shining our flashlight at alligator eyes. They were all around us, like unmoving fireflies. A warm wind blew up and I shivered, watching the moss wave.

“My people,” Mic said softly, “were originally of the Upper Creek tribe. They came to Florida after the Creek War in the early eighteen hundreds.”

“So you’ve been here a while.

He grinned, and his white teeth flashed in the moonlight. “My people came here because they were driven from the north, from Alabama Territory.”

“So, we ought to be burying them in Alabama, then,” I said.

Mic ignored this and took another swig of beer. "My people lived in harmony here, on deer and berries and fish. They were farmers. They wore bright-colored clothes and beads. Andrew Jackson thought my people should be sent to Apalachicola, but many of my clan went to the Everglades instead."

"Hell, I'll drive you to Apalachicola, but I'm not driving to the Everglades. That's too far."

"Next, the whites decided we should go west. My people fought against this move. My many-times great-grandfather, Chief Micanopy, led the revolt. He was taken from his home and moved against his will to the Oklahoma Territory. He died there in a place not his own."

I was silent. The moon went behind the clouds and darkness closed in around us. Crickets and frogs set up a racket. An alligator grunted. Mic and I sat in the boat, staring at each other through the darkness.

"Well," I said, handing him another beer, "you want to say some kind of Seminole words or sing a song here or something?"

Mic hesitated. "I don't know any," he said. I guessed that was the saddest thing I heard all night.

I felt like the moment called for something. So I said, "We're here to restore your heritage to you, Micanopy. We need some appropriate ceremonial tribute to mark the occasion. Think of something, man."

Mic sighed. "Four years of college and I can't speak Muskogee like my ancestors spoke. I never learned anything in my life but the history of a bunch of dead people."

"Damn, man," I said, "that's all history is anyway. Bunch of dead people."

Just then, the moon came out from behind the clouds and lit up the dark, peat-filled water like a night-hunter's spotlight. Mic looked up, and in the high planes of his cheekbones, I could see the bones of his ancestors. He stood up in the boat and raised his arms and let out a blood-curdling howl. He howled again, then barked like a dog, and I laughed out of sheer nervousness. He

grinned at me, and I stood up and commenced to howling myself. He took one of the bones out of the box and held it for a moment, as if checking its weight. Then he hurled it out into the dark water. The bone caused silver ripples on the smooth surface. "To Chief Micanopy," he yelled.

I took a bone and threw it into the water, as far as I could. It splashed lightly and disappeared. We took turns, throwing one after another of the bones into the dark water. As we threw the last one, a great blue heron rose from the banks of the lake and swept over us like a grey ghost, turning in our direction, dipping its wings as if in salute. We watched it fly off into the early light of dawn, and then the clouds closed in again. We paddled back to shore. Didn't even use the outboard.



# Poetry Spotlight: Ilyse Kusnetz

## Winter Park, Archives

An orchard full of frost-burnt  
branches, the shipwrecked  
hulls of empty bushels, and  
a lone man, his arms  
outstretched like a plea,  
ankle-deep in oranges,  
oranges everywhere,—  
a town's bright livelihood  
drowned in ice, and no observable  
moral to the story, just  
it can happen like that,  
one act of God, the weather, etc.  
etc., the usual hindsight  
of cautions, though  
surely one might argue,  
no insulation's foolproof.  
At most, in the end, a resolute  
you couldn't have seen it coming,  
this unexpected snap,  
the gravity of falling.

## The Idea of You at Key West

*Oolite, saparilla, Malabar almond,*  
bungalows built from salt-hard wood.  
The cracked iridescence  
of a Roman pilgrim flask,  
milky sea-glass,  
salt and sand debriding  
its bottled language:  
objects I will place in future poems  
that have nothing to do with you.

At the moment, for example  
though your absence  
is unbearable, I am weighing  
the merits of *ficus* (Latin)  
over the Indo-European, *banyan*,  
consoled by the metaphor  
of aerial roots,  
imagining how your body  
once buried itself in mine.

## Aqua Aerobics at the Y

Five steps from the pool, I realize  
nobody here is under 75.  
I feel like I'm in that movie, *Cocoon*.  
My 40-year-old body wedged  
between blue rinse and wrinkled back skin,  
I join the jumping jack brigade.  
Undercurrents. Resistance.  
It's small talk to begin with—  
a boy in Winter Park was  
bitten several times by a squirrel.  
Did it have rabies? I ask.  
No, they don't know why  
it kept biting him. Silence.  
Keep yourself active,  
one says. Another—I know  
a 95-year-old woman who drives,  
but not at night.  
Squirrel-lady ups the ante—  
she knows a nonagenarian  
who delivers meals-on-wheels.  
To the elderly, she adds.  
That's ironic, a voice inside me  
wants to lash, but I'm quick  
to put the kibosh  
on its sassy little ain't-got-no-respect-  
for-its-elders-and-betters mouth,  
because even now, I'm familiar  
with postponement—  
how 40 is the new 30,  
how my crow's feet routinely  
caw-caw about all  
those Hollywood actresses still

femme fucking fatale at 50.  
As if the truth of growing old, dying,  
that sagging, puckered suit  
for which we've all been measured  
could ever be ironed smooth.





*"Yearling" photographed by Matt Larson*



*"Journey" photographed by Matt Larson*



*"Ingres at Port Tampa" Oil/Linen 48" X 60" by Bruce Marsh*



*"Ingres on Hillsborough Avenue" Oil/Linen 48" X 60" by Bruce Marsh*

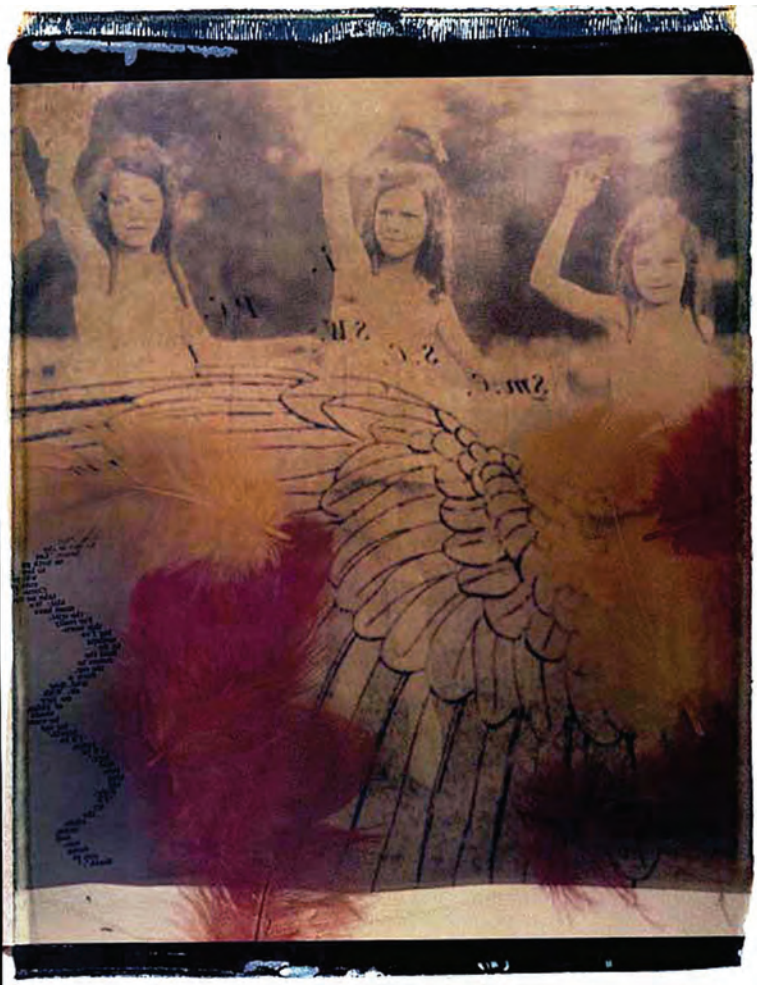




*"Silhouetted" by Nikki Devereux*



*"Tap Dance" by Nikki Devereux*



*"On the Wing II" by Anna Tomczak*



*"Back to the Garden" 40" X 36", Mixed Media/Oil on Wood by Dolores Coe*





*"Nada" 40" X 36", Mixed Media/Oil on Wood by Dolores Coe*

# You Who Never Arrived

Susan Hubbard

*And sometimes, in a shop, the mirrors  
were still dizzy with your presence and, startled,  
gave back my too-sudden image...*

*—from “You Who Never Arrived,” Rainer Maria Rilke*

I’m back in Orlando visiting friends for a wedding, and I stop at the supermarket to pick up avocados and limes, and I see—there across the produce section rummaging among the lettuces, I see—myself. I’m buying iceberg lettuce—or rather, the other me is buying iceberg. This me prefers more exotic varieties: Boston or Bibb.

It’s not a great moment, meeting yourself. It’s the kind of thing you might have a bad dream about. For starters, although the me amongst the lettuces looks a little younger than me—the person telling you this story—she also looks tired, worn out in ways I confess I’m not.

I think I’d better stop calling her me. Let’s call her The Other.

I need to get those avocados and limes and head back to help my friends make guacamole and mojitos—company’s coming for cocktails, and my friends are worried enough, what with the wedding and all. One of them joked yesterday: What if you planned the perfect party, and nobody came?

And I said, Who cares? We’re the only ones who matter.

But here I am, here she is—the Other. I’m not going anywhere until I talk to her.

So I grab four avocados—dark green eggs with black patches, their wrinkled skins promising ripeness—and I head over to the lettuces. “How bizarre,” I say, looking at myself—this Other. She’s wearing the kind of jeans I haven’t worn since graduate

school—ratty Levi's with holes in the knees—and her hair needs a trim. She looks at me and then back at the icebergs as if she's not all that interested.

"Hello!" I say.

The Other looks up. "Do I know you?"

I can't tell if she's trying to be cute or not. "Well, I'd certainly think so," I say.

And when she stares at me, then starts to move away, I catch sight of us in the mirror strip that runs above the produce section. "Look," I say, gesturing up at the mirror--and there we are, two women with identical faces (granted, hers is a little more youthful and yet a little more tired), identical heights, body types, fingerprints no doubt—all the same. "Amazing," I say, staring at us, and she meets my eyes in the mirror. Then she makes a face, a kind of grimace, and looks back at the lettuces again.

"Don't you think it's amazing?" I ask the Other.

"What do you mean?" she says. I'm still watching the mirror. My face is a little broader, hers a little more gaunt. Her eyes look weary, yet somehow more innocent than mine. And, of course, I'm wearing earrings, and my hair is perfect.

Then the automatic mister comes on and our reflections are filmed by water.

"We're the same," I say, not trying at all to be cute.

She picks up a lettuce, flips it over to examine its stem, frowns, and puts it back. "So?"

"So it's a kind of miracle." This language isn't like me at all and I regret saying it immediately. "You know what I mean," I say, but I'm beginning to think she doesn't. Is it possible she doesn't recognize me? "Isn't it odd that we should meet?" I say. "I'm in town for Tiffany's wedding. Remember Tiffany Saper?"

"Why would I remember her?" She doesn't sound curious. She throws a lettuce into her cart and says, "I can't believe they're charging a dollar-fifty a head." And she begins to walk away.

"Wait," I say. "Please." I walk after her, cradling the avocados

in the pits of my elbows. She's stopping at the seedless grapes. I walk around her cart and say, "I've been waiting years for something like this to happen."

Again, I am not being cute. Many times, since I finished school and moved as far away as I could from Orlando and the old neighborhood, I've had a sense of an Other, somebody down here living the life I would have led if I hadn't moved away and gone to college and secured my current high-paying position. While I was out there, building my career, climbing the greasy pole, shattering the glass ceiling, I sensed the Other was back here, living the life I might have had (by all accounts should have had)—barely finishing high school, getting and losing a series of minimum-wage jobs, still living at home in my parents' house, sneaking cigarettes in the bathroom, growing older. Once in a while I had glimmers of the Other's life in a dream or in a day-dream, a sense that she lived in a shadowed place, dating men in the neighborhood, men I was too good for, maybe marrying one of them, probably being mistreated, maybe stuck with a baby or two. Who knew? Who could tell the depths to which the Other might have sunk while I climbed so high?

I have to find out. "Are you married?"

The Other is frowning into the grapes. "Rotten," she mutters. "Rotten."

"Please," I say. "Are you married?"

Her eyes flash, yet still look weary. "Look," she says. "I don't know who you are. I don't know why you're bothering me. If I answer your question, will you leave me alone?"

"Yes," I say, grateful for even this scornful attention. "Please." But now I'm not sure I've asked the right question. Her mouth opens, but I put up my hand. "I'll leave you alone if you answer one question," I say. "But not that one. I don't really care whether you're married or not. I mean to say, that's not the big question."

She tosses a plastic bag of grapes on top of the lettuce in her cart. "So ask the big question," she says. "I haven't got all day."



Why not? I wonder. But that isn't the right question either. My mind is racing now, trying to think back to those earlier intimations of the Other, trying to remember what I wondered about her. Was she married, sure, but that wasn't the big one. Did she sleep better than I do? How was her dental work? Did she remember to vote, and was she active in the Republican party?

But none of that really mattered. What kind of car does she have and what's her favorite color? Does she have a tattoo? Does she watch the same sitcoms I do and which one is her favorite? How often does she eat out? How often does she work out? How about that weight problem? Does she own a gun? And what kind of gun is it? Did she bother to get a license, or did she pick it up on the street?

The Other is getting restless. She pats a pineapple as she passes it—sort of slaps it, really. She's over there by the potatoes now, and I dog along behind her, thinking, thinking. She looks over her shoulder at me, as if she's not surprised and not happy that I'm still here. "Shoot!" she says. "Ask your question, or go away and leave me alone."

"Okay," I say and open my mouth to ask—but she holds up her hand. "Wait a minute," she says. "The deal is you ask me one, then I ask you one. Then you leave me alone. Is that a deal?"

I nod, several times. "So shoot," she says.

I take a deep breath and ask my question. "Do you wish you were me?" Then I figure I'd better make it very clear. "Do you wish you were me?"

The Other looks at me. She looks me up and down, from my shoes to my capris to my hair extensions, and back again. Then she looks me square in the eye. "No," she says. "No. I'm glad I'm not you."

I feel a little dizzy. It's because I skipped lunch, I need small amounts of protein at regular intervals, that's what my nutritionist says, but today there wasn't time, and the lights overhead are flickering. Fluorescent lighting is bad for the brain, I read that somewhere.

Her mouth is moving, but there's a buzz in my ears. I hit the side of my head with my hand, hard, and in a second I hear the supermarket Muzak playing. An instrumental version of something by Elton John. Is it *Tiny Dancer*, or is it *Candle in the Wind*?

Then I hear her voice: "I answered yours. Now you answer mine."

"Ask me again," I say. "I couldn't hear you."

And the other opens her mouth—our mouth—and she says, "Are you sorry?"

"Sorry for what?" But I know what she means. Sorry for trying to murder her. Sorry for leaving her so far behind.

She's standing so close I can see my reflection in her eyes—or is it her reflection mirrored back by mine? It's like mirrors in a hotel bathroom—infinite iterations of self. Dizzy again, I take a step backward and she advances. I take two steps. "Sorry? Not me," I say.

I head for the door. She's following me, so I begin to run. Outside, I drop one of the avocados as I unlock the rental car. I throw the others into the backseat and jump in. And as I drive away I see her, standing in the parking lot, holding my avocado in one hand, using the other to point at me, shouting.

I hear one word: "Thief!" Then I turn up the car radio and head down Aloma Avenue, in the opposite direction from home.

# The Coming of Eve

Scott Ward

The God who led her by the hand  
past walls of cedar and the roof  
of green was just a quirk in air,  
a flaw in the sheer pane of sun.  
She stepped above the fern and ducked  
below the overhanging boughs  
and came by hills where no path marred  
the green which shook the early dew  
upon her ankles, to the shade  
where a man named dust was waiting.  
He was struck through by her white flesh  
parting leaves, by her creature-look  
of suffering. His only work  
throughout his loneliness had been  
to dress the garden with his speech,  
that he might yoke each thing on earth  
to the savage tongue's dire cunning.  
The dust man named her Eve and spoke  
the vows to institute their bonds.  
His consort, she lay under him  
and stained his body with her blood.  
Her catch of breath, each little gasp  
of ecstasy snapped like a ripe apple  
in autumn air. Hearing his name  
used thus, mingling a curse and praise,  
the Lord God moaned with centuries  
of grief, and fleeing to his Heaven,  
dropped a sword of fire at the gate  
of Paradise. But the lovers

were gone already, who now craved  
rank fields, the exercise of will.  
The man was captivated all  
his days with her intimate cries,  
and the visions they engendered,  
seen through a haze, the rhythmic stamp  
of horses on the road, the boast  
of Lamech and his curse, the walls  
of Enoch hung with heroes' shields.

# Postcard from an Old Lover w/ Picture of Horse & Carriage, Driver & Whip

Liz Robbins

The rain's green forgiveness  
is so much larger.  
The close-mouthed snapdragons,  
waiting for rain.  
Not so much, your postcard  
in the rusted red box,  
fountain pen ink blurring  
characters.

You're in love with  
your leaving.  
Drawn hearts spilled  
all about your name.

Remember the healing  
salt baths? Our dry forest  
scene, all sparrows feasting  
on grubs and sorrow,  
flying the mind's entire  
distance for water. So much  
smaller, that lagoon.

Pink Lips of the snapdragon  
open in rain.  
What power, to drench!  
Where I've gone, you cannot  
allow.  
A renegade green parrot  
once enclosed.  
Now in the thick wet fronds  
of foreign palms.

# Blue Green Red

Sarah Prevatt

Tonight she thinks about her family for the first time in several years. It isn't as if her memory hasn't tried to bring them back, especially on those foggy nights when her husband plays Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. On those nights, she goes into their bedroom and crawls under the thick sheets of their waterbed, shielding her face from the red gleam of the traffic light that slips through their bent blinds as the waterbed rolls and sloshes beneath her. She always pretends to be tired when he comes in later and asks what's wrong, though the whole time she's really trying to suppress the images that float to the surface of her memory: her mother's face, red and splotchy, lipstick dry and settled into the fine cracks of her lips, and Damian, sitting quietly, eyes absent, smiling at the wall.

Tonight, she's coming back from Bayside, where she and her husband, Eric, have spent several hours shopping. Melaney sits on the gum-stained concrete bench awaiting the metrorail and sees their faces appear against the hazy gray sunset. She closes her eyes, wills the images to drown in the blackness and the approaching grind of the metrorail.

Eric sits next to her, the coconut sculpture he bought at Bayside on his lap. His hair, soft curls normally slicked back behind his ears, springs forth in the heavy night air, unruly from the humidity. His pale cheeks are tinged with pink, and thin trails of sweat slide down his temples. He's unused to this Florida heat, having grown up in a small New England town, but he's smiling, can't stop talking about the things he wants to do while they're down here. He wants to go to South Beach, take in the clubs and walk along the warm sand. He keeps asking her to translate every sign they see in Spanish, but she tells him she doesn't understand, that she hasn't spoken Spanish since she left ten years ago.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it,” she says dryly.

He laughs, and asks her again the next time they see something posted in Spanish.

“I’m so glad we finally had a convention in Miami,” he says, raising his voice over the roar of the approaching metrorail.

She thinks back to the first time she visited Eric’s hometown, the small, neat town nestled among gray hills and trees naked by October. The sun didn’t shine much while they were there, but she liked that, liked not having to pause every time they stepped outside to let her eyes adjust. She relished the chilly caress of the habitual morning drizzle that glistened on her heavy nylon coat and softened her hair to post-shower dampness. His parents had been neat as well, with trimmed hair and collared shirts and a house that smelled like vanilla. When his parents had asked about her family, she’d told them her family was dead.

That’s what she’d told Eric six years ago. On their first date, he’d taken her to a Cuban restaurant. He knew she was from Miami, and he seemed to think the Cuban restaurant would impress her.

It wasn’t anything like the restaurants in Miami. The white rice was sticky and clumpy, they served dark coffee instead of café con leche, and the sandwiches were made with toasted wheat bread and American cheese. She didn’t mention the differences to Eric. When he asked how she liked it, she smiled and told him it was a refreshing change.

Later that night, over a stale guava pastry, he asked about her family.

“I don’t have any family,” she said, focusing on the thick red guava smeared on her plate. “My father, he’s gone, been gone for as long as I can remember. My mother, she died of cancer.” She didn’t mention Damian at all.

“I’m so sorry,” Eric said, his face soft in the dim light.

Outside, it began to snow. He never asked about her family again.

Tonight, the metrorail approaches slowly, its headlights

casting golden beams through the murky darkness falling over the station. People shift simultaneously toward the rails. Once the metrorail stops and the doors chime open, Melaney and Eric move forward, twisting and squeezing, trying to avoid the bodies that press in on either side. She hears Eric mumbling apologies every few seconds, only to meet the scuffling of shoes on the rubber floor and the rustling of cloth as they continue to brush against other passengers.

They maneuver down the narrow aisles and slip into a row near the back. She slides into the dirty blue seat next to the window, tucked away from the mass of people brushing by each other in the aisle and squeezed next to each other in the seats. The metrorail is uncomfortably warm from the bodies pressed against each other.

Melaney leans against the window, clutches her purse. After everyone is seated, the metrorail jolts forward, and Eric leans in next to her, craning to look out the window at the glittering lights of the city awakening below. Their car is silent except for the occasional squeaking of brakes and the muffled music coming from the headphones of the young girl sitting in front of her.

Damian listened to music non-stop the night Dad left. The best she can remember, that's when it started. That was the day Dad and Momma got into another fight, only this one was different—longer and louder. She was so little she doesn't remember much detail, but she distinctly remembers that Momma wore only a bra and cut-off jeans, and that her eyes and Dad's eyes were bloodshot.

They were screaming and Melaney was holding her ears. She didn't start crying until Momma pulled out a knife and threatened to kill Daddy.

Even though she was old enough to know it was only a butter knife and Momma's threats were always shallow, Melaney was still scared, so Damian took her outside to their backyard, not



much more than a lopsided, sandy square sectioned off by a fence whose links had been bent and stretched to accommodate the greedy claws of raccoons trying to get at their cat's latest batch of kittens. Damian led her to the skeletal orange tree that leaned against the corner of the fence, its branches spreading against the chromium sky like the fuchsia spider veins along her mother's thighs. Feeble as it was, it still managed every year to sprout a few pieces of fruit—sickly, speckled things that looked more yellow than orange and more often than not were infested with flies.

Damian, his face moist and flushed from the wet afternoon heat, told her to pick some, that they were going to make orange juice for breakfast and Momma would be happy. When they went back inside, Dad was gone.

That night Damian stayed up late and kept Melaney up late, too, blaring his favorite Pink Floyd CD so loud that even though the lights were off and he was wearing headphones, Melaney could hear the lyrics over the whine of the air conditioning unit by their window.

She hasn't seen Damian since the summer before she started seventh grade, when he left home abruptly one overcast morning. He had never said exactly where he was going, but Melaney had seen an acceptance letter from some college sitting on his desk for months, so she felt it was safe to assume that's where he went. That's what she told their mother, anyway—not that it mattered much.

“Blue. Red. Green.” The words, in short spurts, are soft but audible over the groan of the metrorail as it lurches to a halt. Melaney wants to turn, can sense the shifting bodies around her as people stare. Eric seems oblivious, keeps turning the creased map around in his hands, trying to figure out where their stop is.

At this stop, the metrorail empties significantly. People file out quickly and silently, and a group of young teenagers, three boys and two girls, clad in dark shirts and baggy jeans, hair stiff with gel, come aboard and sit down in the middle of the aisle.

They pull out a pair of dice and drop them onto the dusty floor.

“Red. Yellow. Orange.”

The words start up again as the metrorail jolts forward. It’s a man’s voice, excited but quiet. She tilts her head a little to the left, chances a glimpse out of curiosity. He’s a small man, bony and disheveled. His hair is long and greasy, his face pale and oily, covered in a patchy, ginger-colored beard. She thinks he must be homeless—he’s wearing nothing but a faded, crudely patched denim jacket and a pair of cargo pants that hang off his narrow hips. Something about him is familiar: his docile voice, maybe, or the way he crouches in front of the seat, peering above the grimy sill like a child peeking at something he shouldn’t see. She turns around, stares out the window, watches the spiny tops of palm trees and the Mexican-tile roofs of houses glide by.

At the next stop, the doors slide open and a rush of city noise greets them. Down below, a fluorescent-yellow ambulance pulls out into the crowded street, lights flashing and horn blaring. Melaney leans against the warm glass and watches it until the metrorail jolts forward again and the flashes of pulsing red slowly leave her line of vision.

It wasn’t until she left Dade County that she realized ambulances in other places were red. The yellow ambulance seemed to frequent her neighborhood a lot when she was growing up—usually on Friday or Saturday nights, when she and Damian would lay in bed, on top of the sheets, with the old shutter windows cranked open to let in the slightly cooler night air. They could hear Mr. and Mrs. Rocio fighting on one side and Mrs. Arazoza praying loudly on the other, and then later the cry of the ambulance would drown them all out. Melaney could never figure out where the ambulances went. She’d been tempted to call the ambulance once, when she was ten and Damian had told her he thought he’d been poisoned. His face had been pale and his skin beaded with moisture, and she’d thought he really was sick. Then she’d asked him how he knew he was poisoned, and he’d said Momma was trying to kill him.

“Green. Orange. Red.”

As she presses her forehead against the window and watches the shadowed roofs slide by below them, she realizes the homeless man is naming the colors of the roofs they’re passing.

Eric finally takes notice, twisting in his seat for several seconds. When he turns back around, he shakes his head and begins to refold the map, although he’s not looking at it. He’s looking straight ahead, so the map ends up inside out.

The teenagers in the aisle have stopped playing their game of craps to stare. One of them, a thin boy who can’t be older than fourteen or fifteen, laughs.

“What, did they close down Jackson?” he says. Jackson is a local mental health clinic. He says it loud enough for everyone in their car to hear. His friends laugh with him.

“Orange. Red. Orange.”

The thin boy picks up one of the dice they were playing with and throws it at the homeless man. It clinks against the window and drops to the floor, bouncing down the aisle.

“Hey,” Eric says, turning in his seat. They ignore him.

“They’re just kids,” Melaney says to him.

The boy picks up the second die and throws it haphazardly. The die falls short and rolls under the seat.

“Hey,” Eric says again, more forcefully.

The teenagers finally look at him. They look at each other, then stop laughing. The thin boy shuffles down the aisle and collects the dice, and they return to their game.

Eric turns back around, his cheeks red. “So sad,” he says, in a low voice she can hardly hear.

“Yellow. Red. Red.”

Melaney hears the words continue in a steady, rhythmic manner until the metrorail reaches the next stop, Viscaya, the stop where they get off to go to their hotel. Here, the man stops counting rooftop colors and a heavy silence ensues, broken seconds later by laughter. It’s a spasmodic laugh, light and lively like the laugh of an amused child.

Even though the metrorail hasn't completely stopped, Melaney grabs her purse and stands up. Grasping the cold metal poles for balance, she climbs over Eric, who stares up at her with his lips slightly parted. She stumbles over the teenagers, who lean out of her way and mumble in her direction. As soon as the doors chime open, she falls out into the sweltering night and maneuvers her way through the crowd to the escalator, waiting to lift her down from the lighted station and into the dark emptiness of the night.

Pink Floyd blared through the headphones the first time the laughter began. It was only nine o'clock and already they'd been sent to bed because Momma had company. They'd been watching television in the den, enjoying the air-conditioning, when Momma had come in, barefoot, her short hair stiff with gel, wearing a tie-dyed t-shirt that was so tight Melaney could see her nipples and had to look away. "Hey, you two, can you give me some privacy, you think?"

And so they'd obediently gone to their room to turn on the fans and lay spread out over the unmade beds, Damian to listen to music, Melaney to flip through a magazine she'd found discarded in the bus ramp at school. The shutters were open, and from outside she heard the steady chorus of crickets and the intermittent grunts of toads. And then the laughter.

Damian was laughing at something, staring at something in the dim light that she couldn't make out. His lips were parted slightly, skewed into what might have been a smile.

"What's so funny?"

He didn't answer, just continued laughing for several long minutes, softly, breathlessly, as if he was sharing a private joke.

"You're crazy," she'd said finally, dropping the magazine onto the floor and rolling onto her side so she could stare out the window. In the back yard, the skinny shadow of the dilapidated orange tree stretched and twisted over the mounds of dirt and faded grass, and she thought she could make out the shape of a

small animal scurrying along the fence line. “Damian, I think the raccoon’s back.”

Silence then, except for the lyrics coming from his headphones, filling the night air.

For a while, Momma, too, had seemed to notice the changes, and Melaney had been relieved. More than once she’d come to pick up Melaney early from school. Melaney had known what happened every time the phone rang in the classroom and the teacher’s eyes turned toward her. Momma would be waiting for her down by the office, her hair limp, her lipstick smudged, her ears sagging from the weight of her tarnished earrings. “He’s done it again,” she’d say, and that would be enough. Melaney would know that one of the high school teachers had found Damian wandering the hall, or some student had reported him, not knowing who he was, afraid that he was a stranger without permission to be on school grounds.

Damian would be waiting there in the principal’s cramped office, slouched in a chair, staring at the ground, when Momma rushed in. Melaney learned to hate going into the high school; she hated the way boys would stare at Momma’s breasts bouncing under her mesh shirt, the way everyone would stare while they walked out with Damian.

She thought that once Momma noticed these things, Momma would know what to do. But they happened again and again, and nothing changed. One day she found Momma alone in the kitchen, wearing nothing but an oversized t-shirt, making herself something in the blender. Melaney went up to the counter, climbed onto the lopsided barstool.

“Momma?”

The shrill grind of the blender filled the kitchen, and Melaney figured Momma hadn’t heard her. When she switched the blender off, Melaney tried again. “Momma, what about Damian?”

“Damian?” Momma stared at her as if she didn’t know who Melaney was talking about. She grabbed a couple of cracked plastic cups from the cupboard and began to pour her drink into

them. “Want some, sweetie?”

The thick red liquid sloshed down the blender and dribbled onto the counter. She handed a cup to Melaney, who lifted it to her lips. It smelled like strawberries, but something else as well, something not as sweet.

“He’s been laughing a lot, Momma.” The cup was cold and made her fingertips go numb.

Momma took a long drink and shrugged, making the neckline of the oversized t-shirt slide off her shoulder. “People laugh, Melaney. It means they’re happy.”

“And he talks a lot. In his room. To nobody.”

Momma smiled, reached out and squeezed Melaney’s hand. “Honey, sometimes people talk to themselves. It means they’re smart. Haven’t you ever talked to yourself?”

Not like Damian does, she wanted to say, but looking into her mother’s face, where rosy blotches bloomed on her puffy cheeks, Melaney wanted to believe her, to know that Damian was smart and that was why he was different, and so she smiled and said nothing.

Later that night, she lies between stiff cotton sheets in the dark hotel room and watches the colorful shadows from the television dance on the wall. Eric has gone to dinner with his colleagues, to Joe’s Stone Crab. He invited her to come, tried to tempt her with the menu descriptions he’d read on the restaurant’s website, but she’d pled fatigue and had crawled onto the lumpy queen mattress before he’d even left. Now, an hour later, she’s still in the same curled position on the bed, monotonously pressing the channel button on the remote control—not to see what’s on the different channels, but to watch the colors change and shift on the wall.

Red. Green. Blue. She hears the man’s voice, soft and distinct, even though he’s probably miles away, possibly still riding the metrorail. She wonders what he’s saying now, though, because it’s too dark to see the tops of the houses clearly.

On the next channel she pauses. The whole wall glows red. She glances over at the television screen. *The Wizard Of Oz* is playing and Dorothy's slippers are glittering at her from the screen as Dorothy clicks her heels together. As Melaney watches, the screen fades from red to black and white as Dorothy wakes up to find herself in her bed at home.

Melaney flips off the television. The room is hazy gray, illuminated by the pale yellow light of the city. Noises drift in from the street: cars honking, tires squealing, music blaring. In the distance, a solitary siren begins its ominous wail. Melaney lies listening to it for a minute, then slips out of bed. In the dark, she feels along the rough carpet for her shoes.

Downstairs, she hails a taxi. As she climbs into the smoke-tainted back seat, the taxi driver asks her where she wants to go. She gives him the address of her mother's house.

The taxi jerks forward as they make their way through the grid of streets leading into her old neighborhood. The houses crawl by, bright pink, sherbet green, golden yellow, some with hand-painted murals, some with mold-spotted statues lining their cracked driveways. The harsh yellow streetlights cast inky shadows over the yards littered with car parts and broken toys, over the untrimmed cherry hedges and tilted sable palms. And then, several blocks later, it comes into view—her mother's house, a simple concrete block house, no murals, no statues, just a few withered milkweed bushes and a basketball hoop whose netting has rotted away. Her mother's car sits in the driveway, an old Ford with peeling paint and a broken tail light, the same car she was driving ten years ago when Melaney left for college.

Melaney pays the taxi driver and climbs out, breathing in familiar scents: the floral smell of the angel trumpet blooming in Mrs. Arazoza's yard, the burnt smell of warm asphalt, the musty-smoke smell of her mother seeping out from the cracked shutters of her mother's old bedroom window. Melaney stands frozen for a minute as she watches the taillights of the taxi fade in the distance and eventually blend with the river of red that flows

down 57th Avenue.

She walks across the short front yard, along the cracked sidewalk leading up to the front door. She hesitates before trying the doorbell. She presses several times but fails to hear any resounding chime announcing her presence. After another pause, she tries the doorknob.

Very little has changed in the house since Melaney lived there. There's the same flattened green carpet, the same rattan couch, the same crystal dove pendant dangling from the window, casting dancing prisms from the streetlights off the cracked glass coffee table, the same portable fans humming and swiveling in the corners of the room.

The drone of the television floats down the hallway, and the pungent smell of her mother's habit chokes the air. Her mother's door is cracked open just enough for Melaney to make out the shadowy figure of her mother sprawled on the bed. She thinks she should keep going down the hallway, tap on the door with her knuckles, tell her mother she's come by to visit. First, though, she slips into the dark room on the left, the room she used to share with Damian.

Even in the dim light, Melaney can see that nothing much has changed there, either. There's a new comforter on the bed closest to the window – her old bed – and a few stiff, dusty silk flower arrangements placed on the nightstand, as if her mother were trying to add color to the room. Damian's bed sits untouched, his CDs still stacked on the floor by the desk, the poster of Pink Floyd still tacked to the ceiling. Melaney walks into the room, sits on his old bed, runs her hand along the worn comforter. She wonders if the crumpled lottery ticket is still there, tucked under the mattress.

A couple of weeks before he left, Damian had come to her, clutching the lottery ticket in his hands. She distinctly recalls his face, his thin lips twisted in excitement, unruly hazel hair falling over his eyes—the way he'd come to her and grabbed her wrist, so quickly and tightly she jumped and pulled it away.



"What are you doing?" she hissed.

"We're going to win the lottery," he said in a shaky voice, holding out the ticket to her.

"Yeah, okay." She turned back to her homework.

"No, really," he said, grabbing her arm again and attempting to force her to look at the ticket.

"Let me go!"

"God told me the numbers."

"You're crazy."

"Five. Ten. Eight. Two. Three. Six." He'd said the numbers in short, rhythmic spurts, his voice trembling. "God told me. I heard him."

He'd held onto the ticket for the rest of the day, often looking at it and laughing, or talking under his breath. She'd seen him carefully tuck the ticket under the mattress that night before going to bed. After the winning numbers were announced the next day, the ticket was never mentioned again.

Tonight, Melaney runs her hand along the comforter, feeling the spots where the material has thinned and torn and stringy cotton falls out, runs her hand along and along until it finds its way under the mattress, her fingers digging between the mattress and the cold wire springs, searching for the crumpled paper, softened and frayed with age. After several minutes, her fingers meet with nothing but cold, twisted metal.

Outside, the clouds shift and hinder the moonlight, and she can hear the distant roll of thunder. She slips off the bed and back into the dusky hallway, closing the door behind her. She walks down the hallway and touches the door to her mother's room, feels the splintered wood beneath her fingertips as she pushes the door open wider.

She can see the shadowed outline of her mother's sprawled body against the pale yellow light from the street. In the shifting light cast by the television, she can see her mother is either sleeping or unconscious. Her hair is longer, darker, and strands of it cling to the sides of her face from the moisture in the night

air. Melaney stands in the doorway for several seconds before she says, "Mom."

Her mother shifts, curls her legs up next to her body, mumbles.

"Mom."

In the dark it's hard to tell when her mother's eyes open, but suddenly her mother sits up, the frayed spaghetti strap of her shirt sliding off her shoulder, her damp hair falling over her forehead. She sits frozen on the bed for several seconds, and Melaney wonders if she's really awake.

"Well, look who it is." Her voice is grainier than Melaney remembers, weak and raspy. "What a surprise."

"I was in the neighborhood." She doesn't move from the doorway, and her mother doesn't move from the bed. The wind is picking up outside, making the shutter windows rattle. "My husband has a conference down here."

She can make out the outline of her mother's head as she nods. "Your husband?"

"Four years. His name's Eric."

More nodding. Melaney waits for questions, hopes they'll come in quick succession so she can answer automatically and leave. She wants her mother to ask her about college, her job, where she lives, if she has kids. When the silence ensues, the stillness of the room broken only by the jerky movement of her mother's head, she knows she has to ask.

"How's Damian?"

The nodding stops. "Damian?"

"Yes. How is he? Have you heard from him?"

Her mother reaches over to switch on the lamp that curves over the dusty bedside table. In the bleached, flickering light, the bright red of her mother's rosacea spreads along her puffy cheeks and lined forehead, and Melaney can see the discolored patches in her hair where dye is beginning to fade.

"He's fine." She bends down and picks up a clear plastic cup from the floor. "Can I get you something to drink?"

“You’ve heard from him?”

Her mother’s eyes have wandered from Melaney’s face back to the television. She lifts the cup to her lips. “Yeah. About once a year.”

Melaney reaches out and curls her hand around the doorknob. It’s cold and slick beneath her moist palm. “How is he?”

Her mother shrugs. “He doesn’t say much. Just sends birthday cards.” She shifts, leans down to pull open the drawer of the bedside table. She lifts out a handful of creased, yellow-tipped cards and hands them to Melaney. “Sent one to you, once, a few years ago. I don’t remember which one it was.”

Melaney tilts the first card to see it better in the light. It’s a simple white card with a teddy bear clutching a bouquet of flowers. On the inside, a cursive font wishes her mother a happy birthday, and Damian’s signature is scrawled in blue ink.

The next card has a painting of a kitten. It looks like the kitten was originally adorned with glitter, although only a few glimmering specks remain. Melaney glances at the inside. It’s a neutral message, not addressed to mother or sister.

“Can I keep this one?” Melaney asks, moving the card so that the flecks of glitter sparkle in the faint light.

“Of course, hon.” Her mother yawns and lies back down on the bed.

Melaney glances over the rest of the cards. As she steps forward to hand the cards back to her mother, keeping the kitten card separate, her cell phone begins to vibrate. She pulls it out. Eric’s number glows in the dim light. She drops the phone back into her pocket.

“The husband?” her mother asks.

Melaney nods. “Was there a return address? On the envelopes?” she asks as her mother puts the cards back into the drawer.

Her mother hesitates, staring at the ceiling, her brow creased. She rummages through the drawer again and pulls out a creased yellow envelope. There’s no name in the upper left hand corner,

only an address scrawled in the same blue ink as Damian's signature. In the dim light, she deciphers the handwriting. The address is in Hialeah. She tries to make out the date stamped on the envelope. The red ink is smudged and faded. She thinks it says November 1, 2005. Less than a year ago.

Melaney steps back into the doorway, slipping the card and envelope into her pocket. Her mother smiles at her, and Melaney notices the layered creases at the corners of her mouth.

"Thanks for stopping by," her mother says. "Bring the husband by sometime. I'd like to meet him."

As she walks back down the hallway, Melaney decides to go out through the porch, still cluttered with cacti and aloe plants and dead orchids, out through the sandy lot, where the orange tree still leans against the fence, bare except for a few scrunched leaves that tremble in the breeze and speckled oranges that weigh down the weak branches.

As she lets the porch door swing shut behind her, she has the sudden urge to slip off her shoes and feel the warm sand and threads of dry grass between her toes, but she fears the shards of broken brown glass and angry fire ants that hide beneath the mounds. Instead, she leaves her shoes on and feels the sand trickle down the sides and bunch under the balls of her feet. She walks over to the tree and pulls an orange off the branch closest to her. She rolls it around in her hands; it's smooth and firm, not squishy and riddled with holes from flies.

A gust of wind picks up loose pieces of grass and spins them by her ankles. She peels the orange, picking and picking with her fingernails until the thick rind lies in jagged pieces on the sand. The sticky juice trickles down her fingers and wrists as she separates a slice and slips it into her mouth. As she bites down and the fresh, sweet juice of her childhood floods her senses, her cell phone vibrates again. This time she pulls it out and presses it to her ear.

"Hey," Eric says as she answers. "I'm going to be later than I thought. I didn't want you to worry."

“Okay,” she says. As she speaks, a car comes flying down the road. As it passes the yard, the driver honks the horn and yells something at her out the window.

“What’s that?” Eric says. “Where are you?”

She hesitates, considers the lies she can tell. She could lie like she did the time she sat in the guidance counselor’s office at her elementary school and told her everything was normal at home. She could tell Eric that she stepped outside because it got cold in the room, or that she was bored so she walked down the street to Latin American Café for some café con leche.

“I’m at my mother’s house. Visiting.”

There’s a long pause. “Your mother?” The wind picks up, interfering with the reception. She hears Eric sigh on the other end, but it could just be the static from the wind.

“I should be back by eleven,” he says. “Will you be back by then?” He pauses. “I think we need to talk.”

“Yes. I’ll head back soon.”

As the dark clouds from the approaching storm roll in, she takes the metrorail, not a taxi, back to Viscaya. She walks along the shadowy station, dodging the puddles of beer and urine that have collected along the concrete, the creased envelope and birthday card clasped between her fingers. She boards the metrorail and sits next to the window with the card in her lap.

The metrorail is empty, quiet except for the groaning brakes and rush of air when the doors open. She wonders what she’ll say to Eric when she gets back.

Yes, my mother is still alive. And I have a brother. I never told you? An older brother.

The brakes signal the next stop, and she presses her forehead against the warm glass. As she watches the shadowed rooftops—blue, green, red—glide by, the darkened colors glittering like onyx through the late night condensation, she wonders what would happen if she just showed up at Damian’s house. She imagines that he is tall now, and thin, with an angular face and glassy eyes. She imagines that he lives in a dark house and sleeps in the den,

where the air conditioning unit hums outside the window. He probably falls asleep every night listening to music, staring at the ceiling, maybe talking to God, or talking back to God. He wouldn't be happy to see her. No, she decides, he would probably just stare at her with those empty eyes, maybe reach out and grab her wrist, and ask her why she's there. She would feel so helpless, standing there with the old birthday card, the acid from the orange still on her tongue. She wouldn't know what to say.

# Aerial View

Kathryn VanSpanckeren

Indian Rocks Beach, FL

So many small rectangular Mom and Pop motels  
an unassuming tan, with startling turquoise  
swimming pools lined up as close to the sea  
as the building inspector allows.  
Their postcard lives depend on the sea.

The beach is a dun strip with rows of fringes,  
a fancy shawl. The gulf ripples and scallops  
sand as it moves out and in  
fretfully dragging its weeds, as a  
widow might who depended on the sea

The high tide mark's another fringe—  
seawrack, but from here it's a line of small  
dots, like poplin people wear in old-fashioned paintings—  
anonymous people. A painter's  
brush depends on the sea.

Above high tide, islands of sea oats  
arrow into prevailing wind. Offshore, one shrimp boat  
drags a white V. The sea, thinks the captain—  
almost out of sight of land—  
is bigger than the land. Depend on the sea.

# Playtime

William Bradley

As Emily was putting her sunscreen on, I peered through the blinds of our cabana room at the other guests in the pool. They appeared to be in their mid-to-late fifties, each a little chubby. The wives wore lots of gold—necklaces and rings, from what I could see. One husband looked a bit like James Lipton, while the other wore a wide-brimmed hat and mirrored sunglasses. Honestly, they all looked like they might just as easily have been playing golf with my parents.

The guy in the hat and sunglasses reached to the side of the pool and picked up a cigar he'd obviously placed there earlier. I said a silent prayer, hoping that he was the type of guy who just enjoys chewing on a cigar, but no such luck; his lighter was also off to the side. As he puffed away to get the end to stay lit, I glared. I can handle cigarette, pipe, or pot smoke, but something about a cigar—especially when it's combined with the smell of chlorine—turns my stomach.

"You okay?" Emily asked. I guess my expression revealed my mood.

"One of the guys out there is smoking a cigar," I said, trying not to sound too pissy.

"It'll be okay," she said, looking out the window herself. "Ah!" she said as she turned away from the window, eyes closed.

"What?"

"Nothing. I just caught the sun's glare off of his cock ring. I wasn't expecting that."

We're not really nudists, you understand; nor are we exhibitionists. I mean, yeah, okay—we have noticed that we



tend to fuck more frequently when we're vacationing at a clothing-optional place. And when we're completely honest with ourselves, we tend to admit that vacationing at a place with a clothing-optional pool is not only relaxing (though it is), but that it also has a certain erotic appeal. That's not why we occasionally stay at places with clothing-optional facilities, though—if we were really just about exhibitionism, we could probably find other, cheaper ways to get our freak on. In fact, our first experience with a clothing-optional vacation was quite accidental—on our first trip to Key West, we made a reservation at a resort called The Atlantic Shores (which, sadly, is now closed), not knowing that there would be naked people at the pool and bar area. Sure, it was weird at first, but you'd be surprised at how fast you get used to seeing swaying dicks and hanging tits as you sip your margarita by the pool. And then there was the big draw—they don't allow kids in these places. No whining. No crying. No, "Daaaaaaaad, I'm boooored!" In a nutshell, clothing-optional hotels and guest houses—at least the ones in Key West—are not the family-friendly hellholes that places like, say, the strip in Las Vegas have turned into. It's just grown-ups drinking, smoking, talking, and having a good time. And, what's more, we discovered that people who prefer to vacation without their clothes on just seem friendlier, somehow. On a fully-clothed vacation, Emily and I may go an entire weekend only talking to waiters and bartenders and each other. But at a clothing-optional vacation spot, we can generally count on some grinning nudist from the Midwest to ask us, "So, where are you all from?" I suppose once you've grown comfortable with other people seeing your genitals and your cellulite, there's really nothing to be shy about. And since Emily and I both enjoy meeting new people, this appeals to us.

So we realized quite a while ago that naked people were fun people, and we began visiting Key West more frequently—leaving our swimsuits behind each time. I mean, why not? When everyone else is naked, the swimsuit actually makes you more scrutinized. And Emily's in decent shape and my dick was typically neither

the largest nor the smallest in the vicinity, so what was there to be embarrassed about, really?

The guest house we were staying in was not particularly big, as it had been a private residence before it was purchased by the current owner. The pool was rather small, shaped like an L and never getting more than five feet deep. The entire area was surrounded by a tall fence and trees to afford a maximum amount of privacy. Although Duval Street with its shops and bars was nearby, the place was still usually quiet and serene, the silence broken only by the occasional crowing of one of the famous Key West roosters and the conversations of the other guests.

Once Emily and I were in the pool, the two couples turned their attention to us, asking us where we were from, how long we'd be on vacation, and otherwise making small talk. It was all very friendly. In fact, at one point, the guy in the hat and sunglasses raised his hand with the cigar and asked, "Does this bother you?"

"Oh no," I answered right away.

"Not at all," Emily agreed.

"Cause I can put this out, if it does."

"No, you're fine," I assured him.

That's just how I roll, you see—I like to think that people who meet me walk away with the impression that, if nothing else, I'm exceptionally polite. You might wind up questioning my intelligence, my good intentions, or my sense of humor, but if you think I'm ill-mannered, well, that would bother me. And, to his credit, the other guy was polite enough to ask if we minded—such good manners should be met with similar good manners, it seems to me. If he hadn't asked, I probably would have grumbled to Emily about it later. But he did, and so I was thus inclined to like him, and breathe in his second-hand smoke.

It quickly became clear that the two couples had been friends for a long time, and frequently took their vacations together, even though they didn't really live near each other. That's nice, I thought, thinking of how great it would be to vacation with some

of our friends from college or grad school. Of course, our friends probably wouldn't be down with a clothing-optional pool area—telling people you like to vacation without clothes often feels like coming out of the closet. I wondered how these two couples initially broached the idea with each other.

Emily and I drifted over to the other end of the pool while the four of them continued their conversation. I want to reiterate that there was nothing particularly sexual about this naked swim—we were just enjoying the sun and the warm water as we drifted over to the deep end together. Frankly, it's at moments like this that I often feel closest to my wife, when I can convince myself that even when we're in a group, we're still somehow alone together.

A door opened and closed from behind us, and not too long after, we could hear feet shuffling on the pool's deck. A man who appeared to be in his mid-60s, maybe, looking a lot like the Love Boat-era Gavin MacLeod except for his multiple earrings and bright yellow cock ring was walking with a woman who looked slightly older than he was. The longer I looked at her, though, the more I realized that she might not have been older—she obviously had recently been ill, and still seemed rather frail, walking slowly, and without a lot of color in her cheeks. Her hair was very short and thin—the kind of short and thin that grows in after completing chemotherapy. I know this, because several years ago I developed Hodgkin's Disease and had to be treated with chemo, and I had the same baby chick-like fuzz on my head before my hair really started growing back. Nevertheless, she looked kind and happy to be on vacation, smiling at us as she said hello. In fact, until she removed her robe, she kind of reminded me of my grandmother.

I never saw my grandmother naked, but I could imagine that, from the neck up and the waist down, she might have looked like this woman (though I would prefer to imagine that my grandmother had pubic hair—if I must be forced to think about such things). But there's something disconcerting about seeing such large, round, and firm breast implants on a woman whose body otherwise seems withered by age. Try to imagine Pamela

Anderson's breasts grafted onto Betty White's frame, and I think you'll get a sense of what I mean.

The two of them got into the pool near the other couples and introduced themselves. From our end of the pool, we said hello and introduced ourselves as well, but it became kind of apparent that Emily and I—a young married couple in our thirties—probably didn't have as much to say to them as these other couples. Though was it my imagination, or did he keep looking over in our direction?

Emily and I got kind of lost in our own conversation about the books we were reading—in particular, I was telling her all sorts of facts about the history of her favorite candy, the Goo Goo Cluster, which I was reading about in Steve Almond's book *Candyfreak*. Every so often, we'd have a lull in our conversation, and I'd hear what the other couples were talking about—which was usually, it seemed to me, vacations they'd taken and resorts they'd stayed at. These resorts all had names like Caliente and Passion, which indicated to me that these people were all a bit more devoted to vacationing naked than Emily and I were.

"Did you guys go to Lifestyles?" the Gavin MacLeod guy wanted to know. At this, I started listening more attentively. I wasn't sure why, but I simply knew that Lifestyles was a swinger's convention. In fact, I was pretty sure it was an annual swinger's convention held in Las Vegas. Again, I wasn't sure why I had this knowledge; Emily and I don't swing, and don't have any interest in swinging. It wasn't until we got home days later that I wound up remembering that Dan Savage mentioned the Lifestyles convention in his book *Skipping Toward Gomorrah*.

"No, we've never been," the guy in the sunglasses and hat replied. "You been to Swingfest?"

At this, Emily looked to me, wide-eyed.

"No, but you gotta go to Lifestyles, man. It's the best time we've ever had."

"And you need to go to Swingfest. I tell ya, we pack two suitcases—one for clothes, and one for toys. That's all you need."

Honestly (and I swear, I won't continue to reassure you of this), Emily and I have no desire to swing. We certainly don't want to have sex with people our parents' age. And yet I feel like it might be a little deceitful for me to not tell you that, after our swim, we went back into our room and had sex before showering for dinner. We'd already fucked twice that day, but when we got back to the room, and I put my hand on her shoulder, it was obvious to both of us that neither of us would be getting into the shower right away.

We ran into Gavin MacCockring and his wife on our way out to dinner, and they asked us for recommendations regarding the local nightlife. We recommended Captain Tony's—our favorite bar in Key West, and the building that originally houses Sloppy Joe's, the bar Hemingway famously hung out in that moved to a larger building on Duval Street in 1937. "We don't really like Sloppy Joe's," Emily explained. "It's too touristy."

"It's not so much a bar as a Hemingway-themed restaurant," I added.

They nodded. "So, what about Garden of Eden?" the man wanted to know. "You been there?"

We had been to the clothing-optional bar, though we'd opted to remain clothed. It's one thing to swim nude in a secluded pool, and quite another to flaunt yourself in a crowded dance club.

"It's okay," Emily said. "Kind of hit or miss. Sometimes you go there and there will just be a bunch of creepy guys standing around, hoping to see a college girl take her shirt off. So, of course, none do."

"These are the guys who are too cheap to pay a cover at a strip club," I said.

"I think it gets better later at night," Emily said. "We had a good time there once, but it was well after midnight."

At this, the older couple shook their heads and laughed.

Midnight was way too late for them, they assured us, which struck me as kind of funny—that they should be so like a lot of the other senior citizens I’ve known in some respects, but so unlike them regarding their sexuality. It was easier to think of the woman as a grandmotherly figure in this sense, although her mesh shirt with no bra pretty effectively discouraged such imaginings.

While I ostensibly quit smoking several years ago, I have—for a long time—allowed myself the luxury of cigarettes with alcohol. At first, this seemed like a reasonable compromise, but lately Emily and I had noticed that this had led to me drinking more rather than smoking less; whereas at first I would smoke during my Friday night cocktails, for quite a while I had been drinking two or even three nights out of the week, just so I could smoke, which probably wasn’t good for my long-term health. So the rule we’d agreed upon was that this trip was sort of a last weekend to indulge bad habits; once we got home, no cigarettes, and no booze until I could stand to have the stuff without nicotine.

So as we walked from bar to bar that night (beginning on the south end of Duval at Bogart’s, slowly working our way to Captain Tony’s at the other end), I was smoking my lungs out, hoping to take in so much nicotine that I wouldn’t want any more for a while. This is the kind of plan that only sounds feasible around the fourth or fifth drink of the evening, of course. Predictably, the smoke started bothering Emily’s eyes, causing her contacts to dry up and get blurry. So we wound up heading back to the guest house while on our regularly-scheduled pub crawl so that she could wash her contacts and hopefully be able to see again. Normally, we wouldn’t return until some time between one and three in the morning; this night, we were stopping by at around ten.

I was behind Emily as she walked through the gate and headed towards the cabana. From the guest house’s back door, I saw that Gavin and his wife were heading out to the pool area.

“How’s it going?” I asked.

“Pretty good,” he replied as they dropped their towels and walked towards the pool.

I fished my cigarettes out of my pocket and walked towards one of the patio tables while Emily went inside. Once she’d shut the door, Gavin looked over at me.

“Do you and your lady play when you come down here?” he asked in a low voice.

“What?” I asked. I’d heard him, but I felt like he couldn’t be asking what I thought he was asking.

“Do you play?” he asked.

“Oh... no.”

“No, I mean, with each other?”

“Oh,” I answered. I was pretty sure that wasn’t what he meant—after all, what kind of question is, “Do you and your wife have sex?” Nevertheless, I said, “Well, yeah.”

“Do you mind if we play?” he asked, nodding towards his wife, who was looking at me.

“Uh ... go ahead.”

With that, they both moved faster than you would have expected. He stood up, and she immediately had his dick in her mouth. Unsure exactly what was expected of me, I stared at my cigarette for a moment, then looked up and caught the guy staring at me while she continued to blow him. He grinned, arched his eyebrows, then gestured at his wife, as if to say, “Hey, check this out.”

At that point, the door to the cabana swung open and Emily stepped out. She was obviously about to say something, but stopped when she saw the old couple. Without missing a beat, she pulled up a chair and sat with her back to them.

“Are you absolutely scandalized?” I whispered.

“A little bit,” she answered. Behind her, the woman had turned around and the guy was getting ready to take her from behind. He kept looking over at us.

“So ... are your eyes feeling better?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Emily said. “Much better.”

“Harder,” the woman said.

“That’s good,” I replied. “Good. So we can head back out.”

“Whenever you’re ready,” Emily said.

How could I still have half a cigarette left to smoke?

Emily and I looked at each other. At this point, a completely sober man would probably extinguish his cigarette and leave. However, I was not completely sober. Furthermore, I had the distinct feeling that these people were kind of counting on me. And they had been polite enough to ask if they could fuck in front of me; wouldn’t it be kind of rude to just get up and leave before they were through putting on their show? What was the proper etiquette in such a situation?

The woman turned back around and took him in her mouth again. He looked over at me, smiled, then started moaning. His moans kept getting louder, suggesting that he was finishing up.

“You know, I should probably pee before we head out again,” Emily said.

“That’s a good idea,” I replied as she stood up. “I’ll go, too.” So we went back into the room and closed the door.

“Sorry,” I whispered.

“I can’t believe they just started fucking right in front of you,” she whispered back.

“Well, he did ask if it was okay.”

“And you said yes?”

“Well ... yeah.”

“Why on earth would you say yes?”

I shrugged. “I didn’t want to be a jerk about it.”

She stared at me in disbelief for a moment, then said, “You’re an idiot,” but I could tell she was not really angry, and was, in fact, having trouble not laughing.

About a half hour later, sitting in Captain Tony’s and alternating between our respective beers and the Pirate’s Punch we were splitting, we actually were laughing about it. The situation was absurd, after all—I’d consented to watch people



I found rather unattractive have sex because I couldn't think of a polite way to say no. What kind of a person does that? Is it timidity? Stupidity? A little of both?

"That was the noisiest blowjob," Emily said.

"What do you mean?"

"Shlurp, shlurp, shlurp."

I hadn't noticed that at all. I think I was too busy thinking about his expression, which was the real reason—more than politeness, I realized in that moment—I'd stayed in my chair watching. I don't know this for sure, but I don't think I smile when I'm having sex. Oh, sure, sometimes one of us will say or do something funny or odd, and we'll end up laughing—that's to be expected, because sex is a pretty ridiculous thing, when you get right down to it. But I certainly don't grin, the way that guy was grinning. Maybe he was hoping Emily would turn around and watch; maybe he was hoping I'd ask his wife for a blowjob. But there was no doubt that he was deliriously happy to be getting off, with his wife, in front of someone.

That's not my kink, and fucking the woman I love in front of a stranger isn't really something that would make me particularly happy. Nevertheless, though, I kind of feel like I understand this Gavin MacLeod look-alike in the bright yellow cock ring. He gets to have sex with a woman who shares his perversions, a woman who couldn't hide her enthusiasm for blowing him once I had indicated it wouldn't bother me. Sexually speaking, he and the woman he loves are on the same page. And that's an incredible thing. I know, because I'm also in love with a woman who is into the same stuff I'm into. It's not always daring or kinky, of course, but when one of us says to the other, "How about you tie me up for a little bit?" it usually results in some degree of enthusiasm. I suppose it may be possible to make a sexually-incompatible marriage work, but—having been in plenty of sexually-incompatible relationships in the past—I can tell you that it can't be very fun.

Here's a man who—like me—has a fulfilling sex life with the

woman he loves. And I can only imagine that, several months ago, as her hair was falling out and she was surely too nauseous to even think of attending the Lifestyles convention this summer, it must have seemed like they'd lost a fundamental part of their connection. Not the whole connection, of course—love is, in the end, about more than sex. But a part of it. An important part. And so as they fucked that night, I like to imagine that his goofy grin was about more than just getting off or being watched—it was maybe about second chances, and finding what, it turns out, wasn't really lost after all. And if I could be part of that, then I don't think it's too perverted to be glad.

# Divorcee Cleans the Stagnant Pool

Melanie Graham

Snakes: coralled and out.

Pooling among the sparse St. Augustine,  
the rental vac pump's thick green flood is an exact replica  
of Technicolor cloud that crawled the sky  
toward Charlton Heston's tan chest  
and the doomed of Egypt.

Female frogs: harder to wrangle.

Unwilling to abandon their offspring,  
the not fish/not yet frog iridescent bluish beads  
scooped out, flung across the fence—  
twenty-five years of the same mother-of-pearl necklace  
fed to a yard of hungry geese.

Dead males: float white.

Bodies twisted like grief wrung handkerchiefs  
or glassine love letters so thin the words dissolve.  
A tapestry of leaves rust the water;  
a blind woman's fortune;  
swirling, unreadable.

# Texaco on Biscayne

Lynne Barrett

After a group of us met for a girls' night out to see a movie, we were tempted over to the nearby not very good place for a drink and fried food and a table outside on a mild Miami January night. We split up in the parking lot. It was near midnight, and the place was hopping, with lots of people standing outside by their cars, smoking and talking in the soft, humid air. My friend Jill had come with me, but two of the others lived closer to her, so she went home with them. Had I driven her, maybe this wouldn't have happened. Or it would have but we'd have been together and so everything would have been different.

I was heading home by myself, down Biscayne, when I felt the left rear tire go wrong and at the same time saw a guy driving along next to me gesturing at me to pull over. Had I hit something on the road, or did someone—this guy?—gash my tire at the restaurant? Was he predator or friend?

I was in a dark stretch of Biscayne, with residential neighborhoods off to each side and office buildings and banks along the road. I could feel the tire deflating slowly, the car moving more and more unevenly, but I didn't want to stop here, in the dark, even if I was going to stay locked in and phone someone. I remembered that another few minutes south there was a Texaco with a 24-hour FoodMart, so I lolloped along, heading there.

The guy beside me honked and waved, but I ignored him. He got behind me, and when I signaled to go left he did, too—but as I turned into the well-lit Texaco, he pulled away. For all I know, he was a Samaritan. I rolled to a stop at the side of the station, near the closed service bay, and ostentatiously pulled out my cell phone. And then wondered who to call. I had broken up with my boyfriend six weeks ago.

I had a vague idea where the spare was in this car, which I am sorry to confess was an SUV. (I used to move furniture a lot, what can I say?) It sat suspended somewhere below the car itself, to be wound down with a gizmo you assembled from rods stowed underneath the front seat somewhere. It was a pain. I could theoretically do this myself, but it was late at night, I was in nice clothes and stupid shoes, and I have never felt I could tighten the lug nuts well enough.

Or I could leave the car here and have them deal with it in the morning, and call a cab. This seemed more sensible. The car would be safe enough here, wouldn't it? It wasn't going anywhere. But I should ask permission. I gathered up my purse, clamped it firmly under my arm, and got out to go into the FoodMart.

A man came out of nowhere in the dark and said, "You need a vacuum?"

I said, "No thank you."

He said, "Vacuum real good."

He was gap-toothed, genus crazy-homeless. I shook my head no and headed past him. He followed, praising the vacuum. I was unable to tell whether he wanted to sell me a vacuum or to use something at the station to vacuum my car.

He followed me into the FoodMart. Behind thick plastic, the cashier sat, a man of about 40, looking tired.

"Hello," I said, "I have a flat tire and I'd like to—"

"I do not speak English," he said, enunciating clearly.

Vacuum Man stirred behind me. I glanced at him—then at the cashier, who sat motionless.

"Tengo problema con mi carro. Un flat tire. Quiero permission dejar mi carro aqui," I said. What were the words for flat and tire?

In Spanish he said, "You speak Spanish?"

"A little," I said. "In high school I it studied. And here, in Miami, I have opportunity to speak it much times." I smiled.

Vacuum Man had gone outside. I saw him hovering near the door. Waiting for me.

The cashier gazed at me sadly and said, "From Argentina I came

here. You can leave your car if you wish. Mine is proximate.”

A man burst into the shop, hollering in Spanish far too rapid for me to gather much besides the word police. He kept pointing outside and I saw that a cab was now parked at the nearer pump. He had a fare that was some kind of problem. I couldn't grasp all the facts here; the person wasn't paying or was drunk or obnoxious or sick, I wasn't sure, probably all of these—the cab driver had tried to eject him, he wouldn't go, and now the driver had called the police. I looked out but couldn't see the passenger. The interior of the cab was dark. It was a saggy-looking vehicle, with the numbers of the company on the side.

I sidled over near the window and snuck my hand into my purse, seeking my cell phone.

The cab driver went back out to his cab and could be heard hollering in English at the customer that the police would be here soon and he should get the fuck out of the cab now.

The passenger replied, screaming defiant obscenities. The cabbie stood by the pump, the passenger stayed inside.

Vacuum Man scuttled back inside the shop. “Beautiful vacuum,” he said, and I contemplated the beautiful vacuum I'd like to be in.

I hunched my shoulder to block him, opened my cell phone, and called Steve. Yes, we had broken up, but it wasn't nasty, and when you have been together for almost a year and break up, wasn't there some clause, good for a call in case of emergency, for six months or until either of you is officially established with someone else? Of course there was. He was asleep, but when I told him where I was and why, he said he was on his way.

In the shelter of the corner between window and cooler case, I fumbled in my purse for money and sorted out a few singles and put them in the pocket of my jacket; I wanted cash at hand, without having to open my pocketbook in front of anyone. I left the cell phone on and put it where I could find it fast. I was not one of those women with an organizer purse but I could see the point now. Having things in the right place could be life or death, in certain circumstances.

The battle of invective between the cab driver and the passenger went on. Through the door, Vacuum Man watched them, and I noticed that he trembled. I became aware that there were other people watching. A skinny black man leaned against the wall of the shop with his hands in the pocket of his sweatshirt, and a couple of teenagers—boys—stood under the massive streetlight at the corner. They installed these streetlights on Biscayne after lesser ones were knocked down by a hurricane. They stood taller than any tropical tree and a cage guarded the light itself. I imagined the boys lived somewhere nearby, were out for adventure, but who knew. They could be hustlers or drug dealers.

Steve drove in and pulled up behind my car. He got out and bent down to look at the flat tire. I left the FoodMart and walked straight to him, with my keys in my hand.

"I'm sorry," I said, "to bother you. I didn't know what else to do. It's too crazy here for me to change the tire myself"—he cut me a look—"even if I could. If you don't want to do it, leave it here and just drive me home."

He looked around and shook his head. "I wouldn't leave it here."

I thought of explaining that the dark compact beside it was the manager's but decided there should be no argument about anything, however trivial, when he was helping me.

We broke up because we had danced and re-danced what he wanted, what I wanted, who we each were, in a kind of figure eight of the good and the bad, gone around enough times we were stalled. I don't know why. We just didn't know how to go forward. We hadn't exhausted desire; right this minute, he looked good to me, not just because he was Galahad. Not just because he was cranking the spare out from underneath the tire with an efficient, irascible perfection, the effort showing in his long legs. But partly because of that.

While he was under the car, Vacuum Man edged towards me.

Steve stood up with the spare tire and said, "Please go inside

‘til I’m done with this.” Then he said, “You’re not dressed to be out here,” looking me up and down, and I thought he thought I’d been on a date.

“I was out with the girls,” I said.

“Mmmhmm,” he said with a grin which meant, You women all dress up for each other but not for me. He opened up the back of my car to get the jack.

Vacuum Man stayed with me as I walked toward the shop, and I said, “I really don’t need a vacuum, but please take this,” and handed him two dollars. He grabbed the cash and moved away.

A police cruiser pulled in with a chirp of the siren and swirled around to just behind the cab. Two cops got out. The cab driver came out as I went into the shop.

I felt I should buy something. I chose a ginger ale, paying the cashier through the small opening in the plastic—it must be bulletproof plastic, I thought—then opened it and sipped. Cold gas burned my throat.

“From Argentina you came here?” I said.

He nodded. “It is ten months.”

“There have been hard times in Argentina I have heard. In the news on the radio. Problems with the money.”

He said, “Yes, there were terrible times, there, so bad that I had to leave my wife and two boys, to come here so they can eat.” He began to speak more quickly, so I caught only phrases, but the meaning was clear enough, as he poured it out. Financial conditions. Government mismanagement. Corruption. Stupidity. Debt. You can have worked and been honest and have a business, an honest business, and it all disappears. It is arbitrary. The money lost all value there, ridiculous inflation, all that you had worth nothing anymore. And then you must come here to this place just to feed your family.

Outside, the police stood, one talking to the cab driver, the other to the passenger, with their posture conveying the serious courtesy of the law. They were making progress. The passenger was out of the cab. One policeman was writing something



down. I presumed the cabdriver wanted a record of this, in case the passenger at some later point complained. Steve had the car jacked up.

The cashier brought out pictures of his two boys: together, in some kind uniform, perhaps of a Catholic school. They had their father's serious dark eyes. "Do you have children?" he asked.

"No," I said, and because I thought he would expect me to feel sad about this, I added, "lamentablemente," although I had not been yearning for children and was generally annoyed by all the culture's endless pressuring jabber about biological clocks and so on. And now I felt dragged into hypocrisy by my need to stay in the shop. And, after all, look at him, stuck here, trapped, because of those children, his hostages to fate.

The cab was gone. I didn't see where the passenger went. The cops sat for a moment in their car, then pulled back onto Biscayne. The watchers emerged from the dark: Vacuum Man, the skinny black guy, the kids. But no one, I noticed, went anywhere near Steve. He was working calmly, had the bad tire off, the other in position, and no one bothered him. This was the advantage of being a man, damn it.

The skinny black guy entered the shop, looked at me, nodded, and picked out a bottle of beer.

My Spanish was warming up and I felt I should keep the conversation going but I didn't want to ask the cashier what he thought of America. What could he think of it with this view every night? While the skinny black guy paid and left, I said, instead, "I never visited Argentina, never went to—" I started to say Latin America but South Florida is a Latin part of the Americas, surely, so I said, "South America."

"You should travel there," he said. "You can use your Spanish there."

"Argentina has much culture," I said.

"Beautiful architecture," he agreed, and he described someplace I couldn't completely follow—in Buenos Aires—a place with some kind of flowering trees or trees and flowers, flores, arboles—and the most exquisito something—something to

eat?—and here we were in the fluorescent lit cube of a FoodMart, I thought, this awful exile and captivity. I wanted to bring up Borges. Would it be pretentious to bring up Borges? And then was it not true that Borges saw the arbitrariness of fate, fate's circles and puzzles, the way any path of escape led back to destiny, which would make his seem to be not a momentary Argentinean problem but an absolute, and how would that cheer this man up?

Steve came in, and said the spare was just meant to be a temporary substitute, so I'd need to get a real tire put on tomorrow. He'd follow me home, just in case the temp was no good.

"Could you tell what happened?" I said. "Did I hit something sharp? Or did somebody do something to the tire?"

"Too dark for me to see," he said. "Wherever you take it tomorrow they can do the tire autopsy."

I laughed. Tire autopsy. That was Steve: wry. I first liked him for his wryness.

I turned to the cashier and thanked him. "I hope you well," I said. "That things will get better." I was full of goodwill and sentiment, suddenly. And relief.

He looked at me with weary tragedy and thanked me. He could not summon a smile.

Steve was out the door and on his way to his car.

As I left the shop, the skinny black guy lurched up to me, lifted his right hand, and said, "I bless you with the benediction of the soul. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope. By the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

I thanked him and gave him a dollar. In my car, I put on the headlights and saw Vacuum Man just around the corner of the building beside the repair bay, sitting on a canister vacuum cleaner, holding the beer the skinny black guy had bought.

I drove home, with Steve following me, and of course I invited him in. It was very late, and he had come when I called, a reliable man in a dangerous world. The kind of man, I now know, who would go far away to work if we needed it, our son and I. Not

that we have needed it yet, but as I drive Biscayne sometimes with the baby in the car, I pass where the Texaco was—lately gutted and painted bright pink to house a business selling flower pots and garden ornaments and butterfly flags—and think of all that can happen.

## Contributors

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**Lynne Barrett** is the author of the short story collections *The Secret Names of Women* and *The Land of Go*, and co-editor of *Birth: A Literary Companion*. Her fiction has appeared in *One Year to a Writing Life*, *A Dixie Christmas*, *Miami Noir*, *A Hell of a Woman*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Other Voices*, and many other magazines and anthologies. She has been awarded the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best mystery story from the Mystery Writers of America and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship. She lives in Miami where she teaches at Florida International University and edits *The Florida Book Review*. More information can be found at <http://lynne.barrett.googlepages.com>.

**William Bradley's** work has appeared in *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *College English*, *The Normal School*, *The Missouri Review*, and other magazines. He lives with his wife in a small town in North Carolina called Murfreesboro, where they both teach at Chowan University.

**Dolores Coe** received her MFA in Painting from the University of South Florida in 1989. She was on the Faculty of the Ringling School of Art and Design from 1991 until 2005 where she was Director of the CORE Studio Program for a period and taught a variety of courses spanning traditional, time-based and digital media. She resigned her teaching position in Fall 2005 to pursue studio work full time. Her work has been widely exhibited in both solo and group exhibitions and her paintings are included in a number of public and private collections. ([www.dolorescoe.com](http://www.dolorescoe.com)). She lives and maintains her studio on the Little Manatee River in Ruskin, FL.

**Barbara Crooker** has published poems in magazines such as *Yankee*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Denver Quarterly*; anthologies, including the *Bedford Introduction to Literature (Bedford/St. Martin's)*, *Worlds in their Words: An Anthology of Contemporary American Women Writers (Prentice Hall)*, eleven chapbooks, and two full-length books, *Radiance*, which won the 2005 Word Press First Book Award and was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize, and *Line Dance*, also from Word. She has

received three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships in Literature, the WB Yeats Society of NY Prize (Grace Schulman, judge), the Grayson Books Chapbook Competition (Sue Ellen Thompson, judge,) and the Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award (Stanley Kunitz, judge). She lives and writes in rural northeastern Pennsylvania and enjoys visiting friends in Bradenton, FL, every winter.

**Nikki Devereux** has been an artist her entire life, starting with sketches that she did as a very young child and then moving into oil painting classes by the time she was 11 years old. She remembers being bent over a canvas at night, amongst so many other seasoned artists in the adult class that she was taking, and the smell of turpentine and oil paint was just intoxicating (both literally and figuratively). As a photographer, she let her early love for art and painting influence her work, and she constantly strives for that perfect composition and lighting. She is very passionate about photography and constantly learning new things. She is currently working on a series of photographs called "Four Seasons," inspired by Alphonse Mucha's "Les Quatres Saisons." Travel and curiosity for language have led her around the world. Her travels and encounters with people, literature and culture have all come to play a role in her work, which takes many elements and blends them together, much as her heritage is a blending of races—French, Vietnamese, German and Irish.

**Connie May Fowler**, a Florida native, is a novelist, memoirist, and screenwriter. She is the author of several novels, including *The Problem with Murmur Lee*, a Redbook premier book club selection; *Remembering Blue*, a Chautauqua South Literary Award recipient; and *Before Women had Wings*, winner of the 1996 Southern Book Critics Circle Award and the Francis Buck Award from the League of American Pen Women. She also published a memoir titled, *When Katie Wakes*.

**Melanie Graham** is a first year PhD student in poetry with the University of Lancaster, UK. Her work has appeared most recently in Harvard Summer Review, The Southern Quarterly, and The Homestead Review.

**Susan Hubbard** is the author of six books of fiction and coeditor of *100% Pure Florida Fiction, an anthology of Florida stories*. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares, Triquarterly, The Mississippi Review*, and several other journals. She teaches creative writing at UCF.

**Ilyse Kusnetz** previously published poems in *Poetry Review* and *Crazyhorse*, and her poems have been broadcast on BBC Radio-Scotland and NPR-WMFE. She is currently working on a full-length collection of poems entitled *Tips from the Underworld*. Since 2001, she has taught English and Creative Writing at Valencia Community College in Orlando.

**Matt Larson** was given a professional Nikon camera and dark-room outfit before he reached age 10. Both his father and mother were avid photographers and encouraged him to be a photographer. He attended the University of South Florida and obtained a B.A. degree in photojournalism. Twenty years later, he completed his MBA degree at Saint Leo University. Larson is employed by Media General which owns The Tampa Tribune, WFLA News Channel 8, and TBO.com. During the past 24 years there, he's held positions as a multi-image producer, photographer, video producer, creative director, project manager and now, Community Partnerships Manager. On behalf of the Tribune, he's had the opportunity to serve on several arts-related boards and committees, including: International Television Association, American Society of Media Photographers, The Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts, Mayor's Public Art Committee, and more recently, the Glazer Children's Museum. Larson admits that his discovery of plastic toy cameras reignited his love for photography and has brought him back to those early years of just having fun playing around in the darkroom and making art. His blog, [ToyCameraPlay.blogspot.com](http://ToyCameraPlay.blogspot.com) is a testament to his new found passion with toy cameras.

**Bruce Marsh** has exhibited his paintings extensively in Florida and the Southeast, and has had exhibitions in Los Angeles and New York. He received the State of Florida Individual Artist Grant on three separate occasions, has numerous exhibition awards including Best of Show in the Gasparilla Art Show of 1972 and 1973, and has participated in exhibitions at almost all of the major museums

in Florida. He is represented in Tampa by the Clayton Gallery, and had a solo exhibition there in March 2005. He is also represented by Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art in Sarasota, Florida, where he had an exhibition in March 2007. During the past 25 years a major part of his efforts have been devoted to large scale painting for public spaces. There have been over 50 major institutional and corporate commissions, including three 8' X 12' canvases for the Orlando International Airport, a large mosaic mural for the City of Tampa at the Sulphur Springs Pool, and works for TECO, GTE, NCNB Bank, Bank of America, Celebration Health Center in Kissimmee, IBM in Boca Raton, and American Express in Jacksonville, among many others. Bruce and his wife, the painter Dolores Coe, currently maintain a home and studio on the Little Manatee River in Ruskin, and a cabin and studio in Franklin North Carolina.

**Peter Meinke's** book about writing, *The Shape of Poetry* (new & revised version), has just been published. *The Contracted World*, his 14th book of poetry, is his most recent in the prestigious Pitt Poetry Series, which includes *Zinc Fingers*, *Scars*, and *Liquid Paper*. *Unheard Music*, a collection of short stories, came out in 2007. His poetry and fiction have received many awards, including two NEA Fellowships and three prizes from the Poetry Society of America. His book of short stories, *The Piano Tuner*, won the 1986 Flannery O'Connor Award. He directed the Writing Workshop at Eckerd College for many years and has often been writer-in-residence at other colleges and universities; from 2003 through 2005 he held the Darden Chair in Creative Writing at Old Dominion University. Eckerd College recently established The Peter Meinke Endowed Professorship in Creative Writing. Meinke's work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and dozens of other magazines; he and his wife, the artist Jeanne Clark, have lived in St. Petersburg since 1966.

**Susan Meyers** is the author of *Keep and Give Away* (University of South Carolina, 2006), which received the SC Poetry Book Prize, the SIBA Book Award for Poetry, and the Brockman-Campbell Book Award. Her poems have also appeared, or are forthcoming, in *The Southern Review*, *Crazyhorse*, and *jubilat*. She won Yemassee's 2007 Pocatago Poetry Contest, judged by Peter Meinke.

**Daniele Pantano** is a Swiss poet, translator, critic, and editor born of Sicilian and German parentage in Langenthal (Canton of Berne). His next books, *The Oldest Hands in the World* (a collection of poems), *The Possible Is Monstrous: Selected Poems by Friedrich Dürrenmatt*, and *The Collected Works of Georg Trakl*, are forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press, New York. Pantano has taught at the University of South Florida and served as the Visiting Poet-in-Residence at Florida Southern College. He divides his time between Switzerland, the United States, and England, where he's Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Edge Hill University.

**Sarah Prevatt** graduated with a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing in 2007 and currently teaches at the University of Central Florida. Her stories have appeared in *The Cypress Dome*, and she has had two pedagogy papers accepted by The Association of Writers and Writing Programs.

**Liz Robbins'** poems have appeared recently in Barrow Street, MARGIE, Puerto del Sol, RATTLE, and storySouth, among others. Poems from her first book, *Hope, As the World Is a Scorpion Fish* (Backwaters Press), have been featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac* and *Verse Daily*. She's the recipient of a Schultz Foundation grant and an Intellectual Life Grant, and a nominee for Best New Poets and a Pushcart Prize. She's an assistant professor of English and creative writing at Flagler College.

**Wendy Thornton** has published fiction in *The Literary Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Confluence*, *The Oregon Literary Review*, and many other journals. In Spring, 2009, she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for her story, "Finding Lizzie," by editors of the *MacGuffin Magazine*. She has published memoir in *Riverteeth* and *southlit.com*. She is also a well-published poet, with poems forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *Underground Voices*, and *Shadowtrain*. She is President of the *Writers Alliance of Gainesville*, a member of the *Gainesville Poets and Writers*, and has been an invited reader for many non-profit organizations and events. She is currently seeking an agent for her first novel, "Reflections," and is editing her second completed novel, "Dear Oprah."



**Anna Tomczak's** work has been featured in exhibitions at and collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Florida Gulf Coast Museum of Art, Harn Museum of Art, McGraw-Hill, Museum of Florida Art, Norton Museum of Art, Polaroid Collections, Polk Museum of Art, Sony Latin-America and Tampa Museum of Art. Artist awards include the Florida Individual Artist Fellowship and Career Enhancement Grant; Polaroid Artist Support Program Grant; Loft Nota Bene Artist Residency, Spain; Escape to Create Artist Fellowship, Seaside, FL; Distinguished Visiting Artist—Anna Lamar Switzer Center for Visual Arts, FL; Southeast Museum of Photography, Florida; Atlantic Center for the Arts Cultural Exchange Fellowship, La Napoule Arts Foundation, France. Her work has been featured in publications such as: Sanctuary, Anna Tomczak, Photography, curated with essay by Barbara Hitchcock, Polaroid Collections. 74 page Monograph, Fresco Fine Art Publications; The Georgia Review, View Camera Magazine, Camera Arts, Studio Photography and Design, Florida History Magazine, Polaroid Manipulations KCarr, Photo Portfolio Success JKaplan and Digital Photo Art Theresa Airey. Tomczak earned a BA in Theater Arts from Pennsylvania State University; and an MFA in Fine Art Photography, University of Florida. This combination provided her the foundation for the dramatic imagery realized in her current work.

**Erin Trauth** is an MFA student and composition instructor at the University of South Florida. She has published short stories in *Fiction Fix* and *Calliope*, and was the 2007 recipient of the Thelma F. Young Award for Excellence in Fiction for "The Dress," the second chapter of her novel manuscript.

**Kathryn VanSpanckeren**, Professor of English and Writing at the University of Tampa, has been Poetry Editor of Tampa Review, organizer of UT's Writers at the University series, Coordinator of the Writing Program, and advisor of QUILT, the student literary magazine. She has published poetry in many journals including Ploughshares, American Poetry Review, Carolina Quarterly, River Styx, boundary 2, Contact II, etc. She lives near the tip of Davis Island with her husband and small dog, where the night sky allows clear views of the stars. Her passions include American Literature; her book Outline of American Literature (a literary history

that has been translated into over 25 languages and is used widely around the world as well as in the U.S.) is maintained on the U.S. Dept. of State website. It grew out of her lectures while she was a Fulbright Professor of American Literature in Indonesia. She has taught in Australia, collected folklore in Nepal, and lectured on American literature in Thailand, the Philippines, Burma, Australia, Egypt, Tunisia, Portugal, and Argentina. From 1990-1993 she was Academic Director of the 6-week Fulbright Summer Seminar in American Literature for professors of American Literature from abroad. She has co-authored scholarly books on Margaret Atwood and the late novelist and poet John Gardner, and is currently working on a poetry manuscript and new book on Margaret Atwood, as well as a longer version of her popular history of U.S. Literature. She grew up in a rural area of Central California North of Santa Barbara; scholarships and a succession of odd jobs allowed her to go to the University of California Berkeley (BAs in English and Folklore and Mythology), Brandeis (MA) and Harvard (MA, Ph.D.).

**Genanne Walsh** graduated from the Warren Wilson MFA Program. Her work has appeared in *Puerto del Sol* and *Bloom* (forthcoming), and online at *Swink*, *Blackbird*, *42Opus*, *McSweeney's*, and elsewhere. She lives in California now, but went to high school and college in Florida.

**Scott Ward**, Professor of Literature and Creative Writing, M.A., University of South Carolina is a poet whose first book, *Crucial Beauty* (Scop Publications), won the 1990 Loiderman Poetry Prize. His most recent volume is *Wayward Passages* (2006, Black Bay Books). He has served as poetry editor of *Southern Humanities Review* and *Shenandoah*. His poems have appeared in anthologies such as *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon) and *Buck and Wing: Southern Poetry at 2000* (Washington and Lee) and journals, including *America*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *The Christian Century*.

**James Whorton Jr.** is author of the novels *Approximately Heaven* and *Frankland*. He teaches at SUNY Brockport.



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