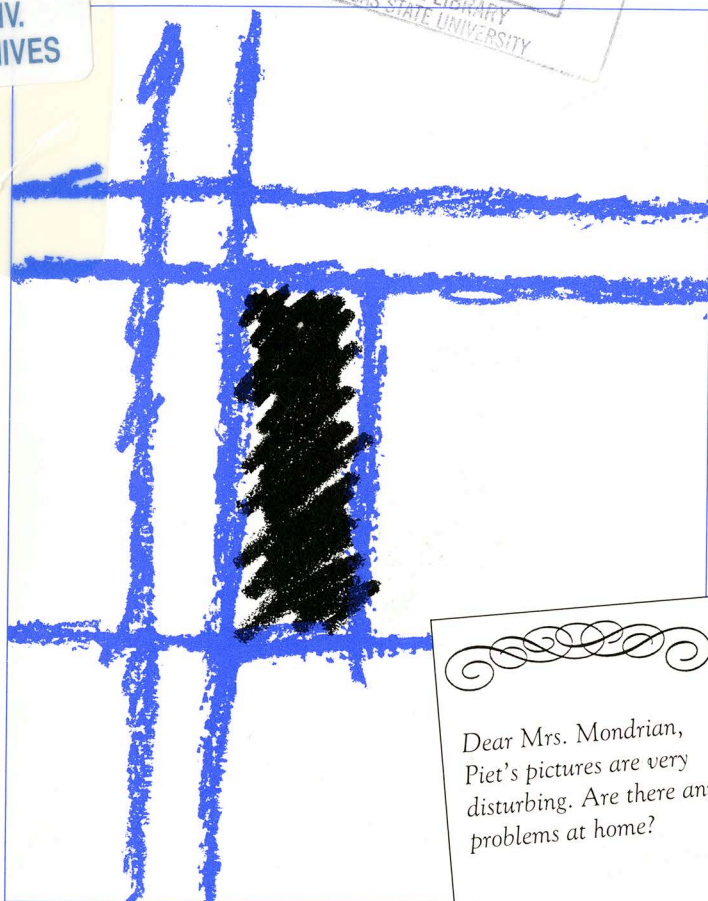


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**TOUCHSTONE**

**1991**

Kansas State University  
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Volume 25 Fall

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*Touchstone* is an annual publication of literature by students from across the nation. The editors welcome submissions of art, photography, fiction, essays, and poetry. Manuscripts must be typed and double-spaced. Please include an SASE.

*Touchstone* provides the campus and the community with a tangible learning experience, a valuable forum for publication, and a stimulating collection of prose and verse.

A thank you to our faculty advisor, Elizabeth Dodd, for all her help, advice, and "good cheer."

Thank you to all of the staff for their hard work and enthusiasm.



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## AWARDS

### POETRY

Edward Skoog  
"Playground"

### FICTION

Michael Hesser  
"The Locust's Bed"

### PATRONS

Gertrud Alton  
Jerome Dees  
Elizabeth Dodd  
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The Dusty Bookshelf  
Varney's Bookstore  
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Graduates in English



## CONTENTS

Playground	
Edward Skoog .....	1
The Locust's Bed	
Michael Hesser .....	2
A Moment	
Candace Plett .....	7
Making Poems	
Candace Plett .....	8
The Ground Breaking	
Candace Plett .....	9
Good Women Who Love Bad Compatability Quizzes	
Karin Dell Antonia .....	10
Telling Stories	
Jana Leep .....	11
Moorings	
A. J. Rathbun .....	15
Folklore	
A. J. Rathbun .....	16
On Epilepsy (A Sestina)	
Michael Hesser .....	17
Hotel of Dreams	
T. A. Tyler .....	18
My Hands Are Tied	
Tassinda Thomas .....	19
Oral Hygiene	
Robin Meeks .....	20
Decadence	
E. J. Schwartz .....	22
What Lochart Does	
Wendy Snider .....	23

Chesapeake  
    Edward Skoog ..... 32

Whaleyard  
    Edward Skoog ..... 33

Chrome And Wicker  
    Edward Skoog ..... 34

Motion  
    Edward Skoog ..... 35

Edward Skoog

## Playground

On a porch near the grade school  
I am taken out of staring  
by the low metal ching of chains  
swinging on tetherball posts.  
A stream of robins runs over the houses.

When the clouds were being pulled across the night sky,  
I told you we were asleep and dreaming.  
A train slid around the town.

When speedboats cut across,  
a whole lake shudders.  
Even in the one-inch bay between two rocks  
a mile away. That's how still this house is sometimes.

The doors of the grade school open and children fall into the yard.  
Their coats are zipped up by their own small hands.  
They point at all the birds.

Your house, your boat, you  
are miles away. You are waiting for this.  
Smoking and wearing a white dress on a porch, or  
you are swimming in the waist-high waters  
that leak into the Atlantic.  
I hope you like it there.

Once we walked in the playground,  
and the moon waxed the lawn into a bag of cut green beans.  
We walked soft, so the ground would be impressed with our softness.  
Now I think you are good gone.

And now also from the school chimney a cold ray of swallows  
spreads into the growing river of robins.  
They slow and veer south, unconcerned.  
That's where they were going anyway.

Michael Hesser

## **The Locust's Bed**

Cradled gently in the open boughs of the oak, the eight-year-old watched her brother prowling below.

"Katie!" cried Jesse, Jr., "Come back here and play with me!" A willow branch, naked and slender, trailed behind him like a sickly yellow scorpion's tail. It twitched impatiently, sending up clouds of the dead summer dust. "I got a funner game this time. Promise!"

Katie didn't budge but rather pressed her swollen cheek against the cool wrinkles of the bark. Here, hidden among leaves, she could find solace from her brother and his games. Brick-red hair flailed violently as he scampered to the front of the house.

His high-pitched voice seemed leaden and distorted as it struggled over the roof. "Kay-tee! Mama's home! And she gots cookies for you . . . if you wan'em!"

Still holding herself close to the tree, she snuck a peek at the driveway. She saw no truck. Mama had talked Grampa into going to town to see Junior's dad, again.

Junior reappeared, his ears scarlet, screaming, "Where the hell are you?" He punctuated his tantrum with impetuous slashes at the ailing rosebushes.

Mama would have a fit if she heard him use that word, Katie thought, not to mention for whippin' her flowers. His britches ain't so big that Mama can't whoop 'em.

Through the broken canopy of her refuge, Katie's bright eyes followed her brother as he peered under the porch and then checked the henhouse. He turned to look at the barn. The barn returned his stare; its flattened, crimson face towering over the child in a perpetual scream. Pitchforks, ropes, saws and axes seemed to dance in the shadows of its blackened maw.

"I know yer in Daddy's barn, Katie," Junior mumbled with no particular amount of resignation. He stood there, restlessly shifting his weight from one foot to the other, the switch drumming uncertainly on the dry earth before he dropped it. It laid curled behind him in the red dust, momentarily forgotten, and he bent to select pebbles to throw at the chickens.

Katie sighed and gazed upward. The evening sun, percolating through the foliage far above her, cast cool shadows that swarmed gently over her soft skin and flaxen hair. She closed her eyes and let the earth—the baked, calloused dirt—roll away beneath her. At the barn, her brother paced nervously.

“I know yer in Daddy’s barn, Katie,” he said again, mustering courage.

Jesse’s barn, her thoughts fired.

“I can hear you in there, so just come out.” He paused. “If ya don’t come out, I’m gonna come in!”

She smiled inwardly. Fine, let him look in Jesse’s barn. She relaxed in the scant breeze and allowed her fingers to explore the thick wrinkles of the ancient oak. Here, beneath her, were a couple acorns, lodged between the two branches she was sitting in. She wondered if she could plant them and make them grow, one day. And over here was another, but without its little cap. And over here, Katie stopped. Deep within an oaken furrow her fingers encountered something light, something alien. It crinkled, almost imperceptibly, as her fingers brushed against it again. She plucked it as cautiously as she would a wild raspberry.

She held it before her face for a long while, twisting it slowly so that she could study every part. It was a translucent husk, beautifully grotesque, and hunched over itself. Its eyes were like jewels or tears that sparkled in the intermittent sunlight, and its six brittle, hollow legs clutched feebly at her fingertips. But the delicate plates along its back had split; this shell, crisscrossed with inner threads like stitches, was all the host had left. It had broken from the earth, from the tangled roots, and crawled all the way up here, she mused. Then:

“Well, looky who I found!”

Katie looked down—and gasped.

“Since mean ol’ Katie won’t come out and play, I guess I’ll have to play with Mittens.” In his arms he held a mewling calico.

Instinctively, Katie turned and grasped the tree trunk, smashing the husk in her panic. Her toes floundered wildly, desperately searching for a foothold on the lower limb. Junior sang, “Mitteney, kitteney, let’s see the kitty fly,” as he rocked the tiny bundle precariously in his arms.

Her scream was drowned by the dusty rumble of Grampa’s Chevy sputtering down the gravel road. “Shit,” he said and dropped the cat. The screen door banged loudly after him.

Katie watched the cat scamper under the porch before descending from the tree. The sun smoldered in the crimson tempest of the western sky as she dashed into the house. Far above her, the locusts began their evening symphony.

\* \* \*

The kitchen counter was littered with red-and-white striped buckets. Grampa was heating the tiny ears of corn he had arranged in a casserole dish, and Mother stood before the sink, briskly stirring butter into mashed potatoes with a wooden spoon.

"Katie," she said, not turning around, "I told you two to have the table set before me and Grampa got back, now, didn't I? Now go help your brother."

Katie grabbed two of the tumblers her mother had set out and moved to fill them with water. Her mother looked down momentarily.

"Oh, Katie! You two been fightin' again, haven't you?" She let out her breath, a long, soft sigh, and touched the welts on her child's cheek. "I've told ya and I've told ya that you two have got to love one another—Honey, stand still so Mama can lookit this." Katie stopped fidgeting and allowed her mother to inspect her face.

"You're gonna be fine, honey. You'll be jus' fine." She gave her a quick kiss on the forehead.

Katie glanced into the next room and saw her brother making taunting, gruesome faces. She hugged her mother's thin legs and tried to retreat behind the floral folds of her dress.

"Honey!" her mother cried, dropping the bowl and startling Katie. She pulled her arms from her legs and stooping, whispered, "Don't hug Mama there, Baby. Mama's still a little sore. From her fall, you know." Grampa slammed the oven door.

\* \* \*

Grampa, in his denim overalls, returned grace that night. He thanked Our Heavenly Father for the food on their table, and asked that it provide not only nourishment for their bodies, but nourishment for their souls. He prayed for the safety of all of His flock and gave thanks for the love of Our Lord. Katie stared down her tightly fused fingers and into her plate, flinching at the occasional kick from her brother seated opposite. "Amen," they said, and Katie secretly wondered which man it was they were talking about.

Grampa passed the food around. Katie asked that a leg be left for her to insure that her brother would leave her a wing. When the plate of chicken came around, there were two left. She assembled them symmetrically on her plate so that they looked like an angel.

For the longest time, only the sound of extra-crispy crunching filled the dining room. Then:

"How come we're havin' city food again?" asked Junior through a mouthful of mashed potatoes. Grampa's knife screeched across his plate, startling all three. The children looked at Grampa, then to their mother. She looked down.



Grampa alone continued eating. His jaw made the odd popping sound that it always made when he ate corn-on-the-cob. In the silence of the room, it seemed to reverberate off the porcelain, the walls, and the china cabinet.

She looked at each of the children in turn, almost mechanically. Then slowly: "Mama's got a surprise for you." Katie thought she could hear the individual kernels swimming around in Grampa's mouth. "Your Daddy's comin' back to live with us."

Grampa excused himself then, his meal unfinished.

Junior nibbled on his chicken leg. "When's Daddy comin' home?" he asked.

Jesse—Katie thought—Jesse.

"Daddy's comin' in later tonight," their Mama said. Katie could hear Grampa's dishes clattering in the sink. "So I want you two to do your chores real good, now, so the place'll look nice for Daddy."

"I bet he's gonna bring presents again! Is Grampa gonna get to stay?"

"Well, Grampa's a busy man, Junior. He's got all sorts of things to do."

"What kinda things?"

"Well, all sort of Grampa things."

"Is Grampa leaving because Daddy is a 'goddamnsonofabitch'?" There was a single chuckle from the kitchen.

"Junior!" she shouted but then, with sudden restraint: "Grampa likes Daddy." Katie heard the clattering of the dishes resume. "They jus' don't get along too good, sometimes."

Jesse, Jr., seemed to mull this over in his cinder-block head, trying to digest a mouthful of potatoes at the same time. Then he proposed, "Do you like Daddy, now?"

Their Mama looked into her napkin. Katie could see her pupils flashing wildly back and forth, as if she were running through a mental checklist. Her lower lip quivered for a moment, but when she looked up her face was blank. "Yes, Junior. Mama loves your Daddy."

\* \* \*

That night Katie awoke to the sound of Jesse's car sliding to a stop on the worn gravel road. She huddled under her blanket. Vines and flowers, embroidered by her grandmother's gnarled hands, spiraled intricately over that green patchwork, and she felt safe beneath it.

Outside her window, like a rattling hymn of maracas, the cicadas sang. She recalled the shell she had found that evening. Perhaps even now as she struggled to sleep, she thought, one was struggling among the twisted roots, fighting to cast itself from the dry, unloving earth; deliver itself from the locust's bed. Maybe, at this very moment, it was pulling itself out of itself, to emerge in winged radiance.

Grampa, Mama, and Jesse exchanged their formal greetings, but like metal grating on metal, those tin words slowly changed into the phrases Katie had heard so many times before. Flinty shards of conversation like “what he did to you” and “you don’t know who I need” and “my goddamn kids” fought to pierce the cool floorboards and bore into her head.

That night after dinner her brother had asked her with unusual softness, “Katie? Do you like Daddy?”

“No,” she had said, she didn’t like Jesse. And now she said it again and again. She didn’t like his calloused fingers and the way they touched her neck and legs. She didn’t like the smell of his breath that he kept in the flask in his coat. She didn’t like the sweaty, wiry, black mat that covered his chest. And she didn’t like his pink thing, the thing that stood up nearly against his belly, like the scar on Mama’s stomach—

The wooden steps groaned, protesting under Jesse’s weight as he approached the attic door. Katie curled under her blanket, gripping her knees.

“Katie,” he whispered as he opened the door, “Daddy’s home.”  
But she was far away, singing.

Candace Plett

**A Moment**

Warm day after rain  
early in autumn before the first dark leaves go gold  
and yellow clover and clusters of cattails abandon this  
beach near the dam—  
you talk softly about hunting  
the art of the chase, and the horrible grace of those wings  
all at once, pumping,  
lifting away

lying on our backs under the migrating sun  
thinking that there is work tomorrow  
and the days are getting shorter

listening to the thistles whispering  
as they go blissfully to seed

the reservoir splashing at its clay banks

mobs of white pelicans  
wheeling away

Candace Plett

## **Making Poems**

i.

At night even an old house  
grows new  
finding its hidden corners.  
Ghosts move across the floors  
going to windows, looking out at the moon.  
Those silly dreams  
that got shuffled under days  
rise out of dust and fill rooms.

ii.

In solitude  
all the sounds  
are gifts:  
the wind shifting,  
insects crawling, rasping with lives,  
a lonely calf—his hollow cry,  
the soft scratch of pen  
skimming lines  
like a night bird whisking along a black water  
with gleanings of fish.

iii.

Waiting  
past the last night breeze,  
the first soft lamp of morning,  
there is finally nothing  
only silence and  
poems dropping softly  
like water squeezed from stones.

Candace Plett

### **The Ground Breaking**

The way the plow turns  
earth, the black flesh unfolds  
in rolls of animal skin, the dark bottom  
of the world opening, oily blue and gleaming  
fresh as rain,  
each rounded shoulder, grainy and soft.  
The plow sails along cutting ribbons,  
leaving stiff waves  
of dirt  
arching and then falling, crumbling back.

From the kitchen window above the sink  
I can see Momma standing,  
hands at her hips,  
watching Daddy open a swath of garden  
through the backyard's broad heart,  
the soft old grass  
curling under the blade,  
and two boys in torn jeans  
by the house waiting  
to take their three-wheeler across  
that rough, new range.

Karin Dell Antonia

### **Good Women Who Love Bad Compatability Quizzes**

Modern Love, how shall we measure thee?  
My love is like a red, red graph  
with bars and lines and standard deviations,  
Greek letters and charts and a million calculations  
tattooed across my breast in heart's blood.  
I stand on the X axis, reaching towards your distant Y.

Should the world on its great axis tilt,  
sending me stumbling across lines and spaces  
would I cling to my wobbly statistics  
or go gladly into that bright light?  
Would I find my heart unbloodied, the battle won?  
Or search in vain amid a sea of crumpled paper?

I will lose my head, though it be fastened on.  
Would that I will hang on to my heart.

Jana Leep

## Telling Stories

“You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories.”

—Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony

Mother, Cat sees spirits jumping from drapes, soaring into him like spears, but remember what I always say, “Cat, be a quiet cat.” Remember, though, that I start seeing those spirits and they lunge at me with arrows and chains and spears, and I used to say, “Girl, be a quiet girl,” but now, I can’t quiet myself anymore. So be careful but please take Cat. Please take Cat and please don’t tell me to be a quiet girl because I am not a girl anymore.

Like I used to think our family couldn’t speak because we’ve always seemed to keep everything under our skin like a bad complexion lingering into adulthood. But yesterday morning, when I stared into Aunt Celesta’s white-washed complexion, I heard nothing, at first, of course, because she was dead. But later that afternoon when you sat me down in front of Aunt Celesta’s oak dresser of memories, and said, “Stare at your aunt in these photographs. Don’t stare at your relations as if you were in a museum. People are in mourning—this is not a family reunion,” I said, “Girl, be a quiet girl,” and stared and stared and got scared that it was too late for me to learn the language of people, being you and Father consider me something else. But in all my staring, I found my family hidden in Aunt Celesta’s oak dresser drawers.

I saw Grandmother’s kneaded hands wrapped around a pencil looking like a pig-in-a-blanket writing the alphabet and figured she was learning to write her name.

I found you, Mother. A real goddess in black and white, and I found myself thinking you were beautiful. You were spinning your baton, twirling, twirling right in front of Grandfather.

I found Father, kneeling on a green frontier, suited for victory, filled with marshmallows—a football star.

And Grandfather, hammering away at his first church, pockets full of candy. I could smell his breath of liquor and cigarettes. His candy corn rotting my teeth.

But then I found Aunt Celesta, and she spoke to me straight out of the 1970's. Her hand on an iron griddle, a toothless smile, whispering, "Think of all the living being cremated with my bony old body. I won't have no grave for you to visit, so why don't you study these here photographs, and keep them for yourself. Each time you need company, pull these photographs out and have a private ceremony on my behalf."

And I said, "Aunt Celesta, thank you very much for thinking of me. Living in that building with no one but my cat, Mother and Father, I do need something to remember."

And you know, Mother, I never knew Grandmother had so much to remember. You knew I slept over at Grandmother's last night, well, Grandmother asked me to stay with her because she said she had started to see spirits too. She said she's part of a procession moving toward somewhere, and that Aunt Celesta had found that somewhere. But I tried to tell her Aunt Celesta wasn't dead because she'd whispered to me that afternoon. Well, Grandmother took my hand and whispered a little softer than Aunt Celesta, "You're right. She ain't dead—she's been harvested."

She gripped my hand like she was ringing out an old dishrag. But I was used to it. I had lost my hand at the funeral when she held me on like a leash, and I had to follow her to the box where they had laid her sister like an archeological find.

I touched Aunt Celesta's reptile-like skin while Grandmother talked to her and I stared at her. I wished Cat had been there. Cat would have nestled down into Grandmother's ironing board body. Maybe Cat would have understood the spirit surrounding Aunt Celesta that seemed to wipe Grandmother and me down with astringent. This spirit was different, though. Mother, it didn't stab me with spears, and with Cat being given to me by Father, and Cat only knowing those kind of spirits, maybe it was good thing that Cat wasn't there. But with my hand being stolen by Grandmother, she swept me away from Aunt Celesta and I met our relations. Grandmother showed me off. I made sure to be seen not heard. But they told stories. They told stories and I couldn't remember how to say, "Girl, be quiet girl," and that's when I found myself in trouble with you, Mother, because I was listening to foolishness, and that's when you planted me in front of those photographs.

I saw cotton aprons. Scarfs wrapped around wig-headed women. Canning jars lining basement walls. Plows and cows. Dancing couples looking like melodies. It all seemed like my family existed in clean small towns where no one raised their hand because all questions were answered.

So later that night, Grandmother and I were telling bedtime stories, holding hands, and I pulled out the photographs so she could talk with Aunt Celesta too. Grandmother said that Aunt Celesta had not had a happy life, and that now that she was gone we should let her alone. But



then Grandmother changed her mind, and said, "Your Aunt Celesta was the strongest woman in Marysville. She could tackle a horse. She was a strong woman and look at those hands. Those hands quilted as a way of saying something."

And so I left Grandmother's hand for a moment and ran my fingers over the shiny photos, trying to remember Aunt Celesta's reptile skin. But all I could remember was seeing those hands across her sunken chest, looking like a young woman, skinny, pale, waiting to bloom, crushed. And then, I got real cold, and Grandmother wrapped me in Aunt Celesta's quilt, saying, "Snuggle down under this quilt. She ain't dead, is she? Her story is living on in these squares of color. And when are you going to start stitching your own stories? You're almost a woman now, and I can see that better than you or your Mother. I should be around more like a grandmother ought to be, telling stories about rounding out and finding being a woman more difficult than pictures tell you. Your Aunt Celesta would have wanted me to tell you."

And so Grandmother started telling me a story. She said that Aunt Celesta had one child, that she married a man, mean and driven to control her, and that the sisters warned Aunt Celesta, but Aunt Celesta was in love with being in love with a man.

But from here Grandmother continued the story but she whispered saying, "Uncle John wanted no children. And what he wanted he got. So Aunt Celesta never did enjoy a minute of good sex her entire life. When Uncle John wanted sex, he wouldn't do Aunt Celesta like a butter churn, like your Grandfather was good enough to consider from time to time—Uncle John was always in and out of Celesta like a jack rabbit."

I gulped when Grandmother said that but kept swallowing the story because Grandmother kept talking. She said that one time, Aunt Celesta knew her insides were ripe like a peach, and out-smarted the old fool. He hopped on her like he always did, but Celesta, knowing how he worked by this time, when he was ready to prevent a child from forming, she wrapped her legs around him—tight—and as Grandmother said it, "I told you she was strong, and even though she got a good beating, she had her child anyway."

Well, Grandmother finished that story and was meaning to move on, but I lying there flat on my stomach, listening, warming up under Aunt Celesta's gift, I felt like I was being bombarded, like recess in grade school.

Over and over I saw Aunt Celesta wrapped around Uncle John like an octopus. Wrapped around him like spaghetti around a fork, remembering that forks hurt when they jab at you, and then I felt like I had ants in my pants. Ants biting at me, stinging me right where Uncle John would have jabbed Aunt Celesta. I felt I was sitting on an ant hill, I couldn't be still, those secrets just started crawling in and out of me, and I told Grandmother that I wanted my legs closed forever.

I told Grandmother the secret. I told her about being wrapped around by his two legs, about being split through the crotch like a tree splintered by lightning. I told her that you had brought me the cat that he had bought after finding me, raw and bleeding before it was time for me to be a woman. I told her that you made me be a quiet girl because I might tell stories. I told her that he still visits me and that you need glasses—that you must be going blind. But Grandmother interrupted me. She told me another story about Grandfather and Father being like twin brothers. Her voice wobbled as if it needed a cane, and she said, “Your grandfather did the same to your mother as your father did to you. When Grandfather died, I started seeing the same spirits that haunt you and your mother, and now I have had to tell my secret.”

Well, all we could do after all the stories were told was to burn the pictures of Grandfather, Father and Uncle John as if we were making an offering, or cremating something of ourselves. We felt sorry for you, Mother, and we cried, wishing you could have joined our ceremony.

Grandmother and I, we have decided our future should be together, and she said she was sure glad I wasn't a quiet girl anymore. She said I was a young woman, and not a girl, and that he couldn't take that away from me, that me telling stories as I did, that was like starting my period all over again. That I was pure.

So Grandmother and I are going to be roommates, and now I don't need Cat. I have the photographs, Grandmother's stories and Aunt Celesta's quilt to keep me warm. But I want you to have Cat because I won't be around to stare at you, or for you to stare at me, but you can stare at Cat and Cat will see spirits in drapes, and you can say, “Cat, be a quiet cat,” and then maybe you will start to see spirits and tell stories too.

A. J. Rathbun

### **Moorings**

A suitcase rests in the front hall closet  
pulling dust onto the dust it wears  
after years and years of unuse it  
becomes a mound of fine gray ash.

A picture in a metal frame looks down off  
an empty mantle. The man laughs,  
the woman ruffles his hair,  
a boy and girl look up at them in wordless admiration.

A glass waits half-full among  
empty glasses on a coffee table,  
melting ice causes the deep red remains of a Bloody Mary  
to slowly dissolve.

An old Siamese sleeps blindly in  
the far corner of the kitchen.  
She lies undreaming on a torn blanket,  
covered by fading flowers.

A. J. Rathbun

### **Folklore**

Old gray hairs sit  
on an eroded park bench, wearing  
brown derbies, and exchanging  
scars. Two squirrels in January search  
frantically for an acorn  
that was hidden  
one September. A pebble rolls,  
rattles against the aluminum door  
of a mobile home. The people inside watch TV  
never guessing about the mountain  
resting,  
outside their door.

A mother and daughter  
sit at a glass topped coffee  
table. They strain their necks,  
looking into the yellow pages  
of a faded scrapbook. A deer colored  
like the outline of a fallen tree  
skirts the dusty smell  
of a city, long since  
deserted. In an empty backyard  
a young boy pulls on the handle  
of an iron pump, and then  
sticks out his tongue. He doesn't  
give a second thought, as he  
swallows an ocean.

Michael Hesser

### **On Epilepsy (a Sestina)**

I'm trying to pull myself out of me—  
my hands are in fists and my heaving chest  
contorts and then thrusts. It's struggling to crack  
open from the strain of the battery  
of medication, the pills and capsules,  
that, like scarecrow straw, I've stuffed my body.

They're snakecharmed by this, this twisting body.  
Just a crowd aghast at singular me.  
I'm bent among lives rounded as capsules  
and quiet as clothes folded neatly in chests.  
Only grim sideshows like self-battery  
intrigue them enough for schedules to crack.

If I could wriggle down into the cracks  
of the earth and leave this lopsided body  
that jolts and then bolts like a battery  
overcharged, I would. Were it up to me  
I'd bury myself like a treasure chest  
and lay in waiting like a time capsule,

'til that seizing seed, that violent capsule,  
softens and pushes up through the harsh cracks:  
tendrils and buds sent sprouting from my chest  
to musically bloom: a radiant body  
of orchestral flowers, fragrant and balmy,  
protected by a thorny battery's

sharp percussion. But I'm a battery,  
dead, and seem distant as a space capsule  
orbiting this crowd that scrutinizes me,  
appalled, as if I were someone who's cracked.  
Their stares, white as chalk, outline my body,  
their concern bound behind arms folded on chests.

What do they care if there's life in this chest?  
I'm just a display of assault, battery,  
and spasms: nature's quirk, a battling body  
and mind, both locked inside the same capsule  
yet disagreeing. I think if I cracked  
my head like an egg I'd pour out of me.

T. A. Tyler

**hotel of dreams**

Fallen lines of broken rock  
In the hotel of dreams  
Snow white  
The light bright  
And blinding to our needs  
Carnal hunger  
Speaks through the rise  
And fall of jeans  
And the highway looks so  
Lonely  
In this dark romantic scheme  
Lace and curtains  
Drawn to filter  
Out the paranoia fit  
And the mountain  
Climbing higher  
Hard to keep the fire lit  
Heart is echoed  
Pulsing pounding  
In everything we do  
And so lonely in this  
Icebox  
Lights are down to but a few  
Trembling shaking  
Sheeting sweat slides  
Down your face to hide  
All the feelings you once  
Spoke of  
And the promises you lied  
Just a heater  
That we need here  
So cold inside and on the out  
And so alone here  
In this icebox  
As the demons scream and shout.

Tassinda Thomas

### **My Hands Are Tied**

Caught up and twisting  
in this stony embrace of night and stars,  
We beg to be told  
the legends that wear old suits,  
the myths of real lives.  
But my hands are tied,  
caught up and twisted behind my back.  
Our hands are tied.

We are the past relived  
in this present flesh.  
Recording the days that peel away  
like old paint on my walls.  
I would reach out and  
catch those flakes—  
but my hands are tied,  
caught up and twisted.  
These hands are tied.

We sit at the feet of the old gods,  
waiting on peals of wisdom.  
Words that will tell  
of the heart's rusting climate,  
of why the summer divorces the fall,  
of how we are and what we are  
and what we are to be.  
I would write these words again  
but my hands are tied,  
caught up, twisting behind my back.  
Those hands are tied.

The wound of poetry bleeds  
into those who say: There is no stopping it.  
The blood has thickened in my veins  
tiredly it says:  
I have no energy for desperate acts.  
I can only dream of dancing with darkness  
in your blue rooms, aching to be.  
I can only pretend I exist.  
But these hands cannot record it.  
No, these hands are tied  
caught up and twisting.  
My hands are tied.

Roblin Meeks

### **Oral Hygiene**

I use it faithfully every day,  
at least once in the morning and once at night,  
and don't forget before bed and after meals.  
That is, if you want to keep the plaque from growing  
gangrenous across your white hard enamel.  
(Three out of four dentists surveyed agree.)

It's easy.  
I spread the paste along the stern wiry bristles,  
bent from countless brushings  
like my mother's languid broomcord duster.  
Then I buff in careful circles along each molar  
to scour and sterilize my  
reflected ivory smile

that, so white and friendly then,  
happened to catch another's attention once.  
I could tell she knew the art of oral hygiene—  
quite well—  
by the way she grinned as wide as Mercator's Antarctica,  
her teeth rowed magazine-model perfect.

In the morning I left her drooling soundly.  
Beat her to her own basin  
to scrub the stinking tarnish from my teeth, and  
found my own brush hanging behind her mirror  
still slightly damp from the night before.



But the bristles had aged primal and unkind,  
each stroke grinding bicuspid  
to concrete  
and incisors  
to scimitars,  
leaving me spitting foam  
and blood  
and  
fractured words  
past the soap  
ducks and clamshells  
staring like spectators  
from their Walmart wicker baskets.

Trying to cleanse the taste from my mouth  
(once in the morning, once at night,  
and don't forget before bed and after meals),  
I smile into my mirror and pull  
the plastic from my new-and-improved  
guaranteed-to-get-at-those-hard-to-reach-places  
brush.  
(It's preferred 3 to 1.)

E. J. Schwartz

### **Decadence**

Buildings carve dirty shadows  
into sidewalks and trash sticks  
to the black pavement. I notice him slumped  
close to the street  
against brick patterned walls, his clothes  
brown and textures of plaid.  
Wrinkles cross his face  
under layers of heavy dirt.

She calls him "Denver wildlife,"  
and I stare at her. Her  
features darken as we drive  
from under lights.  
Shadows etch her face into  
his. Her skin softens, beautiful  
dirt filling empty spaces.  
With another light, he is gone.  
I turn away.

We drive through the city darkness  
down streets, an open chasm  
where lonely people fall.

Wendy Snider

### What Lochart Does

Lochart stood in the shower, turned off the water, and wiped the steam from the window with the side of his hand. Pressed against the outside window pane was a dead starling, held up in the web of vines that climbed the side of the house. It had been there for weeks, and Lochart examined it every time he took a shower. The nightly frost, he imagined, kept it well-preserved. The eyes, however, were missing. Ants, Lochart thought to himself.

He stepped out of the shower, splashing water onto the floor and toilet. Without drying off, he reached for his khaki trousers with the underwear still in them and pulled them on, missing one leg in the underwear. He turned his Charles Manson tee-shirt right side out and slipped it over his head. The tag stuck to the back of his neck and droplets of water dripped onto his shoulders and shorts. He grabbed his vodka tonic and a pack of Pall Malls off of the sink, sat down on the closed toilet lid, and lit a cigarette. He could hear his wife shuffling papers in the next room. She was probably doing more office work.

"Ellen," he yelled, but there was no answer. He leaned over and opened the bathroom door a crack. "Ellen, it's still here—I wish you would come and look at it. Ellen. . . ."

He knew she heard him. He could hear her give a disgusted sigh as she headed toward the bathroom.

She slowly opened the door wider and stuck her head in. "What is it this. . . ." She stopped short. "Oh, Lochart, I can't believe you're wearing that again. I put clean clothes in your drawer, why don't you wear them? That shirt is disgusting."

"I like it," Lochart replied. He set his lit cigarette on the side of the sink and pulled the bottom of his shirt out so he could inspect it more closely. His lower lip stuck out like a pouting child as he strained to see the bottom of the shirt. "It's clean," he contested.

"It has orange juice or something right here." Ellen pointed to a small yellow stain on the lower left-hand side under Manson's chin.

"Ah, yes," Lochart realized. "That's from those screwdrivers you made last Wednesday—or was it Tuesday. . . ."

"That proves it, Lochart. Today is Saturday. You have worn that shirt for at least three days in a row. I'm not buying you any more clothes."

"I bought it," Lochart was quick to argue. "You just ordered it for me."

Lochart had found the shirt in the back of some music magazine. It had a close-up of Charles Manson's face on the front and a diagram of Sharon Tate's autopsy on the back. He had insisted that his wife order it for him, and, as usual, she did.

"That shirt," Ellen said, "is not only dirty, but it's offensive as well. What will my friend think if she sees my husband wearing something so outrageous?"

Lochart abandoned the current argument and pressed his palm to his forehead. "Oh, God, when is Josie coming?"

Ellen folded her arms and smiled. "Her name is Joann, and she will be here today around four. It's two-thirty now, why don't you make yourself decent. Comb your hair for a change."

"Never," said Lochart as he stood up and looked at himself in the mirror. His wet hair stood on end except for a few longer strands which stuck to the tops of his ears. He smirked at his reflection. His eyes were red and puffy, and the lines around his mouth ran deep. He had noticed lately that he was beginning to look much older than thirty-five. He took a drink, tipping his head back so as to get the last drop. He looked at Ellen, raised his eyebrows, and held his glass out toward her. "Another," he said sucking on his ice cube, "mole ithe."

Ellen took the glass from him. "More ice?"

Lochart nodded. Ellen rolled her eyes and headed for the bar in the den.

Lochart spit his ice into the sink and tapped his ashes onto it. He lifted the toilet lid and flicked the butt in. He climbed back into the bathtub and sat on the side, staring at the bird. Ellen returned with his drink. She leaned in and peered over the top of her glasses to see what he was looking at.

"Lochart, didn't I tell you to get rid of that thing a few weeks ago? You don't even have to go outside. Just open the window and push it through the vines. I'm tired of looking at it every morning."

"Well, I happen to like it," Lochart sounded snotty. "Maybe your little nature friend will like it too."

"She is not my little nature friend. She's just a little outdoorsy, that's all, and I don't think she will like the bird or your tee-shirt."

Lochart took a sip of his drink, and, without turning around, handed it back to Ellen. "More vodka."

"Okay, Lochart, but after this I have to go to the bank. You got your check from your parents today. They made it out to both of us this time."

Lochart swung his legs around the outside of the tub. His eyes lit up. "How much?"

"Two thousand this month," Ellen said as she sniffed Lochart's drink.

"Those bastards, I told them three." He stared at the floor. Ellen was already down the hallway. Lochart stood up quickly and followed Ellen to the bar to watch her mix his drink. "Ellen, are you and Junie going out this weekend, and if you do will she expect me to come along?"

"Her name is Joann, and I've already told her about you," Ellen handed him his drink.

"Oh, great." Lochart turned away from Ellen. "I suppose she thinks I'm some kind of nut. You know I won't go out, simply because people are either too predictable and boring or they're unpredictable idiots. . . ."

"I know, Lochart. You don't have to explain yourself to me. I've heard your speech a thousand times, and I don't care to hear it again. So what if Joann thinks you're crazy, staying in the house for six years is far from normal." She picked the check up off the bar and was out the door before Lochart could respond.

He sat down at the bar and found the TV guide. He slid it closer and mumbled aloud to himself, "Ah, the Andy Griffith Show—three o'clock." He looked at the clock above the television. "Fifteen minutes." He turned on the TV and watched the last part of a Sinbad movie. He flipped the channel to watch Andy Griffith, but fell asleep in his chair before it ended.

\* \* \*

Lochart woke to the sound of voices in the kitchen. He looked at the clock. It was ten minutes to five. He quietly got up and tiptoed down the hallway. He could hear Ellen laughing in the kitchen. He had not heard her laughter in a long time, but recognized it as hers. He peered around the doorway toward the living room where he spotted a backpack, a sleeping bag, and what looked like a long wooden stick with feathers on the end. "Worse than I imagined," he said to himself.

He retreated to the den to fix himself a drink. He pulled out a clean glass and grabbed the ice bucket; it was empty. He went back to his chair to find his old glass, watching the television as he walked. He stumbled on his glass and watched as it skidded across the hard wood, spilling melted ice everywhere.

"Lochart, what are you doing in there?" Ellen called from the kitchen.

He heard more laughter and knew he could not escape. "Nothing." He reluctantly headed to the kitchen with the clean glass still in his hand.

"I need a drink, Ellen. My other one spilled." He sat the glass on the counter and nodded his head in acknowledgment of the guest.

Ellen picked up the glass, put ice in it, and, grabbing a rag, headed back to the den.

Joann leaned against the sink, gnawing on a piece of celery. She had long, sun-bleached hair pulled back into a braid. Her face was tanned and weathered, but Lochart could not determine her age even though he knew she had gone to school with Ellen. She was wearing hiking boots with knee socks and shorts. She had on a headband and a vest with lots of pockets. Lochart tried to imagine what she might keep in them.

"Hi, I'm Joann," she said, extending a hand.

But Lochart didn't see her. He was patting his own pockets, searching for his cigarettes. "Joann who?" he asked.

She looked puzzled. "You mean my last name? It's Grey, Joann Grey."

Lochart found his cigarettes but no lighter. "Interesting. My name is Lochart Schmidtberger," he said as he rechecked his pockets. "Schmidtberger's a hearty German name, don't you think?"

"I wouldn't be so proud of my ancestry if I were you." She was staring toward the center of Lochart's chest at the swastika on Manson's forehead.

Lochart ignored her and began looking through the drawers for matches.

"Hey, what are you looking for?" Joann asked.

"A light," said Lochart, his cigarette dangling from his lips. "Do you have one?"

"Are you kidding?" She laughed. "I don't smoke; it's a filthy habit if you ask me."

"I should've known," said Lochart slamming a drawer shut. He went to the den to find Ellen and his lighter.

Ellen looked surprised. "Did you introduce yourself to Joann?"

"Yeah. Have you seen my lighter?" His eyes scanned the room.

"Lochart, why can't you be polite and talk to Joann for a few minutes? She's a fascinating lady." Ellen was looking for the spill.

"Fascinating," Lochart repeated. He walked over to the spill and tapped his toe next to the wet spot on the floor as if showing a dog where a crumb had fallen. Ellen mopped it up.

"Your drink's on the bar. Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes, so don't fall asleep." She pushed her hair off of her face with the back of her hand and blew a puff of air from her cheeks. "See you at the table," she said leaving the room.

Lochart spotted his lighter in the seat of the chair. He picked it up and tested it, then lit his cigarette. "She's a fascinating lady," he mumbled to himself mockingly. He sat down and flipped through the channels and finally found a made-for-TV movie that looked kind of interesting. It looked like some type of suspense story, but just as he was beginning to understand the plot, Ellen called him to dinner. He went to

the bar and half-filled his glass with vodka and took a drink. She called him again.

He poked his head into the dining room doorway. "I would like to eat in the den tonight. There's this great movie. . . ."

Ellen glared at him. "Lochart, I've set your place. Get in here and have a seat."

Lochart plopped himself into his seat and began eating. He stared at the center of the table. Joann and Ellen watched him eat. They looked at each other and snickered.

"What?" Lochart said with his mouth full. "What is wrong with you people?" His forehead crinkled in anger and his eyebrows met. "Joann, I'll have you know, my wife is not prone to giggling. What have you two been talking about?"

Joann straightened her face and swallowed her food. "We were just reminiscing—you know, about our college days and stuff." They shrugged their shoulders at each other and smiled as if Lochart were not even there.

"Must be fascinating," Lochart threw a sarcastic glance at Ellen, but she was watching Joann.

"Lochart, would you believe Joann lived in a tee-pee for five years after college?" Ellen tried to draw him in.

"Yes, I would," Lochart said coldly. He picked up his glass and stared into it.

Joann tried to turn the conversation his way. "Ellen says you don't get out much."

Lochart set his drink down. "No, I don't get out much," the tension in his voice grew, "and I'll tell you why; it's because people . . . , " he trailed off as he noticed Ellen's scowl.

Joann persisted. "Don't you ever get bored? I mean, how can you stay in the house every single day?"

Lochart was surprisingly calm. "I have everything I need, and what I don't have, Ellen can get for me. As far as being bored, only boring people are bored. Besides, I can always watch television."

"I don't own a television," Joann said proudly. She continued eating and didn't seem too receptive to anything else Lochart might have to say.

Lochart shoved his plate forward, backed away from the table, and looked at Ellen. She nodded to him and waved her hand. He went back to the den and poured another drink.

The rest of the evening he watched TV. After a while, he turned down the volume and listened to his wife and Joann chattering in the other room. They talked for hours. Occasionally, he heard his name, but couldn't hear what they were saying. He tipped his chair back and strained to hear something. At one point he thought he heard one of the women crying but couldn't tell if it were Ellen or Joann. Maybe it was laughter. He didn't care to know.

He heard their voices occasionally switch to whispers, as if they were exchanging secrets. He was surprised his wife had suddenly become so personable. She was normally a very private person. He imagined they were exchanging stories about old boyfriends or work. Joann was probably talking about the great outdoors or hiking or something.

He was angry with Ellen for acting like a teen-ager, yet his curiosity grew and he wanted to take part in the conversation, or at least know what they were talking about. He had already decided he didn't like Joann, but he thought that maybe since she had been drinking wine all night, she might be kind of entertaining. If nothing else, he could make fun of her. He went to join them.

When he appeared in the living room, Ellen looked surprised. Joann's smile vanished immediately, and she looked at Lochart as though she expected an insult.

"Joann," Lochart had an announcement. Joann forced a smile. "Joann, I just wanted to tell you about this dead bird in the window."

Joann looked horrified. He could tell she was not impressed.

Ellen broke in, "Oh, Lochart found this bird, and he won't take it out of the bathroom window. He thinks it's 'neat.' I'll take it out tomorrow."

"No." Lochart was defensive. "It stays."

"How did it die?" Joann asked, trying to show a sudden interest.

Lochart looked frustrated. "How the hell do I know how it died? Some bird disease, old age . . . I don't know. It doesn't matter how it died. It's just there." He gave up. "Forget it." He stomped back to the den. Eventually their voices grew louder, he heard names he didn't recognize. Laughter punctuated this 'name dropping' conversation, but he didn't hear his own name mentioned again.

At midnight Lochart was in a stupor. He had turned down the television and was listening to Patsy Cline over and over. He had reset the needle on the turntable so that he wouldn't have to get out of his chair.

Ellen came in to turn down the music and to tell him that she was exhausted and was going to bed. "Joann's asleep in the living room, so don't disturb her."

Lochart's eyes were half-closed yet transfixed on the television. "Could you get me a sandwich?" he asked the TV. Ellen left and returned with a sandwich and some celery sticks.

Lochart remained motionless as she set them on the table next to his chair. He carefully picked up the plate without taking his eyes from the television. He knew Ellen was watching him. He took the celery sticks off one by one, and methodically lined them up on the arm of the chair.

"I thought you like celery?" Ellen whispered over his shoulder.

"Not today." Lochart began eating his sandwich. Ellen scooped the celery sticks up and put them in the bar refrigerator.

"Goodnight, Lochart." She checked the vodka bottle on her way past the bar and noticed it was empty. She found a new one in the bar and



set it out next to the ice bucket. She watched Lochart on her way out and smiled at him sympathetically, even though his back was to her.

Twenty minutes after Ellen had left the room, Lochart turned the music up a half notch. He peered down the hallway and checked for light under the bedroom door. There was none. Ellen was asleep. He made his way to the living room and saw Joann in her orange sleeping bag. She was sleeping on her back, and her mouth hung open.

Lochart tried to think of clever ways to wake her. He thought of dropping a piece of ice into her mouth, but thought he should save his ice. He thought about standing over her and staring at her until she woke, but decided he liked her better when she was asleep. He moved closer anyway and stood staring at her. She twitched and turned. Lochart tried to keep from laughing as he stood over her rocking slightly. His ice clinked in the glass, and he decided to back away quietly before he woke her. Suddenly her hand shot out from under her pillow, metal flashed in the darkness of the living room. Lochart tried to jump back, but his reflexes were slow. He had never seen anyone on television move that fast. Joann had stabbed the cuff of his trousers with a hunting knife. He was unable to move and nearly fell backward.

"What the hell are you trying to do!?" he asked half laughing, half stunned.

Joann was sitting straight up now and pulled the knife out of the floor with both hands. "I was about to ask you the same thing." She put the knife back under her pillow. "Sorry about your floor," she said as she ran her hand across the hole in the wood.

"Why in God's name do you have a knife under your pillow?" Lochart was laughing now. "That was very impressive, you know."

"Ever since I've lived outdoors I've had this knife close to me when I sleep." She adjusted her pillow and turned away from Lochart. "Good-night, Lochart."

Lochart stood by her for a moment and watched her settle into sleep. "Go to bed," she demanded from under the sleeping bag. "Leave me alone."

He went back to the den and watched a series of half-hour commercials, an old horror movie, and then the evangelists. At five-thirty he heard someone in the kitchen and went in to see what was going on. Joann was getting a glass of water. "Good morning, Lochart. You're up early." She spoke as if she were glad to see him.

"I'm on my way to bed," he said squinting at the sun coming through the window. He was swaying, and his pocket snagged on a drawer handle, but he caught himself on the counter.

Joann smiled. "Lochart, this bird you were telling me about last night, may I see it?"

"Ellen just told you to humor me." He was slurring. "It's on the north side of the house, outside the bathroom window. Take a look for

yourself if you're truly interested." Lochart didn't wait for a response. He made a zig-zag path to the bedroom, careening off of the hallway walls. He met Ellen in the bedroom doorway. She was on her way to the shower. "Good morning, Lochart," she said as she stepped out of his way. "Sweet dreams."

Every morning when Ellen took her shower, Lochart would fall asleep to the sound of running water. This particular morning, however, he heard her pull the shower curtain aside and open the window. He knew she would get rid of the bird before Joann took her shower. He was too tired to fight it. He could hardly move. He tried to keep his eyes open as long as possible and stared at the bedside table where Ellen had left him a bottle of Tums, a glass of water, and two aspirin.

He thought about the bird, about how the days would grow warmer and how the ants would pick it clean, and about the bleached, delicate frame of a bird that would be left suspended in the vines like a miniature mobile. Now Ellen had ruined it, but he was too tired to be disappointed.

As he was fighting sleep, he thought he heard whispers in the bathroom. He then heard Ellen close the window and turn on the water. He was soon in a deep sleep.

\* \* \*

Lochart woke at two o'clock to what he thought was the front door shutting. He had slept hard, his body was stiff and aching. He lay in bed for a while and tried to go back to sleep. The house was quiet, and he remembered that Joann was leaving today. He propped himself up and took his aspirin from the table. The afternoon sun flooded the room. It was hot, and Lochart was sweating. He kicked the covers off and decided to get up. He pulled his cigarettes out of his pocket, and, with one eye closed, peeked into the package. He had crushed them again. There was one undamaged one left. He pulled it out and lit it. He scratched the stubble on his chin and decided he would shave today; Ellen would be proud of him.

On his way to the shower, Lochart checked the living room. Joann's equipment was gone, and he didn't see any sign of her or Ellen. Ellen must have gone with Joann to the bus station to see her leave. He would be clean and shaven by the time Ellen came home. Maybe he would even wear clean clothes today. He felt good knowing that Joann was gone and that they probably would not have any more company for months.

Lochart went in the bathroom and turned on the shower. He undressed and stepped in. The bird was still there, untouched, except for the ants that were now swarming. He knew it would be a good day.

He took an extra long shower. He let the room fill up with steam. When he was finished he found his robe and went to look for clean clothes. He got dressed and went to watch television. It was three, and he was getting hungry. Where was Ellen? He decided to find something to eat, something easy like a frozen dinner or soup.

He went to the kitchen and looked through the pantry; there was nothing but powdered milk, spices, and a carton of cigarettes. He went to the refrigerator and was getting ready to open it when he noticed an envelope stuck to the freezer door. His name was on it. He held it up to the light and could tell there was money in it. He opened it quickly and counted ten twenty dollar bills. There was a note and some kind of list from Ellen in the bottom of the envelope. He folded the money and shoved it into his back pocket. He leaned against the counter and began reading the note.

It was addressed simply, "To Lochart." She said she was going to live with Joann and that she would send for her things. She said that if any of her clients called, to tell them she would be in touch with them soon. Lochart reached over to the wall and unplugged the phone. He found his place and continued reading. There was a grocery list and an apology for leaving the refrigerator empty and forcing him to go to the store. The apology was the only sentiment in the letter. It was signed, "Ellen." Lochart stuffed the note in his shirt pocket with a new pack of cigarettes from the pantry.

He paced around the house and unplugged the other phones. He went to the front door, opened it, stepped onto the porch, and sat down on the front steps. He pulled the note and his cigarettes from his pocket. He opened the cigarettes and threw the wrapper on the sidewalk. He watched as a slight breeze carried it into the yard. Lighting a cigarette, he stood up. "I'm going to the store," he said aloud.

He shut the front door behind him and walked around to the side of the house where he stopped at the bathroom window. A few vines had been broken, he found the bird easily. There were two trails of ants leading into and out of the carcass. He stood and watched them for a while, then flicked his cigarette onto the ground and filled his chest with air. He trudged through the yard watching the grass as he walked. He kicked the pebbles in the empty driveway and headed down the alley toward the grocery store; he knew what he would buy, he had his list.

Edward Skoog

### Chesapeake

The doctor's boy turns out his pockets.  
Pine needles and coins drop to the tartan wool blanket.  
In the long attic bedroom the ceiling's slant brings  
the windows closer. The boy sprawls  
on a small braided rug. A pine brushes the window screen.  
He counts the days left of vacation on cones  
of one branch.

At night,  
branches beat the house. The widower doctor  
smokes on the porch and listens to a game. He knows it is good  
for digestion. Sea air settles in the ferns,  
salts his breath. He plucks chicken skin  
from between his teeth. His ears ignore particulars:  
the name of the pitcher, the score, trees  
knocking against the side of the house, the evening's dishes  
clattering in the sink. All sounds become a distant  
hum. A chainsaw deep in the woods.

This is later:  
at the end of the dock, the boy has a chicken leg  
tied to a string. Three crabs snap in the rusted bucket.  
As he lowers bone into dark water, he thinks  
he might like to swim tonight.  
But he has been told about the stings,  
about jellyfish that make lightning in water.

In the world below the dock,  
the chicken begins to walk again.

Edward Skoog

### **Whaleyard**

A whale hears something on land.  
It is his mother calling from a back door.  
He grows legs, pulls on shoes, and goes.

He is here now, a sparrow's nest grown  
into his baleen grill. Fins buried under dirt and leaves.  
Ribcage yawning at a tree branch. Windshield beat in.

Standing on a sandbar we hear whales moan  
and rust cry at gulls feeding on a trash heap.  
Men in vests sell whale bones, eyeballs, blubber

a half hour before sunrise. Mothers still pick up  
children from school and birthday parties  
on the broad backs of new whales. Fathers ride

in hollow bellies to dark hills  
and look down at headlights shining  
at each other. Dead beasts in aisles,

we walk between them and see a heron gliding,  
neck retracted, over the field of whales and popped hoods,  
a twisting snake in his claws. The school bus

holds racks of whale legs. Its doors are lost.  
The stink of dead cars lifts  
over the rusting field like gasoline

or motor oil,  
spreading in a circle  
and feeding the pink roots of weeds.

Edward Skoog

**Chrome and Wicker**

A man wears shoes in Mobile.  
    They flip down the seaside road.  
        Gravel scatters like artillery at their approach.

Toenails saw through brown leather.  
    His son's head sweats  
        under the home's long tube lights.

The man buys shoelaces, sits in a booth, becomes old.  
    Coffee's a nickel here.  
        Egg sandwiches streak

the slick sleeves of his jacket.  
    He turns over his spoon. The bowl shines  
        by the light tied to the ceiling above his hat.

The sun is above the rental houses.  
    Its eggyolk light combines with his son's fluorescence  
        in the glare off a parked car's chrome.

The man's hair is escaping.  
    By the church, he passes a lady  
        selling roses for a quarter.

She sits in wicker and pits an apricot  
    with her one long fingernail.  
        Her eyes watch his shoes like a fisherman.

Her screams fall on his head like kisses.

Edward Skoog

**Motion**

How the housewife breathes silent heat  
after opening the white oven door.

The silence between two songs on an album,  
during which one song dies  
and another unfurls.

That our bodies began to sag as babies  
when we pulled our heads above our feet  
on the corner of a coffee table.

How air passes through an empty house  
while a lawyer changes names on a deed.

How snow sinks below the real ground  
in apology, in shame.

The questions I ask your eyes  
before I do anything, give  
anything away.

How long it takes a weld to cool,  
before you can run your finger over the bruise.

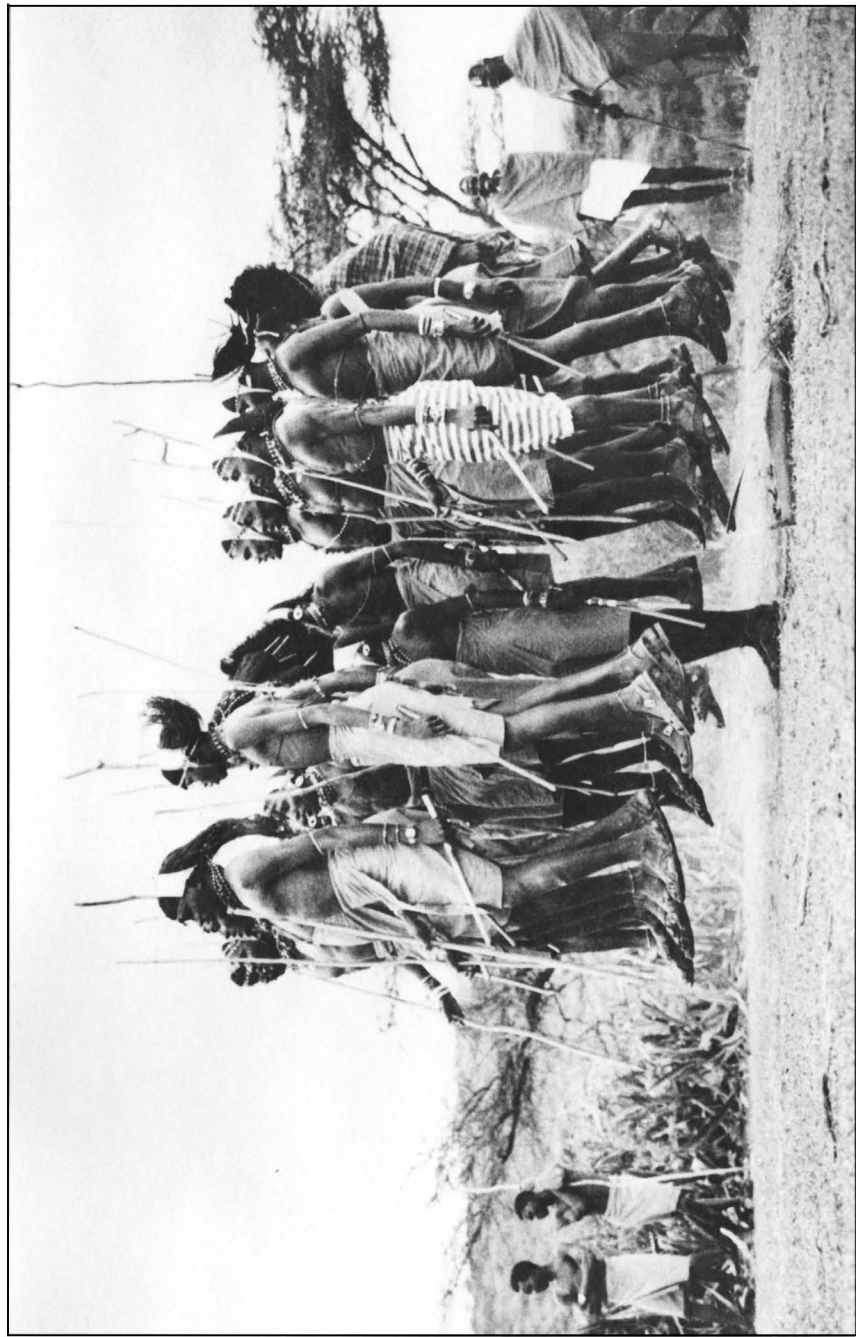
The clarity of fruit, how  
it could be nothing but fruit,  
the juice is so clear on the plate.

The acceleration of trucks in the street beside us  
as we try to walk along a stone fence.

Above winter houses the sun burns.







Maasai Singing, Kenya 1988.  
By Taylor Mali





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