

The English Department presents
the 2018 Annual

Seven Gill Shark Review Anthology

A collection of original composition by students, staff, faculty, and community members at College of the Redwoods. We are pleased to present these original compositions for your enjoyment.

All of this would have been impossible without the hard work and dedication of the following people:

Spring 2018 Student Editors

Donel Arrington
Ana Contessa Carmona Gambina
Rachael Thacker
Saje Wolf

Faculty Advisor:

David Holper, English Faculty

Graphic Artist:

Erin Jones

Spring 2018

Donel Arrington	Remember to Breathe (First Place Poetry Awardee)
Carissa Clark	Nuance
James Floss	Banananana
Rain Flotho	Exist / Exit
Ana Contessa Carmona Gambina	Beggar's Bounty
Mary Lipiec	Inspiration Porn (Second Place Poetry Awardee)
Nova Love	Illusion
Vinnie Peloso	Sanctuary
Branson Schuetzle	A Deep Philosophical Conversation
Joe Shermis	Questioning the Climb
Caitlyn Still	Do Something (Second Place Fiction Awardee)
Rachael Thacker	The Shaping of Trees (First Place Fiction Awardee)
	A Nation of Fear
Kendra Wolcott	A Letter to the Carnivore (Hobson Award Winner)
	An Ode to Quiet Women
Saje Wolf	Rapunzel

Poetry prize is generously sponsored by Northtown Books & College of the Redwoods Foundation

Prose prize is generously sponsored by Booklegger Books & College of the Redwoods Foundation

Hobson Prize is a combination of an anonymous donor and the College of the Redwoods Foundation

Honorable Mentions:

Simona Carini	May Morning in Southern Ireland
Phyllis Chinn	The Immortals
Colleen Ferguson	Career Development
Jesse Gordon	A Dinner for Brandon
Peter R. Presnell	Spirit Bear
Branson Schuetzle	How to Alienate Every One You've Ever Loved (I & II)
Saje Wolf	Scarred

Donel Arrington

REMEMBER TO BREATHE

This coercion has become a perversion
Our diversions only set us up to take the fall
Slowly building this wall of arms
And it's gonna come crashing down

As bullets pierce our divine flesh
We lose our holy breath
It's so hard to catch
When your choking on
The shrapnel from these explosive hearts

We've lost sight of real life
Feels so wrong inside
I'm tired of tasting
All these salty tears we cry

Our brains are fried
Because we cannot ease our minds
When we're fighting for our lives
And time never stands still

NEWSFLASH!

The draft is reinstated
Here's an M-16 young man
It's time to take it
Uncle Sam has got a plan
And it's time to learn how to kill
 Let's liberate the world
 Give the oppressed a hand
 Stab our 50 stars, and stripes
 On this foreign land!
 Rip this soil out from under
 The feet of children playing
 With duded cluster bombs!

Our burning eyes catch
A fading sunset that's
Being destroyed by
Uranium raining down
A desolate sky.

Why?
Tell me why
We tear apart so many lives
Why do we push history aside
 As we decide the fate of the globe?

Urge to explode
Nuclear war

 Is there a cure for this human disease?
 Can violence *really* be planted in our genes?

It's time for us to step back
And see the venom that we are spreading
This cycle is never ending
When it's set in stone
This hate is never ending
When it's set in stone
All we make of war
Is enemies

A culture of plastic is what
Our failures mold
The smoking gun together we hold
The key to our resilient souls
Is buried deep within our hearts

The illusion of freedom
Has captured our minds
Proudly waving red white and blue
Patriotism blinds

America incorporated
Binds our hands
Behind our backs

Twists our spine until
It snaps

Stole the gleam from our eyes
Replaced with dollar signs
The land of opportunity
Is nothing but a billion-dollar enterprise

I've been told that America

Is the land of the free?
Free enough to self-impose
Our own slavery

Humanity's at the mercy of a fast food nation
And our preoccupation is going to be our downfall

This is the last call for arms
Time to rewrite our wrongs
Time to put our revolution songs into action

Because inspiration is just a fraction of what we need
We need some fucking action
Tug at the seams and
Pull at the core of humanity!
Our mortal eyes *must* live to see peace
Our children must *not* fall victim to this disease

We're asleep at the wheel
As we barrel down the highway
Blindly instilling fear,
So much heartache—

How much blood will it take
To comprehend pain?

How much pain will it take
To make us want to change?

Carissa Clark
NUANCE

Ca-*rees*-a.
They grabbed the broken chalk,
carefully spelled it out,
on the small blackboard.
Right to left,
sound to sound,
the lines swooped and bounced.
Indecipherable,
beautiful.
An older girl corrected it,
she smeared the ending
with her small fist
to emphasize the ‘sa:’
كاريسا

A few weeks later I was told
if my name is pronounced
with a stress on the ‘Ca,’
It means ‘big problem’ in Arabic.
We laughed over our tea,
huddled inside their tent—
it was hospital green,
blackened by smoke.
We sipped slowly,
smiling into each other’s eyes.
We didn’t say much,
except *shukraan*
(thank you).

James Floss
BANANANANA

Finally, I have an enemy!
No longer fraught for naught;
A nemesis! A right to fight!

Damn, you Clam-man!
You bivalve bloviator!
Super Slug to the rescue!

Cape, cup, spandex on!
Superslime secreted!
Slugman off!

Faster than a seasonal change...
More powerful than the breath of a breeze...
Able to traverse 100 yards in as many days!

Super powers:
Eye stalks independently pivot!
Sex changes not infrequently...

Just you wait, Clam-man!
And wait!

.
. .
. . .
. . . .

And wait!

Rain Flotho
EXIST/EXIT

My break from faith left me stunted on the existence of heaven and hell.

I wasn't disappointed that this ruined my chance of getting into heaven.

Part of me had already come to terms that heaven did not exist.

It was exactly what anyone fearing a reality of impermanence would kill to hear.

I can live without heaven, but hell seems necessary.

How can I sleep at night knowing there isn't a hell down there that judges you not by your actions in accordance to the bible, but the sincerity of your heart?

A hell that doesn't see wealth and invites those who profited off schemes such as purgatory.

A hell that waives "thou shall not murder" in the case of those who did what was needed to survive.

A hell who punished the pious who pushed for policy that increased our paper production at the cost of lives.

A hell with room only for the money-mongering, death-fearing parasites who have made it their duty to create their own piece of false heaven for themselves by creating a hell here on earth for the rest of us.

I can live without heaven in eternal darkness, but those who exploit humanity don't deserve such ease.

Still faithless, I pray death doesn't grant them one moment of peace.

Ana Contessa Carmona Gambina
BEGGAR'S BOUNTY

Six cans of beans,
two bags of rice,
four apples from the bins.
These few foodbank finds – my groceries this week;
now the meal-planning begins.

On Monday,
the first can of beans,
half an apple,
two handfuls of rice.
Cooked up,
mixed up,
into a chipped, Pyrex bowl.
Frugal nibbles
make it last till tonight.

Tuesday and Wednesday,
pretty much the same:
the apple,
the beans,
the rice.
Thank God,
praise God
I have these few staples,
but Lord, some Jack cheese would be nice.

Thursday and Friday
I split a can of beans,
skip the apple,
but eat a whole lot of rice.
There was a time,
this kitchen,
this table
was the hub of a bubbly, young household.
Now just scuttling roaches and mice.

On Saturday
I could use a break from the beans.
So, I have two apples
and go light on the rice.
I know
I can't
blame them for not coming by;
they've grown free.
Still, I dwell on it with each miserly bite.

Come Sunday,
I'm thoroughly fed-up
with beans, the apples,
all that damn rice.
Back to
the bar,
begging barflies for spirits –
the illusion of solace, delusions,
to dissolve what's left of my life.

I am not
Your Inspiration Porn.

I do not exist
To make you appreciate
Your relative normalcy.

I am not here
For your gratitude.

I do not care
For your pity,

Nor do I
Need it.

I am not here
For you.

I am here

For me.

I am here

Nova Love
ILLUSION

Illusion
イリュージョン

There once was a wise man
Three hundred and sixty-four days a year
He carved wooden turtles

He was very old
He knew that he would die this year
On the longest day
His day of rest

On the longest day, no one saw the sage
Through the shortest night, no one saw the sage

The next day he was found
Dead in his shack
Three hundred sixty-four newly carved wooden turtles laid
Beside him
With a note
That read

私を許して、もう一年生きたい

Forgive me, I wanted to live one more year

Branson Schuetzle

A DEEP, PHILOSOPHICAL CONVERSATION

Bees are dyin'

says One

Yup

says Two

What are we to do?

says One

Yup

says Two

What?

says One

I said, says One,

What are we to do?

Oh, says Two,

What are we to do about what?

The bees

says One

Huh?

says Two

Bees are dyin'

says One

Hm

says Two

and then takes a sip of beer

Everything dies

says Two

Not like this

says One

Hm

says Two

I dunno about that

You dunno about what?

says One

I reckon

there's only so many ways

something can die
says Two

You reckon that?
says One

I reckon that
says Two

I reckon you're probably right
says one
and I'm not one to debate folks
on things
they reckon to be right on

You reckon?
says Two

Hm
says One
still a shame about the bees

Hm
says Two
Damn shame

One and Two sat for a brief moment of silence. A moment in which they each contemplated the fragility of life and the futility of humanity's attempts to both preserve and exploit the natural world for the sake of the modern comforts that both One and Two daily took for granted. It was in this moment that One and Two felt closer to the Earth and to each other than ever before.

One took a sip of beer

You catch the game last night?
says One
I did
says Two

Joe Shermis

QUESTIONING THE CLIMB

If we ask ourselves the reasons,
if we grant ourselves the time,
if we question why we seek the words
that brings us to this rhyme
then we'll find our own direction
that allows us to begin
the search for both the answer
and the moment that we're in...

If we stumble down the mountain
that we climbed when we were sure,
if we trip upon each root and rock
as all ideas occur
then the obstacles are givens
and the paths are what we'll take
when deciding on the answer
when it's all for learning's sake...

If we break into a sprint of joy
while tumbling through the air
and run while we are falling
as if without a care
then we'll experience the moment,
this instant that we give
the presence that is needed
to question how we live...

February 14th, 2018, A 19-year-old male got a ride to a high school. He was armed with an AR-15 style semi-automatic rifle he had legally purchased along with multiple small capacity magazines. He pulled the fire alarm and opened fire, injuring 33 and killing 17. He had planned to *do something*.

During the six seconds the shooting lasted, students and teachers attempted to protect themselves and others. As children huddled under their desks and barricaded the doors with their bodies, they called out to the armed personnel who stood still for four minutes. *Do something*.

911 calls came in so profusely that students were told to stop calling. A young female student sobbed telling emergency services that the people around her were going to die, and she begged them to *do something*.

We read and heard the news, shocked and horrified. We sent our thoughts and prayers but knew this was not an isolated incident. We need *do something*.

Some people blamed the Broward County Sheriff's Office for the actions of its deputies, and they were called over 20 times about the shooter and his family, yet they failed to *do something*. Others blamed the FBI for not acting on reports about the shooter's behavior on social media and not following the standard protocol. They were also supposed to *do something*.

Like with many tragedies, some individuals fed into conspiracy theories. They claimed the shooting was all fake and that the students were paid actors reciting scripted lines and

working with the alt-left to take guns from law-abiding Americans. After all, it's easier to dismiss something as fake than it is to have a conversation and actually *do something*.

Politicians danced around gun control discussion and declined to stop taking money from the National Rifle Association. The Florida House of Representatives chose to declare porn dangerous instead of debate gun control. Nine days later, the Florida Senate approved a ban on the AR-15 used in the Parkland shooting and rescinded it 15 minutes later. Students watched in horror because they knew politicians were putting political agenda over children's lives when they decided not to *do something*.

The Governor of Florida signed into law a safety act which would arm some teachers and raise the age to purchase a gun to 21. The NRA opposed the latter provision and filed a lawsuit against the state because they believe it goes against their Second Amendment right for politicians *do something*.

Survivors of the shooting tell lawmakers that gun violence does not only happen in schools. It is a public safety issue, not merely a school safety issue. Children have to march for their lives and plan walkouts in attempt to get their voices heard. Instead of encouraging students to involve themselves in a historical walk out, some school officials blocked exists and didn't allow students to really *do something*.

Instead of pointing fingers, at the NRA, President Trump, video games, guns or law enforcement organizations, we should focus our energy on preventing another mass shooting. Arming teachers, putting up metal detectors, providing more mental health services and common-sense gun control measures are a few suggestions that have been proposed. No single individual has the correct answer to solve our problems as a society. It is only through working

together and keeping the end goal in mind that we will accomplish anything. Nothing is stopping a tragedy like the Parkland shooting from happening again if we don't *do something*.

Rachael Thacker
THE SHAPING OF TREES

“Where are you from?” The dreaded question oozes out of the mouth, the well-meaning mouth. I die a little inside, a death on repeat that shatters a piece of my soul. The cruelty is not in the pain, but the inability to escape the question. My answers change. “Washington State” is the easiest answer, and sometimes I can feel the satisfaction of answering it correctly. Mostly though that mouth attached to that face, attached to that person, attached to that mind, begs me for more. “Where in Washington?” Therein lies the problem. I don’t know.

Olympia, Washington, Kialynn Court, where I was born. I rode my first bike there, I felt a sense of freedom whipping through me as though the wind was my only obstacle. Until I hit the pavement, and I knew freedom was painful. My backyard was dotted with trees, firs that stretched up to the sky, cedars so high that I would lose my breath before I could see the top of them. Those trees surrounded us, trees that kept us hidden, trees that could hide our shame. Trees that kept secrets. When the trees stopped keeping our secrets we moved. My bike stayed behind.

In Silverdale, Washington the house was bigger than the trees, but the trees were more than the house. These trees were smaller, but they were dense, evergreen firs that were thick with an underbrush of ferns and huckleberries. These firs kept more secrets than just ours. My dad says our cat is lost in these woods; he must have been scared moving to a new place. Every day I would explore them, uncovering more and more things meant to be hidden, but no cat. My brother Christopher was born here. I remember eating huckleberries from the bush when my sister Melissa ran outside to the forest shouting to us it was a boy. There was safety in the evergreens, away from the house, away from the hidings of secrets. I had no bike, so the

evergreens and ferns were my freedom. Even the trees could not hide all the secrets though, and not paying rent goes noticed. We said goodbye to the big house, and the fir trees, and the cat.

In Tacoma, Washington the trees were everywhere except our house. We walked across the street to the 7-11 to throw away the used needles and drugs we found in my bedroom before moving in. This house was smaller than the secrets could hold, so we went looking for the trees. They were near other people's houses, but we found them. I ran away, but no one noticed. When I came home that night, hours later, I was followed by my older brother Jonny bleeding heavily from his wrist. His knife fight distracted from my disappearance, and nobody cared; they rushed to the hospital instead. My brother Danny and I got scared when someone jumped out of the bushes and tried to grab him, and we ran away from the trees and back to our home. My sister Rebecca's kindergarten orientation was in a school surrounded by pines, and we walked there we were so close. We couldn't walk home though because our house that had no pines was surrounded by flashing lights and sirens. A masked gunman was in our neighborhood. I no longer felt safe, my house open, not enough trees to keep out a gunman. We moved away, looking for the safety of the trees.

In Olalla, Washington there were maples and alders dotted in among the hemlocks. This house wasn't big or small; it was just right. It was our goldilocks house. These trees were not just secrets; they were magical. In the spring the leaves would bud on the maple and alders. We would explore them, never knowing what we would find. A trailer filled with items, a magical tea party, a new friend. I would walk through them, near them, next to them. These trees were friends. When I ditched school to avoid the embarrassment of getting up on stage and being on display for the world, I sought the solace of the hemlocks. I grabbed my sleeping bag, my books, and found a quiet spot to spend the day. The hemlocks kept my secret, and nobody knew. The

school did not keep my secret though. I got pulled from school; it was “a privilege that I had abused.” I got pulled from home, pulled from my trees, and put away. I turned twelve and watched my dad cry for the first time. Not when the FBI arrested him, but when his dad died. He cried at the funeral, and I couldn’t look away. This time, when we moved, it was not the fault of the trees. Some secrets are too big to be kept, even by trees. As we drove away, the maple leaves began falling, leaving the branches bare and open to the eyes of the world.

We moved to Graham, Washington wearing some secrets out on our sleeves for all the world to see. This helped. Like a magician drawing our attention away so that he can perform his bit of magic with his left hand while we are all staring at his right. Just to make sure that these secrets could stay hidden, we put them on 25 acres of land; nobody shared it with us. The 25 acres were filled with cottonwood, fir, and alders, but we managed to fill it further, cramming our secrets into each corner. This time there was paranoia, and people began to see secrets where there weren’t any. Their right mouth accusing so that we can’t see what their left mouth is up to. We had a farm; I got to go back to school. Eighth grade was harder after being taken out of the seventh grade. My dad got my teacher fired for showing a rated R movie in class. I became an actress on and off stage. I was good at keeping all the secrets. When we could no longer fit them all in our small 25 acres, we left, the white cloud-like fluff of the cottonwood tree traveling with us on the breeze as we went.

On our way to Ashford, Washington, some of our secrets fell off the back of the moving truck. I cried when my brother Danny didn’t come with us. At the base of Mt. Rainier, we planted ourselves, the trees filling our surroundings so thick that they declared it a national park. Surely if trees can wrap themselves around shame and conceal it, this was the place it would happen. They were so thick and warm, those trees, hovering above us, around us, in us. Even the

elk and mountain lions hid in them. The red cedars and Douglas fir trees that held centuries of secrets and a millennium of the earth's history could easily bear our burden. Finally, a place that could keep all the secrets. I graduated high school, and I left. Leaving the secrets behind me.

I went to Park City, Utah, covered in a blanket of snow, but no trees. I felt instant panic. There was no green, no trees, just brown mountains and sky. The aspen trees that dotted the landscape were barren and only there for decoration. I felt seen, exposed, and vulnerable. I fell in love with a boy who had no secrets. I bathed in his truth, gulped down his authenticity, and wondered at his openness. His family, open like the sky. Their hearts vast with room like the valley they inhabited. I had never seen such honesty. It must've been the lack of trees.

Rachael Thacker
A NATION OF FEAR

I am not afraid of the black man in a dark alley.
I am afraid of the old white guy staring too long at my daughter.
My heart beats a little faster,
I want to grab her hand and run.

I am not afraid of the Muslim riding on my airplane.
It's the skinny red-headed boy joking,
"incest is the best."
People laugh hollowly, because it's not funny.

I am not scared of losing my job to these "damn immigrants."
I am not afraid of my guns being taken away.
I am not afraid of sharing a bathroom with a trans-gender.
I am afraid of monsters.

I have met them.
They aren't black.
They are white.
They smile too much.

They are allowed in your house,
in your bedroom,
in your bed, in your pants,
and no one stops them.

Because while their hands
are holding you down,
silencing your screams,
their white face smiles

And their sticky words ooze,
like a magician,
all the attention on their face,
never noticing their hands.

I am afraid of secrets,
nuclear in power,
held so tightly inside of you
the pressure becomes inevitable explosion.

I am afraid of lies,
repeated until you believe

And you no longer know truth.
Reality distorted.

I am afraid of being invisible, my words unspoken.
I am afraid of dying inside before the outside catches up.
I am afraid of not preventing the preventable.
I am afraid of becoming the monsters I fear.

But I am not afraid to listen,
to speak up,
to fight for injustice,
to resuscitate our nation.

Chest palpitations to get our blood flowing again:
I will push for my female voice to be heard.
I will push so my daughters don't have to.
I will push for a change, so they can learn
without fearing for their life.
I refuse to live in a nation of fear.

Kendra Wolcott

A LETTER TO THE CARNIVORE

There is a certain species of carnivorous plant called the Cobra Lily that feeds on the relentless optimism of its prey. Rather than snapping violently at any insect that crosses its path like some of its more brazen relatives, those who devour their prey instantly with prickled tentacles and hungry leaves, the Cobra Lily is much more cunning. A display of intricate patterns, vibrant colors, and inviting aromas – the plant kingdom equivalent of charisma – seduces its victims from the outside, while the structure of its limbs is perfectly designed to welcome visitors in and prevent them from getting out, so that when a travelling insect – a bee or a butterfly or some other pollinator – stops to explore the dazzling sweetness of its surface, it instead finds itself tumbling down the depths of a darkened tunnel. Once at the bottom, the insect hurls itself repeatedly at the inner walls of the tunnel, fooled again and again by the pockets of light peeking through like pinpoints on a black canvas. The insect does not know that this, too, is part of the trap; that the cells within the plant’s inner membrane are spaced precisely to create the illusion of escape – a fleeting glimpse of redemption. After hours of desperately flying towards this artificial light only to bounce back to the darkness below, the insect grows tired and dies, left in the void to be digested by the patient carnivore.

I have spent so much time wrapping myself in guilt for allowing myself to be deceived by you. For mistaking your superficial charm for sincerity. For being so easily enticed by your conversation and concern even as I began to notice the places where your veneer was starting to wear thin. For still lingering in the space you laid out between us even after I recognized it for what it was. Calculated. Deliberate. Designed just so. A small semblance of humanity preceding an unwelcome advance. A show of contrition followed by yet another proposition. A few words

of remorse while your hand is still resting on my thigh, and the cycle repeats. How many times did I cling to the pieces of light I found in you before I realized that you had revealed them strategically? There are still corners of my mind that tell me I am worthless for this. “How naïve you were,” they say. “You should’ve known better.” Yet I don’t fault the honey bee who is consumed by the Cobra Lily, for she was only doing what she was put on this earth to do – to go where it is sweet and be nourished. How can I judge a creature that is predisposed to seek out the light even when doing so seems futile? How can I blame her for believing that the bright places would guide her back to safety? It is embedded in her DNA.

And this is how I will learn to forgive myself.

The majority of plant species that populate this earth are self-nourishing – they derive their nutrients through photosynthesis, needing only sunlight, water, and soil to grow and thrive. The reason why carnivorous plants feed off of insects is because they grow in soil that is deficient in the vital nutrients required to survive through photosynthesis alone; their trickery is merely an elaborate coping mechanism.

This is how I can forgive *you*.

I am sorry you didn’t get what you needed when you were young. Plants and people, we are very much the same. We are all compensating for something. But, you see, the difference is this – unlike the Cobra Lily, your survival does not depend on the manipulation of innocent beings. I know this because even after you had taken from me more than I was willing to offer, I could tell you were still starving. How many of us will it take for you to realize that when you prey on innocence, you will always come up empty? That cloaking yourself in charisma and false kindness will only weaken your already withered roots? I am sorry that you don’t believe you are enough of a man to subsist without using young women to fuel your ego. But I have spent too

long being suspicious of the good in people to continue living as though I exist solely to save men like you. I cannot allow you to stifle my growth any longer. And so I will move toward the light once again.

Kendra Wolcott
AN ODE TO QUIET WOMEN

I.

“So, you don’t talk much, do you?” he asks as the tides of the crowd around us turn toward a different corner of the room, washing any lingering traces of wallflower from my now exposed skin, he pulls me aside –
“I like that,”
and inside I recoil.

II.

Yet another party I didn’t want to go to:
I’m sitting on the farthest end of the couch, praying that if I stare at my phone long enough it’ll drown out the din of bad music and drunken voices, he looks over at me and laughs –
“You know, it’s always the quiet ones,” he declares,
all slurred speech and false bravado,
“that are loudest in bed.”
I’m supposed to take his leering grin as an invitation.

III.

In my bedroom, after the privilege of a conversation,
Or maybe this time it’s the office, or the library, or the coffee shop;
He waits until I’ve finished speaking before he says it:
“You know, you seem so innocent” –
And there’s a pause,
about the length of time it takes to scan your eyes across a person’s body –
“but you’re really not, are you?”
As if being multifaceted is an attribute reserved for men only.
This is his fatal mistake.

IV.

He’ll take your quiet and turn it into something mystical; treat you like a puzzle that was designed for him to solve,
He’ll praise you for being “different from the other girls” because he doesn’t know how to appreciate one woman without demeaning another,
You’ll blush when he calls you “mysterious,” but in the back of your mind you’ll wonder why it’s so hard for him to understand a woman who wants to be left alone.

V.

He’ll take your quiet and turn it into something violent; romanticize your complexity and then use it against you,

He wants you to be silent in public but loud in bed;
Loud in bed but docile when he starts to slip up,
He likes to be the one to coax the loud out of you
and call you a bitch
when you try to take it
back.

VI.

The thing about “quiet women” is, we are a fantasy and a nightmare all in one.

VII.

I pity the man who mistakes silence for submissiveness -
For he is a victim of his own inattention.
If he took a moment to look outside himself, he would know that it is often the most delicate
flowers that carry the sharpest thorns;
that some of the softest creatures can be deadly when provoked.
I pity the man who confuses tranquility for timidity –
For inside every “quiet” woman is a heart that hums with a gentle ferocity;
It does not occur to him that we can be both the storm that refuses to settle and the stillness that
precedes it.
We are duality made manifest.
It is our greatest power and our
most precious secret.

Saje Wolf
RAPUNZEL

I rise

to birds chirping

as warm sun fills my cold stone room.

Traces of pink illuminate the walls.

My walls.

I love these walls.

We're the best of friends

my walls and I.

Outside the window,

I hear children laughing.

They shout out at me some days,

telling me of my baffling beauty.

Then, men come from far and near

to lay me their praises.

“Rapunzel, Rapunzel,

let down your hair!”

They shout.

Hair!?

I think,

what a perplexing request
they ask of me.

But who am I to deny
these fair men a lock
of my gloried beauty?

I reach to my head,
stubbly and coarse.
I find a strand and pluck it,
without any remorse.

As I dangle the curl
outside of my window,
awaiting adoring receiver below,
I hear an abrupt knock,
it's the fairy who trapped me
in this wretched stone box.

She flutters about
and when I see the blue pills she's holding,
I kick and I shout.
And when she sees hair in hand

she shakes with dismay.

“Oh not again dear Rapunzel,
that was your last strand.”

She calms and she soothes
until I swallow those pills,
and in pours the truth.

These walls can not talk,
and there are no kids around.

The pills make things quiet,
my mind left
void of sound.

They tell me it's better this way
and that my hair will grow back some day.

But life's boring like this,
my soul left
colorless like the deep depths of an abyss.

Please help me dear friends,
this is my plea to you,

to the walls who have watched me,
for so many moons.

Help me escape
this prison devoid of passion.

Bring back my feelings
and my endless imagination.

Take away this 'illness'
and free my soul
of damnation.

Until those soft voices come
seeping back through...

"Rapunzel,

Rapunzel,

let

down

your

hair"

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Simona Carini

MAY MORNING IN SOUTHERN ICELAND

In the middle of one-laned Laugarás bridge,
I stop the car. In the deep quiet,
Ölfusá River streams below,
rain-vowing clouds huddle above,
road and river unfurl across green fields.

I ride the river on the back of the suspension bridge,
over running water — a bite of dark chocolate,
slow-melting and with a long-lasting aftertaste.
I pause the reel of thoughts spinning in my head,
look, inhale, touch then lick my fingertips,
close my eyes and listen to water marking time.

No shadow darken the view,
no voice within or without intrudes, only
lambs bleating hungrily,
horses' hooves tick-tocking on lava fields.

Phyllis Chinn

THE IMMORTALS, OR BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

As the self-proclaimed writer in our group, I suppose I should write something of what happened. I'd write this as a diary, but I no longer have any idea what day or month or even year it is. Perhaps it would be better if I start at the beginning.

There was a little advertisement back in 2002 in the *Mensa* magazine asking for volunteers to participate in an experiment. I had just finished graduate school in a writing program and had no idea what I wanted to do with the rest my life. I was curious enough to respond to the ad. For months I corresponded with Dr. Anderson and Dr. Beatty, revealing more of myself than I had even to my parents. I took all kinds of personality and intelligence tests. Finally I was told that if I wanted to continue, I could be part of an elite group that would be given an immortality drug, injections that would prevent us from aging. I would be able to live forever. I was sworn to secrecy. The drug was difficult to synthesize, and there was only enough for a few select people. I was one of them. Of course I was flattered, more so when I met the rest of our group of twenty people in the prime of life. Again the scientists in charge of the project explained that we could not be allowed to mingle freely with the rest of society – think of the jealousy we would arouse. Perhaps people would murder us in their rage over their own mortality. It all sounded so reasonable.

As part of our application-process, each of us had described what we would do differently if we knew we would live forever. I remember waxing eloquent about how I would write science fiction novels and looked forward to experiencing the future to see if any of my predictions came true. We were given the abandoned biosphere complex in Arizona as our home. Perhaps forever, perhaps only until there was enough of the drug or enough acceptance from the rest of the country to allow us to merge with them. Oh, the joy of being able to see what happened in the future. Why, we would *be* the future.

A bus delivered us to our new home. The geodesic dome of the biosphere beckoned, enclosing three acres, large and glittering in the middle of the desert. We piled out of the bus and unloaded our belongings, chattering as we chose our rooms, unpacked and arranged those items that would remind us of the outside world. For what seemed like weeks, we explored the site, with its variety of habitats: a miniature ocean complete with fish, temperate and tropical

wilderness areas replete with the smells of rich soil and perfumed blossoms, cultivated gardens with food plants and chickens underfoot. At first we all spent our waking hours learning how to maintain the air, food, and water supply in the biosphere, delicately balanced to recycle everything. Then we began to plan the next steps in our extended lives. What should we do first? Paint? Write? Study ancient languages? Well, no hurry – we had forever.

We began to get to know one another better and form alliances. Ten men, ten women. We paired off, some of us anyway. The rest were jealous but not ready to commit to anything or anyone. The pairs soon fell apart. How boring to spend eternity with just one person! The next stage was one of promiscuity. I vaguely recall we thought that having sex with everyone else would be fun. Perhaps it was. I don't recall. It seems so long ago. Time began having less and less meaning. The new books that we had been promised every decade stopped appearing. We had the entire contents of the Library of Congress on disks but rarely turned on the computers. We could all repeat the oft-told stories of each other's life "before." We knew one another's opinions on every topic. We wondered whether people outside had all forgotten about us. How long had passed? No one had kept track. What difference did it make anyway?

So far no one had started on any of the grand schemes we had planned before we entered the biosphere. When you have all the time in the world, no particular day has any urgency to it. We instituted a strict rotation of cooking. Otherwise I am not sure anyone would have bothered cooking or eating. We soon ran out of new things to cook, limited as we were to those ingredients we could raise in our self-contained habitat. Before long we seemed to have eaten the same meals hundreds of times. We were bored with all of them. Perhaps it would have been better if we had just starved to death then.

That's when most of us started having difficulty getting out of bed in the morning. *No hurry* was our mantra. Why start today? Perhaps tomorrow there would be word from the outside world of new advances in some field that would save us some of the work on our own projects. Some of the men started a dueling society. I think they thought the immortality drug made them invincible, or maybe they were sorry they had chosen to live forever. It was quite a shock when the first man died. His dueling partner promptly committed suicide in remorse, or perhaps in relief that he did not really have to live forever. Had we been promised immortality, or only that we would not age?

After that, I lost track of what happened. I was bored and disgusted with myself for my lack of ambition. I hardly ever got out of bed. Tomorrow, I promised myself, I would start my first novel. Was it the poisonous mushrooms that got several people next? I hadn't eaten that night. The cook, of course, killed herself the next day, after burying three others. Our numbers dwindled, and we hardly spoke with one another any more. There would be lots of time later to share ideas, always assuming we had any. With no outside stimulation and no sense of time, we all withdrew into our own personal world. Were we the best that the long-ago scientists could have found to bestow eternal life? What a sad commentary on science and on us! I suspect that I may be the only one left, but I haven't been out of my room in what seems like months. I think I am hungry, but I'm not sure. In fact, I am tired of writing this story. Probably there is no one left outside to know we were here, no one who will care to read anything I might write. As an experiment we have failed and there is no one left to know or care.

“So,” said Dr. Anderson to the assembled scientists, “as you can see from the video monitor tapes, it would appear that the drug to accelerate time-sense worked to the extent that the recipients believed they were living a long time. It's too bad they were such misfits that they wasted this precious opportunity. Still, I think we are ready to repeat the experiment with more stable and talented people.”

Colleen Ferguson
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Within two minutes of opening the Pet Vet Clinic Kit, I knew I was going to be the best veterinarian the world had ever known. The Clinic Kit was a gift from my parents for my eighth birthday; for months I had been treating my stuffed animals with Band-Aids robbed from their first aid kit, and it seemed the time had come for me to have my own. I smoothed my hands over the blue cardboard and traced the words “PET VET” with my finger, my chest tightening with excitement. I turned the kit over, and using a black magic marker, wrote: DR. COLLEEN in big, block letters.

Up to that point, the summer had been mostly a wash. Like always, there hadn’t been much to do in the dry heat of the Sacramento Valley, so my older brother and I spent the first half of the summer calling old folks from the church who we knew had a swimming pool and a soft heart. If they refused our pleas for a refreshing oasis, we would turn to the hose in the front yard, taking aim at the sun and letting rainbowed drops of water fall onto us like rain.

Our pool-less home was set in a cul-de-sac at the southernmost edge of town, abutting Road 98 and the tomato fields that sprawled west into Capay Valley. All summer long, overloaded produce trucks would turn too quickly onto the main road, shrugging off superfluous heaves of crimson cargo. The piles of fruit would bleed out and bake in the sun, staining the pavement red; at dusk, the smell of dust and rot would catch the Delta Breeze and cool our cul-de-sac with the sour stench of sundried tomatoes.

On the evening of my birthday, under a hot pink sky and tomato breeze, I began a new entry in my diary entitled “Why I Want to be a Veterinarian.” The entry ended with the declaration: “I love animals. I don’t think anybody loves them the way I do. Case Closed.”

I began operating on the stuffed animals in my room, ripping off the old Band-Aids and refitting their limbs with soft, white gauze from the kit. Once bandaged, I tucked them into bed to convalesce and turned my attention to the outdoors. For weeks I bothered the neighborhood cats with constant examinations, until one of them—a grumpy orange and white tabby named Tigger—brought me my very first, bona fide patient. Though he didn't bring it to me so much as I had to take it from his grasping, greedy claws. It was a small bird—rust-colored and alive. I readied a box—lined with an old towel—and gently placed my patient inside. Tigger had hacked countless feathers from its back, which was now blistered and raw. It hurt my stomach to look at the mess of lacerated flesh, but my longing to heal was stronger than my gag reflex, and I grabbed my kit and a few boysenberries, placing them in the box next to the bird. Its beak opened and closed weakly, and I tried to feed it a berry. It bit me, then died.

Two weeks later my father woke me for our family's first and last camping trip. It was the end of the summer and god-be-damned if the Fergusons weren't going to have their own story of "roughin' it." The four of us crowded into our 1989 Honda Accord, settling in amongst borrowed camping gear, ice chests, and fishing poles no one knew how to use. Nobody seemed to mind the lack of space—we were in good spirits, giddy with anticipation of the unfamiliar. I was particularly excited—for two weeks I had mourned the loss of my avian patient; now, I was ready to move on, and I believed the forest held promise of redemption.

When we arrived, my parents busied themselves with readying camp and soon sent my brother and me on a walk to "give them space." We didn't care, we were bored watching their frustration grow and welcomed a chance to explore. We struck out on the path away from our campsite, weaving through boulders, conifers, and shattered stumps until we came to a little

clearing surrounded by pine trees. We threw pinecones at various targets, watching them explode in flurries of brown and black. One point if you hit the tree, two if it explodes.

A scrub jay flew by, and I thought of my last patient, “I want another bird,” I said wistfully. Daniel looked at me, one of his eyes bigger than the other — “I’ll get you one.” Another scrub jay flew by, and Daniel’s body blurred with an unearthly quickness as a rock flew from his hand. It sailed through the air, smashing into the scrub jay, and, for a moment, they became one—together, they careened into a pine tree.

Daniel and I stared at each other, four eyes equally wide, and ran to the bird. Feathers were scattered everywhere and a flower of blood was slowly growing underneath the bird’s contorted body. It shuddered like a hand heavy with Parkinson’s, and I reached out to comfort the bird, to stroke its head. It bit me, then died.

My chest immediately tightened and began to ache, and Daniel looked as if he was going to cry. He pleaded with me not to tell Mom and Dad, and I agreed. It was my fault, anyways. I killed the first bird, and now another one was dead. We took our time walking back to the campsite, seeing nothing and saying little. When we arrived, Dad was reading, and Mom was struggling with a package of hotdogs, “How was the walk?” she asked.

“Fine.”

She tilted her head and squinted at me, her eyes declaring, “I KNOW YOU KILLED ANOTHER BIRD,” but she only said, “Okay, honey.” She resumed her battle with the hot dog package.

Later, at dinner, I took one bite of my hot dog and burst into tears. Then Daniel started crying and our confession of carnage came out in a deluge of snot and wails. The next morning,

we buried the remains of my dream, packed up the car, and headed home. Once we had cleared the forest, I opened up my diary and began a new entry: “Why I Want to Be a Detective.”

Jesse Gordon
A DINNER FOR BRANDON

Lydia's eyes burned and welled with tears. The Vidalia onions were pungent as she chopped them into little yellow squares. But then she had cried when dicing the ham and cried when cutting the broccoli and carrots. And had cried last night when she soaked the peas and hid them in a cupboard. She hadn't stopped crying since Brandon died.

She pressed her head against the silver fridge and stared at the magnet with Brandon's picture. His dark hair was always a tangled mess, and on more than one occasion, broke teeth off her combs. She smiled thinking about picking the plastic bits out of his mane. How he'd smile back up at her with a smile that seemed too big for his little face.

"Lydia," Jonathan said closing the door with a slam. His steps crossed the floor with heft.

"In here," she said pulling herself away from the fridge.

Her husband leaned in the kitchen doorway, "Smells good. What is it?"

She looked him over and tried to ignore the gray hair that had ascended his scalp since Brandon had passed. "Thanks. It's nothing," she said sliding the onions into the skillet of garlic and diced bacon.

"Nothing?" he said lifting the lid off a pot. He stirred the green mush with the wooden spoon. "God damn it, Lydia! You're doing this again!" He mashed the lid back down on to the pot sending a ring through the kitchen. "What good does this do?" His voice raised. "What do you think is gonna happen? That he's gonna smell his favorite dinner and just come home?" His voice a shout now. "He's dead."

"You don't know what you're talking about," she said stirring the skillet.

“No?” He walked to the dining room. “The table’s set for three. Who else are you expecting, Lydia?”

She ignored him, pushing the ingredients back and forth in the skillet.

He stepped back into the kitchen and opened the fridge. The shelves were packed with plastic containers, the soup inside of some were fresh from a night or two. Some others had turned brown and furry. “How many more times do we have to do this?”

She pushed the ingredients some more, the bacon crisping and sending sizzling sounds into the room.

“This stops now,” he said and reached for the knob to the burner.

“Stop it, Jonathan.” She pushed his arm away with her right hand, and he struggled back, grabbing the skillet handle in her left hand.

“No. No more.” He grasped her wrist, and his fingers tightened like a noose. In a reflex she tipped the skillet and grease spilled over Jonathan’s hand.

He let out a pained yelp and fell backwards. The skin on his hand looked like a peeled tomato, leaking fluids, and flecked with chunks.

Lydia reached out to help him. “Jonathan, I didn’t mean-”

He waved away her hand and struggled to his feet. “How do I show you he’s never coming home?” He left her there, stepping out the front door wrapping his hand with a towel he took from the counter.

Lydia popped the cork on a red wine she had been saving. She told herself the fight wasn’t her fault as she poured the first glass. She drank and cooked and thought. She didn’t blame Jonathan. He was mourning his way, and she was mourning hers. She felt them aching together, yet separate. The wine bottle was half-way through when she finished cooking.

She ladled several scoops full into each bowl on the table and sat with a glass full to the brim. The steaming bowl in front of her left her feeling empty. She pushed it aside and laid her head on the table.

When Lydia lifted her head from the table, she had to wipe at the dry drool from her face. Her head was pounding, and the wine had turned in her stomach. The bowl on the checkered placemat in front of her held split-pea soup, but the wine glass in her left hand held nothing.

She stood looking over the set table. The candles had burned down, and the soups had all congealed to the bottom of the bowls.

Lydia checked the bedroom for Jonathan, but he was still gone. The clock next to the bed threw off a soft glow of two a.m. She pictured him sitting in a bar, drink in the same hand he had burned, and her stomach sank with guilt and wine.

In the kitchen, the sink was piled with the cooking utensils. The stovetop was an equal mess. It was covered in grease and spilled soup had dried, turning into hard little brown scabs. She felt tired and stupid as she pulled on the latex gloves. She didn't want to fight with Jonathan anymore; she wanted them to heal together. And she didn't want the mess around when he came home.

After pulling the trash can to the fridge and filling it with the containers of old soup, she started on the dishes. The white noise of the water helped her mind focus on what she wanted to say to Jonathan when he got home. The thoughts looped in her head until she heard the door close.

She shut the water off. “Jonathan.” She started, peeling the gloves off her hand, “I’m sorry Jonathan. I know things haven’t been easy lately. That we both haven’t been good to each other.”

She stopped and waited for a response; instead she heard a spoon scraping a bowl followed by slurps.

“Jonathan?” She stepped slowly to the doorway until she saw Jonathan sitting there. His hands were on the table with interlaced fingers. His eyes were full of tears, and a smile spread across his face. He wasn’t looking at her; instead he was watching someone else sitting at the table. Someone who was eating. Someone the doorway blocked from view.

She stepped closer, and the odor hit her overpowering the smells of cooked soup and dish soap. Lydia let out a gag and Jonathan finally noticed her.

“Lydia, honey,” he said rising to his feet and walking over to her. He wrapped an arm around her. “Don’t apologize. I was wrong.” He bent down and kissed her. His breath smelled like root beer schnapps, but his tongue tasted like root beer paint.

She pushed him off her and stepped out into the dining room. The small boy turned, dead eyes gazed up at her. He held up the empty bowl with dirty hands. “Mom.” The words bubbled out of purple pale lips, a smile too big for the face, “Can I have some more?”

Peter Presnell
SPIRIT BEAR

Fall day and long warm shadows stretched the Indian summer across my meadow. It was late in the day when I heard the screams. They came at intervals some minutes apart, but later they came more often. It began with a deep-throated groaning that gained in volume and rose into a sound that sawed at the senses. I lived on the edge of wilderness in the mountains above the Klamath River. I thought I knew all the sounds, could read them like a book. In a decade I'd seen all the animals that I shared territory with. I knew some of them personally. This was something else, something primal and filled with terror. The Indians' horses routinely grazed the pocket prairies that you'd cross to reach my forty from the county road, and it seemed a reasonable thing to think that a horse breaking his leg in a tangle of limbs could let loose such a sound. It was possible, but it didn't quite make it to *likely* since horses don't relish closed in jungle, and nobody would lead a horse into a place like that. In truth, I couldn't make it out, but I needed something to fill the gap until I did.

I waited. The scream rose again from deep in the woods. It was an area of my land I'd left unexplored because it was steep and choked with snow-brush and deadfalls. My work day was over, and I was wearing shorts, moccasins, and a T-shirt, and chipping away at a cold bottle of Molson's. Of course, it occurred to me to boot up and go have a look, but I delayed a while longer, waiting to see if it was moving through or would do it again. It did soon enough. It's my own fault for having approximately the same level of curiosity that routinely kills cats, so there it was: I couldn't not go.

I thought to work my way up the hill, just part way, see if getting closer would provide more clues, and dropped a little five shot .38 into my back pocket, thinking it would do if it fell to me, after all, to put down a horse with a broken leg. I moved off the meadow into the fringe of Douglas firs and peeling red madrone and waited. When the screams came again, I moved again, picking my way, avoiding anything that would crackle or snap. I stopped when the screams stopped. I listened as the forest wrapped itself in an unnatural silence. It wasn't just me: everyone was listening. Again came that woe-some cry that rose out of the creature's soul and seemed to stop time. The sun was down to a hand above the horizon. Judging the sound, I was closing on it.

Moving and stopping in this way, I gained more ground until I reached an area where I could see no more than a few feet in any direction. It was dark and airless in there, but the next few steps brought me into a small clearing. I started across and realized I had just walked past the bear only feet to my left, lying on his stomach, eating a wild boar alive. We looked each other in the eye. There was a single lodge pole standing midway across the clearing. I made for it and shinnied up to its one dead branch six feet off the ground. It was a terrible choice. It was the only choice.

The bear was the largest animal I'd ever seen in these mountains. I guessed six hundred pounds. He was yellow with a thick fur collar and the telltale hump of a grizzly. And as everyone knows, there are no grizzlies in California. His muzzle was gray, but his power was indisputable. The boar was pinned down by the bear's great front paws and periodically the bear would rip and chew at the boar's flesh, and the boar's anguish would echo through the forest. I pulled the .38 and clung to my tree with all my weight on one foot and waited for the bear to charge. He went on eating, and in time the boar's screams wound down to a vanishing

complaint. I heard a voice that sounded like me reassuring the bear that I wasn't there to contest his pig. He never took his eyes off me which I can say with certainty since I could look at nothing else. Perched there on that scrawny dead lodgepole in the middle of nowhere, the sun close to setting and me in my shorts and moccasins with a pistol that could only piss him off at best, well, I realized I was about to die on account of stupidity, pure and simple. And I made myself feel worse yet, knowing that no one knew where I was.

Dusk was turning into night. The thought of being here with the bear in the pitch black forced my decision to put a shot into the ground beside him, hoping the sudden bang would prove reason enough for him to take his boar and leave. I understood that it would only leave four in the gun. I pointed and fired. The report came sharp and deafening as the dirt flew up beside him. He never broke his concentration on me, as if we were chatting over dinner. He gave no reaction to the shot. I couldn't know for sure, and maybe I was deluding myself, but it didn't look like he was upset about my being there, and other than the shock of seeing him just a few feet away, he hadn't threatened me in any way. I couldn't make it out, but I was sure I'd never see home again, and I was dogged by the thought that after he killed me, him being full of pork, he'd probably leave me there to get recycled by the buzzards and coyotes. No one would find me. That was the sorry part. This was my night on bald mountain. This was it.

A few minutes later, still staring at me, the bear pushed himself up on all fours. Then he backed noiselessly into the undergrowth, and vanished, leaving the boar in a gut spilled disarray. I couldn't believe my eyes. I hung coiled around the lodgepole for several minutes. No sound. Nothing but the dark gathering. I came slowly to earth and found that the branch that had held my weight had deformed my foot to the degree that I was unable to put weight on it.

The bear had disappeared into the forest between me and home. I began feeling my way slowly down through the undergrowth, unable to see beyond arm's reach. It was a long trip home, and I was expecting him to appear suddenly at close quarters. Finally, a lighter place showed itself through the darkness ahead. It was the meadow. As I approached, I could see it glowing from the sun's last rays through the dark timber, and I began to breathe. The meadow was home. I was home. I was alive.

That night I paced the cabin, unable to change the subject in my mind. I got trembles I'd never known before. But the thing I couldn't stand was the sure knowledge that I couldn't share this with anyone. No one would believe me, and that rankled. As days passed, there were opportunities to present my tale, but I kept silent. When I was working in the woods with B.B., or his brother-in-law Buster, or my best friend Georgy Xenos, that's when I wanted to tell them. It was tough not telling because so many of the conversations you were likely to have in Klamath River country had to do with record-sized sturgeon or elk, or tales of cougars—even a Bigfoot yarn was acceptable.

Then one night, sipping ale and playing cribbage with Franky McCovey, a bear of a man himself with one bad eye and a big heart, a man I'd reached a certain level of trust with, I could hold back no longer. I said, "I know this is going to sound like I've been too long alone in these mountains, but I had a bear on the place, a different kind of bear, a yellow bear. And he didn't look like he belonged here."

Franky looked at me with that dead pan stoic stare that Indians do, so I gathered myself and marched on with a minute-by-minute account that stretched to half an hour, recounting everything down to the finest detail, like that four inch claw that stuck up at a strange angle, and the whistling sound like a punctured accordion coming from the boar's lungs, all the while

hoping Franky'd find a way to believe some of what I said. And since I was telling it all, I admitted that when I'd reached that point coming out of the woods where I could see the meadow, I'd broken and run. With my bent foot dragging, I barely touched the ground until I'd slammed through the cabin door, lungs gasping, heart in my throat.

When I'd finished my telling he said, "Spirit Bear."

I said, "You think he's a spirit? Like not really there?"

"He was there," he said.

"You seen him?"

He nodded. "One night I was sleeping in mom's loft when something woke me, and when I looked out, I saw him in the moonlight. He looked at me through the window, then he reached over the fence and grabbed up mom's favorite goat and carried him off. Never found anything."

"He's a grizzly, right?"

"He's Spirit Bear," he said, as he was describing a separate species.

"Has anybody else seen him?"

"He's legend," said Franky. "He vanishes for long periods, then comes back and shows himself to somebody."

"How many people have seen him?"

Franky shook his head, "Don't know. Some people who seen him never say. Buster seen him up close. He was deer hunting. He was laid up behind a log watching a five-point buck grazing his way toward him across that pocket prairie above the teacher's place. He was sighting in on the buck when the bear came out of the woods and charged at Buster, and Buster swung up his 7mm and pulled the trigger, and the gun misfired, and Buster thought he'd breathed his last,

but the bear pulled up right in front of him and stood there, looking at him. Then he went off into the woods. It left Buster thinking he'd just had a "religious experience."

I never saw Spirit Bear again. Never heard of him again. Franky never talked of him again.

It was one of those things, a chapter in the book that opened to me, in the mountains that rise from the Klamath River country.

Branson Schuetzle

HOW TO ALIENATE EVERYONE YOU'VE EVER LOVED, PART 1

First thing's first
start drinking every day
But don't drink for the love of it
or to make yourself smile

Buy bottom shelf liquor
that sends tremors up your spine
with every sip
from your body rejecting the poison

After choking down your filth
have a seat
and while slumping down off the couch
onto the cool hardwood
make the decision to become some sort of artist

Look around your home
or whatever home you're in
and decide to become a writer
for a writer requires the least amount of tools

Stagger to your desk
and hold your pen with both hands
and scribble blotchy hatred and nausea onto the page

After about fifteen minutes
step back and admire your work
Feel accomplished for a brief moment
and pass out onto the floor

The following morning
return to your desk with your decoder ring
and decipher the hieroglyphics etched the night before

Then stuff it in an envelope
and mail it to Playboy
When they reject it
send it to Reader's Digest
When they reject it
send it to your local newspaper

Next week
pick up the Sunday paper
Pore over your work
Have a congratulatory drink
and do it all over again

Branson Schuetzle

HOW TO ALIENATE EVERYONE YOU'VE EVER LOVED, PART 2

Actively avoid the calls of your friends and family
They never understood you before you were an artist
They certainly won't understand you now

If they ever manage to get ahold of you
tell them to fuck off
Tell them you'll get back to them
Once you finish this next chapter
and this sonnet
and your numerous haikus
about the bird living in the rafters

Tell them that you're in the middle
of sparking a cultural revolution
with your piece on the peculiar shape
of the buttocks of the woman standing in front of you
in the checkout line the other day

Slam the phone down on the receiver
Unplug the line
Grab a drink and savor it
Then smoke something

Anything

As long as it helps you think on a higher level
that you
and only you
are capable of comprehending

Then laugh away at the ceiling