

# Spark Bright Issue 3 Winter 2009



## **Happy Holidays and Welcome to our 3rd issue of Spark Bright!**

We're rushing into the festive spirit with the same frantic excitement we use to greet every holiday season - with loads of new reading materials and a lock on our wallets! We know the financial strain well, which is why we continue to offer our literary findings free of charge. We'd like to take this time to thank everyone who has submitted their works to us and share how grateful we are with how much they help us supply you, the reader, with fresh new FREE writings to get you through the coming months. We hope you enjoy what you read and share it with your friends and family as you're sitting around, enjoying the holidays together.

From Our Family to Yours,

Happy Holidays!

From the Spark Bright crew.

### **In this issue:**

**Poetry** by Andrew Taylor, Annelies Vanherck, Ben Nardolilli, David McLean, Elena Rardon, Elizabeth Switaj, G. David Schwartz, Gary Beck, James K. Mudgway, James Mansfield, John Mulligan, Kim Dela Cruz, Leslie Moon, Lili Leader, Michael Lee Johnson, Nannie, Paul Handley, Psycho Kanev, Ray Succre, Regina Green and William Doreski

**Prose** by Edward Rodosek, Howard Good, Joseph Grant, Thomas Sullivan, Trina Allen and William Doreski

**Cover art by Leanne Hinks. Her work can be found at <http://olcanna.deviantart.com/>**

**Special thanks to Elandria Broughton-Shear, and Jamie, for allowing us to use their photography in our cover art. Their work can be found at <http://elandria.deviantart.com/> and <http://simplybackgrounds.deviantart.com>**

**So thank you to Elandria, Jamie, Leanne, and to everyone who has contributed to us so far—in this issue, as well as in our previous two issues.**

**Credits: 'The Mulberry Tree' has previously appeared in *Chiron Review*, summer 2008**

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## **The Two Parts—Ray Sucre**

Are you that person who is delirious?  
The second part begins “make an impression  
such as to make sense of us.”  
I will set it down for the person who is delirious.

Make an impression such as to make sense of us.  
The first part inquires if you are here yet.  
Yes, you and I are both here,  
and my inquiry ends with “you and I.”

The sparks in the sparks.  
The sense of the encircling.  
The delirium, the two parts.  
You and I.

## **Oscillations, Aftershocks—Kim Dela Cruz**

I.  
My head weighs ten pounds. Somehow  
your body weighs less.

II.  
It was too easy to rattle your bones.  
I would play simple melodies on your ribcage  
but you could touch so much more  
with nimble fingers licking piano keys  
catching the cadence of forgotten rhythms  
in your sleep. They said you never made a  
sound.

III.  
I never understood harmonics.  
They slip away softly in the night  
like stolen teeth and memories of you.

IV.  
In my dreams  
you're always screaming.  
Does that sickle smile mean you're happy now?

V.  
I am nothing if  
I am not. I am  
no such thing.

VI.  
I laughed at your funeral.

## **Nights are for Nostalgia—Lili Leader**

Somewhere in the world  
stars are falling and lovers  
are lying in a grass field,  
watching the steady descent  
of a solar system, wishing  
on that brilliant death.  
Their palms whisper  
to each other, sharing secrets  
tucked deep in the creases  
as their lips smirk at the sky,  
tempting the universe --  
daring her to scorn their bliss.

Somewhere in the world  
a man is bent over an infant,  
two fingers pressed delicately  
to the soft bones in an  
under-developed chest;  
he applies faint pressure there  
and screams at tiny ears  
(or maybe infinite ones)  
*don't you dare! don't you dare!*  
and the nurses pity  
while the parents hope.

Somewhere in the world  
a musician is on a dim-lit stage,  
in an under-appreciated bar  
singing his soul to the drunks.  
They sigh, or grumble, or sit  
silently seething with their sins  
and the musician has no mercy;  
he lays them all bare, hearts  
stripped ruthlessly, till they are weak  
and trembling and honest --  
till they are beautiful things.

And somewhere in the world  
you are hunched over a table,  
your pen traces intimate curves  
over paper you've carried with you  
to far-away and dangerous places.  
You are writing a love poem  
and dreaming of soft skin  
under your calloused fingertips,  
and of nights in your youth  
wasted in endless grass fields  
while killing wishes on the stars  
that refused to fall.

## The Mulberry Tree—Trina Allen

Small purple fingers. Plump, fat mulberries bursting with sweet tartness.

Laughter of girls.

I checked my watch and dashed up a flight of stairs. I opened the stairwell door and heard the commotion. Students yelling and laughing. A paper ball flew out of a classroom door. My heart raced, pounding against my chest. Did I have the energy to capture and then hold their attention for forty-five minutes? Just back from lunch, their minds would be on breakups, hookups, basketball and Gatorade.

As I walked through the classroom door, Brittney left her seat, walked across the room, and yelled in Trey's face, "You been talking about me. Haven't you, crack head?"

I felt my face flush with annoyance, thinking seriously of walking out the classroom door. Not looking back.

"Enough," I said. "Brittney, sit down now!" Brittney had been suspended for fighting several times this year, so I made my voice loud but controlled, demanding compliance.

Brittney didn't seem to hear me, deep into the throes of her anger. "You are slow, you motherfucker. Do you hear me, crack head?" Brittney said, stepping toward Trey. Wisps of her hair fell out of the band holding it.

Students left their seats and gathered around Brittney and Trey. A chorus of "Fight, fight, fight" rang through the classroom. Panic traveled down my spine. I straightened my back to hide my fear. Brittney was taller than I was, big-boned and busty. The scratches from a recent fight were still healing on her face.

Time slowed as it sometimes did when I faced a crisis. My thoughts were clearer. My actions quick and focused. I pushed the intercom emergency button and spoke into the intercom. "Send the deputy, now." From experience, I knew it would be several minutes before help came.

This class period was lost. No math instruction would be possible today — even if I was successful in preventing a fight between Brittney and Trey, I'd never get the students' attention. My primary concern was student safety. If Brittney hit Trey, I'd end up breaking up a fight. I had to get Trey out of the room. He was the weaker of the two. He would lose to the bigger, more experienced Brittney. He would

welcome an excuse to back down.

In an unexpected show of guts, Trey stood and threw his backpack to the floor, books poking through several rips in the material. He took a step, mere inches from Brittney. I barely looked at his face. I was too busy looking at the new sneakers on his feet.

"Trey, out in the hall, now. I will not tolerate this behavior," I said with more confidence than I felt. The boy nearly ran out the door. Tears of anger threatened my control. I was furious, not with Brittney, but with Trey's mother. Trey wore expensive sneakers on his feet, but his backpack was falling apart and his clothes were torn and dirty. Wrong priorities from a single parent who was too far into her drug habit to care.

Brittney yelled, "Ya, you better run, loser, crack head."

I put my hand on her shoulder, hoping the contact would calm her.

She shrugged me away, but stopped screaming.

"Take your seat, Brittney." I said, while turning on the overhead projector. "Class, begin the assignment on the overhead." I hoped the girl would comply and that would be the end of the excitement for the day.

I walked into the hall to check on Trey. Noise immediately erupted again from my classroom. I sighed. Trey sat, shoulders slumped against the lockers. He wiped a hand across his reddened eyes.

I swallowed the lump in my throat and began to perspire even though the hall was not warm. Anger bubbled in my heart. I felt helpless. I couldn't make enough of a difference in Trey's future. I had saved him from a fight today, but what about tomorrow? I sank to the floor next to him and hugged my knees. Trey had started sixth grade with a first-grade vocabulary and lacking basic math skills. His future career possibilities seemed limited to drug dealer or burglar. One class period a day was just not enough to make up for the years of lost education, robbed from him by a system that favored the more fortunate.

As sometimes happened when I felt powerless, thoughts of Cathy came to me. Small purple fingers. Plump, fat mulberries bursting with sweet tartness on my tongue. Cathy's laughter.

## The Mulberry Tree—Trina Allen (cont.)

It was a Saturday afternoon the summer before my sixth-grade year. My younger sister Cathy and I had gone on a bike ride. The North Carolina summer was too hot for bike riding, but our parents' fighting had grown worse. Listening to them argue over the cost of groceries all morning was reason enough to escape.

I rode behind Cathy. Oppressive waves of air rose from the pavement, distorting my view. Peddling hard, I sucked in muggy heated air, trying to fuel my legs with oxygen. My effort was barely sufficient to keep my bike moving at a crawl. I stared at the rivulets of sweat that ran down Cathy's neck, plastering her cotton shirt to her back.

Turning a corner, a large, round-topped mulberry tree appeared like a mirage. Dense green branches sprawled over a white picket fence, shading a hedge of holly and a hundred feet of road. My mouth watered as we rode over plump dark berries on the road. Cathy signaled left and pulled her bike to a stop.

We leaned our bikes against the picket fence and, standing in the shade of the mulberry tree, Cathy and I ate berry after berry. Our fingers were purple, our mouths and tongues blue. We laughed at each other. The succulent, refreshing berries slaked our thirst and eased our sadness. I plucked a mulberry with purple fingers and put it in my mouth, laughing as the tart sugary berry burst between my teeth.

The sweet happiness of that day has a place forever in my memory alongside the despair of the day after when I lay in bed, a pillow over my ears to block out my parents screaming. Her anger at my father spilling over onto me, my mother came into my room and pulled me out of bed. "You are worthless. What kind of idiot can't even remember to bring her bike in out of the rain? Those bikes cost money. Your father is waiting for you in the kitchen."

A chill of fear pulled my chin up in defiance. I knew what was coming. In the kitchen, Cathy and I stood side by side. We pulled our underpants down. I put one hand on my ankle and held Cathy's hand with the other. With each stroke of the belt, I heard

Cathy crying. I tightened my grip on her hand, but I didn't let one tear fall. Hatred for my parents kept my eyes dry.

Afterward, Cathy lay on her stomach in bed with blood in her underwear. I held her hand, brought her dolls to her, and rubbed her back. I didn't know how to help her.

Now, sitting in the hall with Trey, I felt that same desperate helplessness. I watched the deputy walk down the hall toward us, gun holster bumping his hip.

I got up, brushed my pants off and returned to the classroom. Without a word to my students, I retrieved my purse from my desk drawer and walked out of the classroom. I would never go back.

Once home, I poured myself a vodka and tonic and escaped to the back deck. A man in a white polo shirt walked across my yard, startling me. My heart slowed as soon as I read the placket on his shirt: Progress Energy. He was here to read the electric meter. Looking at that man so much like my father, a tear ran from my eye and then another.

I understood. My father's belt had left me powerless. Just as I was powerless to help my students make up for the life that had been stolen from them by our educational system. Once again, I was that little girl with her pants down, holding her sister's hand while the belt burned stroke after stroke. I put my head in my hands and sobbed.

I thought about the students that I would never teach. A bird chirped, the thrill of a cardinal. I hadn't noticed it before. I walked down my deck stairs and then over to my rose bushes. I pulled a yellow blossom to my nose, breathing in its sweet smell. Across the yard sat a small black mulberry tree that I'd planted in memory of Cathy. My sister died a month ago, in the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital. Mulberry trees were fast-growing. It wouldn't be long before this tree's fruit-laden green branches provided shade.

Small purple fingers. Plump, fat mulberries bursting with sweet tartness.

Laughter of girls.

**Hands Upon Your Hips—  
James K. Mudgway**

Hands upon your hips,  
Glancing out to a dead calm sea.  
As still as an oil slick.  
A flat plain to the edge of forever.

Eyes fixed, you stare at me.  
Laying on a rocky outcrop.  
A shy sky of pinks and yellow...  
Flashes of orange brilliance.

The unconscious sea began to stir,  
Ruffled by a playful wind...  
Turquoise hands darting out of the  
Ocean to catch me when I fall.

Carrying me to a golden grey shore.  
Looking up, blurry-eyed, at you.  
Hands on your hips.  
Eyes fixed, as you stare at me.

**Nine of Wants—Elizabeth  
Kate Switaj**

no bandaged eye  
but bandaged mind  
& suspicion breaks

fence from its even threes  
so someone smaller  
may pass to view

it isn't what I give to you  
plank or passage  
but what you take            I fear

**Mother, Edith, at 98—Michael  
Lee Johnson**

Edith, in this nursing home  
blinded with macular degeneration,  
I come to you with your blurry  
eyes, crystal sharp mind,  
your countenance of grace—  
as yesterday's winds  
I have chosen to consume you  
and take you away.

"Oh, where did Jesus disappear  
to", she murmured,  
over and over again,  
in a low voice  
dripping words  
like a leaking faucet:  
"Oh, there He is my  
Angel of the coming."

**There Are Kites—Andrew Taylor**

on beaches catching the breeze  
keyboard girl's chain and artificial sun  
in the music hall

I open the dictionary given to me  
on my 7<sup>th</sup> birthday it contains letters  
from her            written in 1986

handwriting distinct it changed  
before she died            almost unrecognisable

on the postcard she sent from Llandudno  
she disguised it            and fooled me

I thought it would all work out in the end

on wet sand somebody has made squares  
out of pebbles

perhaps in remembrance

## ACLU—Paul Handley

Clear history punctually.  
What cookies?  
Family life is my storefront.  
My wife's sweat oozes  
fear of my caprice,  
I watch movies I despise for the record,  
to hide any predisposition  
toward workplace violence.  
I exercise and devour water to purify  
my system of false positives.  
I check out Love Actually, returning it late,  
a movie for which I have a particular antipathy.

Books I read are life affirming,  
as are the paintings on the wall.  
A political columnist that was a habit  
now covers restaurant row.  
She *adores* Thai barbecue.

Interview process.  
Mental health-how far do they go back?  
You've been strong in math  
since 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and I flushed momentarily  
from the compliment then wondered  
if she knew how I cut the eyes  
out of fish, threw them back  
to watch them bump into pilings.  
Medical record of my family tree  
is laid out with my electronic resume.  
Longevity, but a predilection toward  
alcohol-induced diseases which I explained away,  
but long looks when my beer can  
seems to glow at the summer picnic.

Work  
Rearview mirror in my cubicle  
disguised as accoutrement.  
Work id buzzes me in and out,  
to become part of the register.  
My buddy Ling in the lab  
told me there is a pee catcher in the urinal.  
His smile says he's joking,  
then he tells me what I ate the last two days.  
My profile says I could be hiding  
something, which is like a 5 out of 10.  
Stepping into foyer after a call,  
my supervisor said that just outside  
the door is technically on the premises.  
I try to remember who I am which means  
I have already lost if what I'm doing is faking.  
They are winning.

## (A Dedication to) The Lost One—James Mansfield

And I really wish you wouldn't go,  
And I really wish you wouldn't go,  
Leaving me here in a sorry heap,  
Buried more than 6 foot deep.

I just want a chance to make this right,  
To spend with you another night,  
But I know I cannot be the one.

I just want a trip back in time,  
Back to when everything was fine,  
And define my life from that point.

And I really wish you could love,  
And I really wish you could love,  
This broken and lonely soul,  
Take him out of his endless hole.

I just want a soul to be my mate,  
To once again know my fate,  
To have happiness running through.

I just want to be part of a pair,  
In to your eyes blindly stare,  
And not be what I've become.

Up and down, life and death,  
Two weeks ago my last breath,  
I'm a fool, I caused this,  
My frightening fall from bliss.

The time for blaming you is over,  
To myself the fault now rests,  
It was all me, my error and greed,  
And now I'm too empty to feed.

Covering up like the coward I am,  
Lies I tell, hurt I feel,  
I'm the lost one.

Hell has swallowed me up.

I'm the lost one.

## Not As Planned—Thomas Sullivan

I've been waiting for two weeks to do this mountain bike ride on the Hood canal side of the Olympic Peninsula. The ride isn't in any of my guide books, but I've got a detailed map and plenty of water, so I should be fine. A leisurely, two hour adventure in a beautiful old-growth forest awaits.

Five hours later I'm pushing my bike back up a steep switchback near the start of the trail. I feel like an exhausted Egyptian slave hauling a block of stone up to the top of a temple. Salty sweat stings my sunburned face as I stop for the hundredth time and drop onto a fallen log. I tip a water bottle to my mouth, find it empty, and instantly feel empathy for border-crossers. I missed a turn back there somewhere, no idea where, and have spent the last hour in a mild panic. I don't want someone to discover my corpse fifty feet from my car.

I crest the hill, look down at my car, a feel a wave of relief. Safety at last. I roll down the last bit of trail unsteadily, like a kid just learning to ride, and get into the car. Driving back to town I can think of only one thing – having a cheeseburger and two ice-cold beers at The Trading Post, a restaurant-lounge with an outside tiki bar that sits in a gravel courtyard behind a rickety, wooden fence. I found this Jersey-meets-The-Keys slice of paradise on my previous trip out here with my wife and love the downgrade, scuffy vibe of the place.

When I arrive I find that the patio area is closed. So be it. I stagger inside, slump into a booth, and grab a plastic menu. The twenty locals lining the bartop pay me no heed as I look around the room for a waitress. I don't see one. Behind the bar a red-faced woman jogs back and forth, manning four taps in mid-pour while also writing up tabs and taking new orders. I sit for a few bleak minutes before admitting that this scene is a wash.

I get back in my car and drive through the darkening light to the grocery store one block down the road. My new plan is to pick up a pair of good beers, drive down to the burger shack, and take my dinner combo back to the campground. As I enter the harshly lit store I pass two checkout ladies complaining

loudly about a manager who just doesn't seem to appreciate his workers requesting unscheduled days off. I slog to the back of the store and stand in front of the liquor section in despair, eyeing a wall of boating accident beers: Milwaukee Ice, Busch, Schmidts, and a new brand of Budweiser that contains tomato juice and has a name that sounds like a venereal disease. I snap two Coors off a six pack and head to the checkout stand.

When I plop the cans on the rubber belt the checkout woman laughs and says, "Drinking the good stuff, huh?" As she holds her mouth open I notice her tongue piercing, which glints in the overabundance of fluorescent lighting that fills the store.

I force self-restraint, chuckle, and say, "Looks like this is the best you got."

She smiles and points in the opposite direction of where I just came from. "The section with the good beer is over *there*, behind the produce."

I stand perfectly still, wondering why a business would do this. But I'm too tired to make another trip across the store. It's easier just to stick with the crap beer.

When I mention that the store could probably use a new stocking consultant, the woman guffaws and says, "Everyone does the same thing...they stand in front of the glass wondering 'what the hell'. We had a pair of guys last night bitching out loud about the selection, getting really angry."

"Let me guess," I interject, "You let 'em swing on the vine for a bit before showing them the good section." It's exactly what I would do with ungrateful, angry dickheads.

The woman grins and says, "*Exactly.*"

I grab the Coors, lumber to my car, and roll away. Someone passing me flicks their lights at my vehicle, which is heading through the darkness with its headlights off. I drive for two miles and slip off the road into the gravel lot for the burger shack. My stomach is screaming for food, and the smell of greasy, burger-scented air hits me like a field of beautiful lilacs as I exit the car. As I'm plodding around the front bumper the "Open" sign on the restaurant snaps off. I stop walking and stare at the weather-beaten shack

## **Not As Planned—Thomas Sullivan (cont.)**

like a priest who arrives at heaven to find a “No vacancy” sign.

I get in the car and head down to the Shell station, gunning for the attached Subway store. When I arrive the chairs are up on the tables and a man is slowly covering tubs of meat with Saran wrap. I head straight for the stand off Hot Pockets (a burrito-ish concoction containing god knows what meat-packing factory leftovers) and toss two half-ponders into a cheese-stained microwave. When the burritos are finished I pay up, march into the parking lot, and slip behind the wheel. I wolf down my half-frozen dinner in record time, using the bare minimum number of bites required to avoid choking.

Back in my pitch dark campground I sip on my Coors and ponder the day. Nothing

went the way it was supposed to, which made it a grand and funny day. We need these days to remain grateful for things that go well and to be happy to just be alive. These little tragedies need to become comedies, and quickly. If you can’t shake the anger, every last drop of it, you’re doomed.

\* \* \* \*

The next morning I’m standing in the campground shower. My neck and back muscles feel like I just took second place in a jackhammer endurance contest. Someone flushes a toilet, turning my water into a scalding stream of hell. I scream and jump back, slapping the shower head to the side.

Let the games begin.

## **Heartless—Howard Good**

I’d like to be happy, I really would, I’d like wake up one morning before the accidental discovery of America, or at least without finding my heart quietly smoking by the gas pumps and the state fire marshal banging on the door while neighbors shout useless pieces of unsolicited information, when to declare bankruptcy, how to plan a party, but I can’t, not if the buds of the apple tree are closed and inattentive, and small, frail things crackle underfoot wherever I step.

## **Building Blocks—John Mulligan**

Grey office buildings set in the grey clouds. Giant filing cabinets filled with men and women – five blocks away, a shadow slides through a door, like a misfiled letter: you would never know, after it was gone, it had slipped into some other folder, some important correspondence now lost though its absence wouldn’t at the time seem urgent, no obvious lessening to scream at, to the dull sky, to the drab walls.

## **Global Warming—Gary Beck**

The weather pattern changes frequently, erratically, and meteorologists with advanced college degrees make poorer predictions than the Farmer’s Almanac, once meant for rural readers who couldn’t foresee climate change.

### **1666—Nannie**

we are the fore-play to  
a new london fire and  
i think your freshly-baked bread  
is burning

you crawl out from beneath  
the covers and lick my tummy  
like flames until i'm just  
arms and legs sticking out in  
perpendicular angles from  
an ash laid ghost city  
of a child

unwritten law number  
threehundredandsixty-four:  
never scream fire in  
a seated theater

unwritten sequel number  
sixteensixtysix:  
we did  
and it was burning

our faces are smeared against  
fallen september leaves  
and water can do nothing  
to put them out.

### **Another Day in Paradise— Annelies Vanherck**

First light reveals  
dark blue light yellow sky  
and mountain silhouettes

covers the last faint sparkles  
with the brighter blanket  
of daylight

and then it waits a while  
until the world wakes up  
from the silence  
after the last surviving lullaby

Slowly  
one by one  
the stars are replaced by puppets  
tugging on the ropes  
that tie them to the night

They feel life return  
to their bodies  
shake off the last lingering dream  
and start their dance  
hanging on the strings  
of daylight

### **Paper Boats and Hurricanes—Elena Rardon**

Contractile muscles are pulsing  
delayed messages to my brain  
because a broken heart is one thing  
that Elmer's Glue All can't fix.

"I love you" never loses its meaning  
even after 427 notes scrawled on napkins  
and stuffed underneath my pillow  
so that you'd never be able to find them

Now I'm stuck listening to the same three love songs  
and imagining that you're listening, too.  
(I make a mark on my wall every time I think of you:  
I wonder what happens when you pass my height record).

Yesterday I turned those love notes into  
paper boats and set them at sea.  
Maybe by some miracle  
they'll end up at your door.

## The Persistence of Memory—Joseph Grant

Memory does not come cheap. Memory does not simply ask for naught in return, it takes what it can grab. It is in that acquaintance of remembrance in which it vanquishes man time and again. If he is not careful, it takes the very heart out of him once more for old time's sake and if he is lucky, it will damage him quickly and leave him beholden to his losses. But if he is neither of these, it will stay with him and slowly tear away at whatever happiness may be left in him, until he is no longer good to anyone; least of all, himself.

The war in Afghanistan was behind him now he said to himself as he trudged down the winding, ancient stairs of his apartment building and out into the bright New York City sunshine. It had been many months since his last tour and he had a damaged leg thanks to an IED to prove he was never going back again. His health insurance had been cancelled when it was deemed too costly and his physical therapy bills began to mount.

His father had called him a coward for not wanting to re-enlist for another go round and he had told his father in no uncertain English what to do with himself and for that, his father said he never wanted to speak to him again.

That was fine by Jack. There were many people he would never speak to again. His comrades, his brothers in arms, most of them dead and buried in the sands of places he couldn't pronounce. Some were nearly enough dead for what the war did to them and there were others he once knew but did not know any more. Old friends, ex-girlfriends, ghosts of the past of another life gone by, scattered to the winds.

With the sun setting, he limped the barren wintry streets as his mind kicked back to a predawn raid in Dahaneh, a southern city in the Helmand province where fighting had been especially brutal. The area was renowned for its profitable opium trade and the Taliban used this knowledge to their advantage and utilized the proceeds to buy munitions and supplies. Jack's outfit had planned to sever the

supply lines for the insurgents and cut smuggling routes to and from Western Pakistan but the operation of leapfrogging along the mud brick military installations proved ineffective at best. The Taliban had been able to recoup their losses and move on, seemingly unscathed. The insurgents had intended to stay and put up one hell of a fight and as a result, the town was considered a deadlock and his outfit was shipped elsewhere.

As much as the Afghan conflict was a war like any other quagmire, it was an armchair war, fought not by those who understood combat, but who understood politics, sound bites and public relations. They wanted to sell this war to the American and British people like any other product that killed such as tobacco or alcohol, but like many other things during such economically tough times, no one was buying what they were selling.

The only thing the war taught him was how to kill and how have no conscience while doing it. He had hunted with his father as a boy and it was the only thing that they seemed to tolerate doing together. Other times he just couldn't see eye to eye with the old man. His father had taught him the basics of how to kill but the military showed him how to perfect it and enjoy while doing it.

Returning to civilian life only exacerbated the inadequacy he felt in living with his father and his inability to find steady employment did not help his readjustment. With his one good leg and countless future surgeries to restore the other, employers were reluctant to take the risk to hire someone who would potentially be out on medical leave months at a time. Through his old less-than-stellar military contacts, he finally secured a position in one of the oldest business enterprises in Manhattan, the Giambini Crime Family; serving as the point man for hits that required a person with extremely tactical experience. In that, he needed to get in and get out without getting caught.

What he brought to the table were

## **The Persistence of Memory—Joseph Grant (cont.)**

night vision goggles and the various assortment of body armor and Kevlar vests; all Level III or better and enough arms to bring down a medium-sized police force, if needed. He likened the hits to being back in combat and thought of New York City as the ultimate killing zone.

At first, he was perfect in his work, gleaming front page coverage over the actual war itself, even if it was anonymous. This pleased him. As much as the war had given him purpose and direction, it also took him away from who he was as a man and what he truly wanted to be. The war had changed all of that. Now killing was all was any good at, he knew. They drilled it into your head day and night until you thought of nothing else.

When word came through that the Family had just gotten a lucrative secret contract in order to sidestep some lengthy prison time from the Feds, Jack was elated. This meant big money for him, no doubt, he beamed, until he was given the details. He was to infiltrate military installations within the U.S. and take out the military leaders the U.S. Government deemed hostile to the war effort. General who had spoken out against the escalation and spoke of ending the war altogether.

The proposal of the job shocked him, but his government contacts informed him that it was not the President or Congress who ran the show but the military industrial complex overseen by the Pentagon, FBI, CIA, NSA and a few other shadowy government organizations, which were better off kept that way, they smiled. Congress and the

Administration either took the credit or the hit come election day.

As Jack took out General after General and other military spokespeople, headlines screamed for justice. Some news reports blamed the CIA, while others blamed terrorists. All wanted someone to pay. Then came the directive that Jack was to take out his old CO. He balked outright. The man had been a father figure to him and had virtually taken him from a reject and made him the man he was today. On at least one occasion he saved Jack's life in Afghanistan. Jack never knew how to repay him and now they wanted him to kill him? The guy was the father he never had. Jack refused the job, saying he'd sooner kill his own father. In Jack's line of work, this made him a very dangerous commodity to those involved. He was considered unreliable and unofficially Public Enemy Numero Uno which led to his life on the run. He not only now had the concerted efforts of the Mafia and the U.S. Government and military industrial community but also many facets of the CIA, FBI and paramilitary groups hot on his boot heels.

For now, he would head down to Mexico where for a few thousand American dollars a man like him could just simply disappear. Try as he might, his mind always fell back to his old life. He had to condition himself to stop remembering. He was aware that memory continually sunk you if you let it and that he would need to stay focused in the present in order to stay alive. It was all he had. He would need to forget in order to fight another day.

## **Manuscript—Andrew Taylor**

At Liverpool Central Station a girl  
reads music manuscript to  
herself hums the tunes while  
a fast train passes by

## **Dementia—Gary Beck**

The madman looks  
in his fixated way,  
with one eye at himself  
and the other  
at whatever  
he can perceive.

### **Paper Butterflies—William Doreski**

Every spring I sketch and cut out  
paper butterfly wings to paste  
to bits of pasta. Shameless,

I pray over these constructions  
until they animate and fly.  
Maybe they even reproduce

by laying tiny pasta eggs  
that erupt into caterpillars  
tasty with marinara sauce,

but I'm not sure. I've done this  
since kindergarten. Miss Benton,  
target of the principal's lust,

taught us to make these butterflies,  
tinting the wings with finger paint.  
Those felt too encrusted to fly,

so I tried using colored pencils  
and made them flimsy enough  
to glide. Then I tried prayer,

being a little blasphemer,  
and touched some pagan spirit  
that responded with the humor

the ancient Romans so admired.  
So for many years my butterflies  
have scattered over the planet,

flapping among genuine flowers  
with whatever purpose lengths  
of penne can muster. Collectors

like Nabokov must be astonished  
when they net one of my examples  
of magical will. Museums

probably contain specimens  
of these fragile improbables.  
I'd rather not acknowledge

my authorship. Why compete  
with genuine creation except  
as critique? Snip and paste and pray,

and the creatures flutter on the breeze,  
scattering like propaganda  
to diminish a summer day.

### **My Daddy—Peycho Kanev**

daddy was always very sick  
laying In the bed shaking  
and cursing  
with rivers of sweat pouring out  
of him

the doctors came to our house often,  
and after they'd leave  
my mother would lock herself  
in the bathroom. I'd hear  
he cry and  
the soft prayers

one night dad called me with his  
weak voice:

You know,son,  
there is one scary monster under my bed.  
go to the basement and bring my shot-gun  
so I can kill it

I did.

he said;  
now, son,  
go out of the room.

I closed the door  
and then I heard the

shot.

I ran to my mom with  
yells of joy:

Mommy, mommy,  
daddy killed the monster.

### **Evolution—Gary Beck**

I try to sleep  
but cannot rest,  
consumed by nuclear dreams,  
mushrooming  
through my fiery brain,  
a reminder  
of civilization  
gone entirely mad.

## Never Saw You Coming—William Doreski

Dad always claimed he never saw me coming. He insisted he never knew Mom was pregnant until the day she dropped me. He liked to joke about it—the baby no one knew was coming. Mom didn't like that sick streak in his humor, but I did, and tried to get him to make sick jokes for my friends. Now life had made a sick joke out of Dad, and visiting him in the retirement home was about as cheery as being trapped in a haunted house.

"What's happening, Dad?" I never knew whether to take a man-to-man tone, a bubbly adolescent tone, or a sneer. His reactions were so unpredictable. He'd laugh at anything, or he'd get all sullen and hurt-looking. None of his poses convinced me.

Dad turned from the TV and faced me with a mass of wrinkles. He looked much older than his seventy-one years, too feeble to live alone, too shaky and sight-dimmed; but Mom had gone with cancer a few years before, and Gloria and I had no room in our two-bedroom apartment, not with two kids screaming for more space.

"Ha! Never saw you coming." His smile rumbled like a latex mask.

I nodded to acknowledge the nurse brushing past with Dad's insulin. She asked him where he wanted it. I didn't catch his answer and didn't want to watch. I hated the thought of needles, especially when stuck in somebody right in front of me. The canned air smelled of disinfectant and feces. Good thing Dad had no sense of smell. Cocaine years ago had ruined his mucus membranes and taste buds, so he had stayed thin and indifferent to stinks. "What's on TV?" I asked as the nurse sashayed out of the room.

"Some crap. Some fool trying to win a million bucks, like that's going to solve his life." Dad switched off the ugly institutional machine. He leaned back at so oblique an angle he was almost horizontal. "You're like that, Bobby. You think money's the answer to everything."

"Are you kidding? You think I went into the fire department for money? We haven't had a raise in two years, and the taxpayers think we already make too much. Most guys are working two jobs. Come on,

Dad." I'd been in the department for fifteen years and had moved up to lieutenant, but the pay still didn't go far.

"I know, but you still think money can fix everything. That's why you went to work for the city."

Dad's teasing sometimes got ugly, but this was silly. Work for the city—like I was Honey Fitz or Curley dipping into the public trust. "You expect me to quit? I got kids to support, and a wife. What should I be doing? Teaching Latin, like you? A dead language? Come on, Dad, you know I'm not a book reader or anything. Besides, you worked for the city too, didn't you? Don't teachers work for the city?"

"Yeah, a wife," Dad snickered. "Hey Gloria's fine and all, nice woman and good mother. But between the two of you, you could spend a million bucks in a day, for sure. Yeah, I know, I know, life's more expensive now. This place costs eight hundred a day. Can you believe it? Eight hundred a day."

"Yeah, I know, I filled out the paperwork, remember?"

"Anyway, I'm glad you're here. Something I wanted to tell you. What was it? Oh yeah, I want you to have the house. Time to sign it over to you." He looked pleased with himself for feeling so generous.

"House? Are you kidding? The state made you sell it to pay for this place. You knew that. You signed the sales agreement. Last year. Had to empty your bank accounts, spend everything on this place. Then with everything gone they put you on the dole." Pacing around the tiny room, I tried to calm myself. Dad was losing it for sure. He had made such a fuss about selling—how could he forget? He even threatened the social worker who was helping us with the Medicaid application. I looked carefully at him. He didn't look right. His pupils were dilated. Stroke? Oh no, not a stroke. "Jesus, Dad. How're you getting coke in here?"

Dad tapped the side of his nose. "Connections, Bobby, connections. Everything in life is connections. Connections and just showing up, as Woody Allen says. Want a sniff? Check the hallway first, make sure

## Never Saw You Coming—William Doreski (cont.)

nobody's coming." He opened the bottom drawer of the nightstand and took out a plastic bag.

"Put it away. Are you crazy? How're you paying for it? Come on, Dad. Who sold you this?" I grabbed the bag and stuck it in my pocket. "I'm dumping this stuff. You must be nuts, snorting coke with your health problems. It's lunchtime anyway. Somebody's coming with the trays."

Dad laughed and flicked on the TV. "You were always such a little prig. Come on; don't tell me you've never tried it. What do you do with yourself out there in the burbs? Don't you ever want to have some fun in your snotty little middle-class life?"

"Hey, I'm a firefighter. I can't stick that crap up my nose. Smoke's bad enough. This stuff'll freeze your heart. Look, Dad, I'm responsible for you now. You can't be a hippie all your life. Time to grow up. I know being stuck in here isn't much fun, but you're gonna get yourself in trouble."

"Trouble? What do you know about trouble? I've been in jail a dozen times. What've you been doing all your life? Making little babies and eating fat-burgers and grease-fries. Give me that bag, will you?"

"You've been in jail, yeah. And now you're bragging about it? You think you're Al Capone? You spend a night or two in the slammer because you got busted at an antiwar rally in the Sixties. You spent another night sobering up after you wrecked the car. And one more night when the cops busted up the riot on the Common. Don't make yourself out to be another Bugsy Siegel. You're just an Abbie Hoffman wannabe."

How did I get stuck with hippie parents? When I was ten Dad was long-haired, tie-dyed, and draped with love beads. Mom was worse—she wore a fringed Indian outfit and painted her face with weird streaks. My friends thought they were nuts. Nobody else in Roslindale had parents like mine. Not that they weren't fun, but they weren't like real parents. Dad could be really funny, and Mom was sweet, but kids like stability and parents who look like everybody else's. Most of my friends' fathers were Vietnam vets, and their

mothers worked as teachers' aides or went into the city to Hancock or Liberty Mutual. The neighbors hated my parents and thought they were Communists, which in fact they were. It's a wonder nobody burned down our house. I used to lie awake worrying that somebody would. Maybe that was why I went into the fire department.

A heavy woman arrived with a tray of processed slop in Technicolor. For eight hundred dollars a day you'd think they could do better with the food. "Dad, I'll go outside while you eat. I need some real air."

"You sure do." He winked and turned away. As I left he was muttering something to the heavy woman. I hoped he was complaining about the food. I strolled down the long, quiet, beige-carpeted corridor. No wheelchairs, no empty-eyed wanderers in bathrobes, none of the clutter of the nursing home Mom died in. Dad was getting deluxe treatment. I was surprised the state would pay for such a fancy home.

Outside the air smelled sweet with early summer. Sparrows flirted in the hedge. The parking lot full of cars gleamed like a lacquered metal ocean. A police cruiser slid to a stop. Two cops got out. I knew one, Punky Moran. We'd been in school together. The other looked familiar, too.

"Bobby, hey, sorry about this, probably nothing. We gotta call about you. Gotta search you." Punky looked apologetic but eager. Cops always look eager even when they try to look cool.

"Hey, whatever." I braced myself against the brick wall, being a cooperative fellow, but then remembered the bag of cocaine. Oh crap.

The other cop, Jerry, I think was his name, yanked the bag from my pocket. "Hey, here it is."

Here it is? He expected to find it. Dad! Goddamn. This was some joke. What the hell. Punky cuffed me, steered me into the back seat. "Jeeze, Bobby, what you fooling around with this stuff for?"

Could I say I took it from Dad? Why hadn't I just flushed it down the toilet? Dad had to know this would ruin me. The union

## Never Saw You Coming—William Doreski (cont.)

wouldn't help me, not for a drug bust. No job, no pension. No nothing. Sweat chilled me all over. My body felt too fragile to live another moment.

Jerry drove to the far end of the lot and stopped. Punky, kneading the little bag, looked as thoughtful as somebody named Punky could look. "This ain't you, Bobby. What's your dad playing at? Why'd he rat you out?"

"He thinks he's funny," I said.

Punky emptied the bag onto the pavement. The wind whisked the white

powder away. "I'd get a new dad if I were you." He opened the rear door and let me out. "Been meaning to say that for years. Guy's a nut case. I mean, I like him and all, but I'm glad he ain't my dad."

I watched the cruiser merge into traffic, slithering like a shark through a school of mackerel, then returned to the retirement home and pushed open the door. No more jokes, Dad. The kid he hadn't expected was gonna have his say.

## We Bury Her In Us—David McLean

we bury her here in us  
like a torment, like a torturer  
and a golden ring,  
scented memory

maybe, and hazy weddings  
when wombs said yes to death,  
when words failed and fell from the head,  
like Chucky and Tiffany

wed again, but dating dead men  
nevertheless. we are zombies  
and have corpses enough to eat  
forever, and yet we bury her here

like we bury love,  
like squirrels bury nuts

## This Boy—Regina Green

this boy of ours  
non-existent from his first mis-conception  
my arctic eyes  
your head of curls  
a seed upon a stony path

he would have run and managed to fall in love  
given me grandchildren  
sat up at nights whispering mother

it is no use  
now  
there are only footfalls of the slightest shuffle  
from here to the bathroom and back  
a lying down  
and a ticking of the clock

he might have made me proud

## The Decision –Edward Rodosek

The wind.

All he feels is a violent blowing of wind.

The loud harsh noise of wind invades his brain and ousts from it all the others thoughts. Only the astonishment remains how the blowing could be so brutal--the wind is literally overturning him. He can't either think, or feel.

But he has to think on something, for God's sake!

What are those fleeting oblong shadows occurring close to him and then vanishing upwards swift as lighting? Why are they rushing faster and faster? Must he be afraid of the police, of the court of justice, of hell--because he'd shoot the villain who'd taken from him his sweetheart, the only sense of his life? What are those tiny dots down there--then spots, then contours--that are growing and growing?

Or must he ask himself only--has he made the right deci-

### **La Luna—Leslie Moon**

La Luna is clothed  
in a garment of shimmery white  
She dances and sways  
to the starry ritornelle  
She gazes over her shoulder  
She catches her reflection  
She beams at her radiant beauty  
All who gaze upon her delight and marvel at her

La Luna is enshrouded in a covering of darkness  
She is surrounded by silence  
She shivers in emptiness  
No audience marvels at her beauty  
No chorus sings as she dances  
She is alone in the loneliest of places - The Cosmos

### **I've been dreaming in the back room—G David Schwartz**

I've been dreaming I the back room  
I'm not sure what that means  
But I pleased to tell you  
I sure do like those dreams

### **Wine Girl—Ben Nardolilli**

You're happy to see me,  
Even though I'm only buying  
Two bottles of the cheapest stuff you have,  
No problem,  
You ask about my evening  
Two bottles,  
You think I'm going to have company.

With your tan skin  
And your dark hair, you're perfect  
To appear on one of these labels,  
I'd rather look at you  
And swirl your image  
Than some chateau,  
Or deal with the metaphors  
Of peaks, hills, and valleys  
Where small grapes wait to be plucked.

### **Burning Rapunzel—Nannie**

i.  
i feel like i'm stuck in a toaster  
and my rapunzel hair is too  
flammable to save me  
and you're the prince who decided  
to make scones, instead

ii.  
how i wanted to tell you  
chapped lips don't look good on frowns  
and freckles are just pin-pricks  
where your skin doesn't quite reach  
[and brown eyes are the dead forests  
oceans decided to forget]

but then i remembered  
i look the same

iii.  
we could sit in bed all morning  
and draw each other  
highlighter smiles  
and pretend that they really are  
permanent like our eyes

or do you scratch them out  
as well?

iv.  
your cheekbones didn't curve  
the right way, anyway

### **ELL Room Window— Elizabeth Kate Switaj**

aggressive exotic eucalyptus  
finger leaves lit green against  
foreign blue sky & bright  
holds up the mottled brown  
immigrant—sparrow song  
unheard above bus drone  
by brick church  
w/ rainbow banner  
& half-hour bells