

# Front Porch Review

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A Walk into Town  
- Susan Myrick

We live a block west of our town which is easy walking distance to the library, pharmacy, grocer, post office, book store, coffee shop, and bank. Younger residents congregate at the ice cream and sandwich shops. More fashionable residents than I enter and leave designer shops. The streets are busy with comings and goings.

Today, a warm day in May, I walk past the playground where three slim, stylish and freshly graduated eighth-grade girls fold themselves inside a red and black wooden train engine. They cross their bare legs, hold cell phones, and share stories in serious tones. The girls' limbs, so newly long, wriggle in a tangle inside the small cab.

A boy mows the green lawn the way a child rides his bike for the first time. His father follows him with directions the way a father coaches his child to ride without training wheels. "Mow closer to the tree!" he insists.

An alley, lined with gardens and playing children, leads home from town and the park. One of the young has grown from small and ball-playing into oversized pants and cigarette smoking behind the garage.

The ordinary traffic of people is likely to be lost to memory the way a camera lens, left open, preserves the image of stationary structures while erasing the people in motion among them. Before the landscape of a village changes significantly, children grow up and parents grow old. Young families will move in to take their places. A walk into town is not just an errand; it is an opportunity to preserve – to paint fleeting moments in words.

Andy

- Patricia Bass



Observations from My Bench  
- Lois Wagner

As time allows, I enjoy sitting on my backyard bench and considering my surroundings. Across the yard my Italian neighbor's six-foot wooden fence allowed me to improve my landscaping – clematis vines grasp it with purple-flowered fingers. Yet this fence denies me easy access to casual visits as it is too tall to my liking. Still Candida and I do enjoy chatting over it, disembodied voices just like Wilson and Tim in the TV show Home Improvement. Do good fences really make good neighbors?

My grandchildren's playhouse sits near the back fence to my left, and I find joy in watching them play. Once upon a time, I looked forward to having my grandbabies come and visit Grandma for sleepovers, visits and playtime. What I did not plan for was having my grandchildren and their parents, my daughter Carrie and her husband Wes, living with me for an extended period. The Recession and three babies in quick succession have been obstacles to their leading an on-the-tracks life. *Mi casa es su casa.*

My grass needs cutting, and there is still the spot where the grass just does not seem to grow. Could it be there my children had their beloved sandbox? The one built by their Dad, with all their names painted on the sides. I see them playing, building castles and roads in the sand. A breeze blows above my head, and my wind chimes play a lovely tune. John, my husband, does not care for chimes but he humors me because he knows they bring me contentment. Found: one good man.

Creeping Charlie keeps wending its way into my yard from my back-neighbor's yard. I attack it once again and notice my Lilies of the Valley encroaching into her territory. I cannot help but wonder which offends more. I see Celine out one day, we chat over her split rail fence, and I forget the Creeping Charlie and think about how nice it is to visit with her.

I see the birds at my feeders nibbling at the seed the squirrels left behind for them. They seem to be happy with the leftovers.

I glance to my right towards our deck and remember the many happy summer meals shared at our table. Most enjoyable are the Sunday breakfasts with John where we linger over the Tribune and laugh, "We'll never get anything done at this rate." Oh, the joy of being lazy.

A look to my left – there are my lovely lilac bushes. Their beautiful smell, with us for such a short time, reminds me of the glories of spring. How proud my son Chris was to purchase these for me for Mother's Day many years ago.

Behind me is the Monzella's home, no fence here. Jackie, my younger daughter, has been a big sister to their children since they moved in eighteen years ago. Their driveway has been the scene of many of our family graduation parties. Their dog likes to visit my yard; it must be the shade. We have been blessed with caring neighbors, our second families.

I observe much from my bench. My yard may be small, but it is sufficient for my needs. It provokes a lifetime of memories. Life is indeed good.



Admiring the Cherubs  
- Patricia Bass

We take you to the Andy Warhol show  
you're squirming in my arms  
while I stroll and gaze  
at silk-screened red and green  
portraits of Marilyn –  
they cover half a wall.

We move into the balloon room  
and you stop wiggling.  
On a bench by the wall we sit  
and people wander through  
while seven silver pillows float  
helium-bloated, to and fro  
within a billowing tent.

Suddenly  
like a glimmering fish, one dives at you  
nosing up to your nose! You shriek!  
Oh, isn't it neat! We're laughing, lingering  
quite a while before we're ready to move.

The next room has cows – purple cows  
on a chartreuse ground  
all over the walls! You are only two; cows  
mean nothing to you, but I, your grandma,  
think they are grand.

What a day! Near the exit admiring sketches  
of fat pink cherubs, I hear  
a man's voice behind me softly say  
"You're beautiful!"  
I turn to see him smiling at you  
you're sleepy and don't seem to care, but I blush!  
For a heartbeat I 'm 25 again.

# Ad Hoc Scabble

- Arthur Altman



December  
- Josh Hess

At the hospital today I sat watching all the nurses run to and from rooms. Like mice. Some of them smiled, and I laughed. They smiled still. I laughed more.

A little boy with a sad face sat beside me. I wanted to ask him why he was sad. I didn't. Instead, I got up to look at the candy machine. All colors, all kinds.

A nurse walked by and smiled.

We left to go get my car. The drive was long, it seemed. And when we got there, I saw the basement. I saw a lot today. It was odd. It was new to me. But it was a trip well-taken. I think I was there for someone...I think.

The door closed as I walked to my car. I forgot that I left it running. It was warm though.

At home, I sat to write this, right now. It took me a few minutes to think about my day. I wonder what was wrong with that little boy. I hope he's okay.

Walking Tour

- Bill Martin







Fox Hunt  
- Dennis Beard

Sonny felt himself being shaken out of a deep, dreamless sleep. “Come on, Bud. If you’re going fox hunting, you got to get up and get dressed. We leave in twenty minutes.” It was a quarter to four. The shotguns, the shells, the warm hunting coats, fur-lined caps with ear flaps, and other necessities had all been loaded into the car the night before. Margie was making sandwiches for their lunch and a thermos of hot coffee to keep them warm and awake. The plan was to drive south to Gladpatch and have breakfast. Then east over some of the worst dirt roads and through some of the muddiest river bottoms in Illinois to reach the site of the hunt.

Margie was screwing the cap on the thermos when Sonny walked into the kitchen. “You watch what your father does, and do the same. Be careful. Lot of hunters where you’ll be – maybe hundreds. Not all of them watch what they’re doing. Some’ll be drinking. Dean, don’t you drink and hunt!”

“All right, Margie. We’ll watch it – keep the anti-freeze level as low as we can. Come on, Sonny. Let’s get out of here before she makes us take the pledge.”

Margie wanted to throw her arms around Sonny as if it were the last time she was going to see him, but she held back. He was a year out of high school and no baby.

They picked up Ed, Dean’s faithful hunting partner and were in Gladpatch in time for breakfast. Dean had to shake Sonny out of another sleep. There was among seven or eight cars all parked perpendicular to Garver’s Cafe, the only place in town to eat. Graver’s took up two crumbling store fronts in a row of buildings, half of them vacant.

They walked in and were hit with the thick smell of hot grease, coffee, and cigarette smoke. The three slid into an empty booth, Sonny facing Dean and Ed. The paint on the walls was faded and layered with cooking grease and dust. It was impossible to tell what color it had been. The table top was a mass of carved names and initials. Sonny opened his menu, but couldn’t take his eyes off a freshly carved heart inscribed, “Lisa, let’s be more than friends.” That was all it took to get his imagination rolling.

“What’ll you men have this morning?” Sonny heard the voice of an angel. He looked up and saw her mischievous eyes focused on Ed and his dad. She was slender and yet voluptuous where she needed to be, possibly a year or two older than Sonny, with long reddish hair and an open, friendly face; and there was that something about her – the spell of a country siren. He’d known several girls, was going steady now, but this was different.

“I’ll take the Hunter’s Special and coffee.” Dean was a man of average height, a little overweight, but handsome with graying hair, and infectiously friendly.

“Bacon or sausage?”

“Sausage.”

“Want those eggs scrambled?”

“Basted.”

“Okay, three eggs basted.”

“Give me the same,” echoed Ed. He was tall and lanky. His eyes were sunken, and his

cheeks hollow. His thin lips fit tight around his teeth. There was a thick shock of black hair combed straight back. He spoke little but was quick to smile and easy to know once past the severe looks.

She turned to Sonny, a stripling of nineteen who had inherited his dad's good looks. For a moment the playfulness left her eyes, and they were a deep, soft brown. Then, she flashed her smile and said, "I know these two from way back. Well, maybe a year anyway. But you're new. I'm Lisa, you got a name?"

"Sonny. I'm Sonny. Glad to know you, ah, ah, Lisa."

"What you having for breakfast this morning?"

"Make mine pancakes and sausage. I'll have coffee, too."

"Coming up." And she hurried away.

Sonny hoped his interest in her was not too obvious to Ed and his dad. "She's a really nice waitress, Dad. This place is so dingy, who'd expect her?"

"Take my word for it, Sonny. Don't go soft on her."

"What do you mean? This is a long way from home. Hard to take her out or anything like that." But he was thinking she was only an hour and a half or so from Greenhaven – didn't seem far.

"Just take my word for it," said Dean.

Lisa was soon back with three plates, which she flung onto the table with an ease Sonny thought amazing. Her swooping right arm was as pleasurable to watch as a well done quarterback sneak or a double play. Then she slid into the booth next to him, and turning those playful eyes on the two men, she asked, "So, you guys headed for the big fox hunt today? Would you rather chase the fox or catch her?" She laughed, and they did, too.

Sonny didn't laugh.

"If you put it that way, don't you mean vixen?" said Ed, eye lid raised.

"Yeah, I suppose we are talking about a vixen."

"Any Elvis in the jukebox?" Sonny asked.

"Yeah, *Heart Break Hotel* and a couple of others, but they never get played Saturday mornings," she answered.

"Lawrence Welk crowd," said Sonny, glancing at the collection of hunters.

Lisa looked at him and winked.

"I got an order up," she said and was gone.

"Bring the check," Dean called behind her.

She was quick with the check. "Well, Sonny, how do you like Gladpatch? You like the girls down here in the country? Are we as nice as the girls up where you live?"

"Come on. Let's go," said Dean. He left a tip, then they walked up front to the cash register and paid. Then out into the fresh air.

"Dad, there, at the end, that Lisa seemed like a hard case. At first, I liked her. Then all at once she turned strange."

"Sonny, that girl isn't the right kind for you, and she knows it. She seen you'd gone soft

on her and was trying to scare you off. In her own way, she's a decent sort. You can see that. Most people are like that, you know – we're all decent, even though we ain't."

Dean opened his car trunk and pulled a fifth of Old Taylor from under the hunting jackets. He took a swig and passed the bottle to Ed. "Sonny, it's going to be damned cold out there today. A swallow of this might help if you want it."

"I better not. The stuff makes me sleepy."

"Okay, it's up to you," Dean said, and he felt some satisfaction with his boy.

The hunters who assembled at the starting point were an alarming bunch, mostly rustics with old shotguns showing signs of misuse and neglect. Some weapons were already loaded as if their owners were expecting a fox to appear in the midst of the crowd. Although the use of strong drink was forbidden, bottles of whisky were passed around with man after man taking a swig as fortification against the cold. There was a good bit of guffawing about the slim chances of any fox surviving the coming onslaught.

The three of them got into their heavy coats and caps. Their citified hunting gear set them apart from most of the others, farmers wearing the same clothes they had on when they milked cows earlier that morning.

Sonny turned to Dean. "Dad, as that ring of hunters tightens up, what's going to keep one guy from shooting at a fox and accidentally hitting someone on the other side of the circle?"

"The main thing is, Sonny, we're supposed to stop walking before we get within range of the oncoming men. Shotguns don't reach out that far. The other thing is, everyone's got to use common sense. The fox is on the ground. If you shoot at him, you'll be shooting at the ground twenty-five or thirty feet out. Just hope everyone is careful that way. But no doubt about it, this is dangerous."

"You boys like a swig of this juice?" offered an old farmer with an open smile. "It's a frosty morning. Where you from?"

"Thanks, anyway. We had a shot right after breakfast. That oughta hold us. We're from up in Greenhaven. Glad to meet you. Name's Dean. What's yours?" Dean made friends with farmers because he was naturally friendly and because he was always on the lookout for places to hunt birds.

"I'm Parker, Gale Parker. I farm a hundred-sixty just west of Cartersburg. Maybe ten miles from here."

"You're right about one thing, Parker. It's cold out here this morning. I wish they'd get this thing started. How was the quail hunting over your way this year?"

"I heard they got a few. Don't do much hunting myself." Parker passed his bottle to his partner, Tom, who got the last swallow.

The men were ordered into trucks to be hauled to their starting places. Sonny, Dean and Ed climbed in with Parker and fifteen others, and the truck began to move. The raw wind penetrated their jackets and stiffened their faces with cold. It was a dark, overcast day with two or three inches of snow on the ground. Out over the fields broken corn stalks protruded from the snow and wavered in the breeze. In places the wind had swept the snow from the tops of the

furrows leaving black ridges against the stark white. The men hunkered down against the cold, icy fingers wrapped around the frozen shotgun barrels, holding them upright, butts against the bed of the truck.

“That’s a nice old shotgun you got there, Parker,” said Ed. “Looks like it’s seen some use.”

“It’s a beauty right enough,” said Parker. “L.C. Smith. Been in the family for three generations.”

Dean leaned close to Sonny, and said in his ear, “You keep your distance from Parker and that damned shotgun of his. That thing’s old as Methuselah. The s.o.b. is as likely as not to blow up in his face, and I don’t want you near it. You hear?”

“I hear.”

The truck stopped every hundred feet or so to drop off a hunter. Parker jumped off followed by Tom. Then Dean, Sonny, and Ed dropped off in succession. They all stood along the road until somewhere a signal must have been given, because the men began to move into the field ahead. If a man looked right and left, he might see thirty men or so all in a line. Each one could only imagine that he was part of a huge ring, each walking toward the unseen center of an imaginary circle. It was quiet except for the crunch of feet on the crusted snow and on the frozen corn stalks lying in the furrows. There was the soft rustle of the brittle leaves clinging to broken stalks still half standing. Each man, with a half-frozen finger near the trigger of his gun, lusted for a shot at a fox.

There are a lot of guys out here...gotta duck under that barbed wire...this field is as barren as the last...no fox hiding here...Frannie as good as proposed to me last night...feeling I got for Lisa isn’t gone...Frannie seems like nothin’, now...never was anything...got to see Lisa again even if it means drivin’ to Gladpatch for breakfast...what’s that...fox...look at ‘im go...straight away...a perfect shot...over the fence...tail flying...there he goes...he’s in my sights...why don’t I shoot...dad’s yelling, ‘shoot, shoot...dammit...’he’s into that draw...too much brush...never hit him now. What a beautiful animal!

“What the hell’s the matter with you?” Dean bellowed. “We come all the way down here! You’re the only one has a shot at that fox – a perfect shot as far as I could see – and you don’t even pull the goddam trigger!”

“Yeah, I’m pissed at myself – don’t know why I didn’t shoot.”

“Well, he’s running now, won’t get far,” shouted Ed. “One of the boys’ll nail him.”

“If another one gets up, I’ll get him.”

“Damn little chance of that,” his dad said. “Once in a great while, little buddy, once in a great while, you get a shot like that.”

“Well, don’t let it bother you.”

The hunt resumed. Noon time came, and they ate their sandwiches as they walked. There was the sound of distant gunfire, but Sonny, Dean, and Ed saw no more foxes. Presently, a truck pulled into a muddy lane beside the field, and the men climbed in and squatted low out of the wind. The sun was going down, and it was colder than ever. Sonny thought of Lisa.

“You the kid that missed a shot at that fox?” said Tom, the man with old Parker. “They oughtn’t of let you hunt unless you mean business. These damned animals are eating our chickens. You know that?”

“Leave him alone, Tom,” said Parker. “Things like that happen.”

“If you’d been walking where I was, Mr. Parker, you’d of nailed him with that long barrel of yours.” said Sonny.

“Good chance of it, boy. Three generations she’s been in the family. But, facts-o-matter is, I’m same as you, didn’t get a shot off all day.”

“I’m so stiff with cold,” Ed grumbled, “I don’t know if I’ll be able to climb down off this truck.”

It was dusk when they got back to the starting place.

“Come on over to the car, Parker.” Dean was in a good mood. “I got a bottle of good Kentucky whiskey in the trunk. You too, Tom.”

“We’ll just take you up on that one, won’t we, Tom? – after a day like this.”

Sonny thought, It’s amazing the way dad has made a friend of old Parker and crabby Tom. Mom was right when she said, “Watch your dad and do what he does.”

Buck’s Riverside Tavern was not on the way home, but that’s where they headed, “Best steak and pan-fried potatoes anywhere,” Ed said, as he slid forward in the seat and let his head fall back.

“Best waitress, too,” said Dean.

They drove in silence, Sonny fantasizing about Lisa. He compared her to Frannie, the girl in Greenhaven who was wanting to marry him, and who had said to him, “Here I am, eighteen, and not even married.” He’d thought, “I’m nineteen and haven’t once thought of marriage. That is until I met Lisa. Man, if this isn’t ridiculous.”

Dean pulled his car into the nearly full lot at the Riverside and turned off the lights. The tavern was housed in a weathered clapboard building with an odd set of gables and eaves. Said to be a hundred-forty years old and to have once been a stagecoach way station, the place was situated on a county road a few hundred feet from an iron trestle over a river. The first floor was given over to a bar, a dining room, and a kitchen. The back wall was composed of small-paned windows overlooking a deck and the river. The interior, including the walls, was pine, stained and gone dark with age. The rustic effect appealed to sportsmen.

Walking through the door, Sonny said, “Listen to that music, Dad. They got a jukebox.”

Ed remarked, “Looks like the tables are full. We’re going to have to wait at the bar, which ain’t such a bad thing.”

“I’m going over by that fireplace,” said Sonny. “My toes are frozen,” and he walked into the dining room and stood close to the blackened stone hearth, looking dreamily into the flames.”

“Hi. Glad to see you guys here tonight.”

He snapped to and turned at the sound of Lisa’s voice. “I’m glad to see you, too.”

She thought, Look at that weary face light up, and he’s leaning so far forward, he’s going

to fall into my tits. “Gotta run. Busy night. Catch you later,” and she was gone.

He looked up to see his dad waving to him; their table was ready. “I shoulda told you, Sonny, Lisa waits tables here on weekend nights”

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t exactly sorry to see her.”

Lisa came over, “What’re you guys having tonight?”

“I’ll take the T-bone and American fried potatoes. Make it rare,” said Dean.

“Make mine the same, and another Budweiser,” said Ed.

“Budweiser it is. What about you, Sonny?” She gazed at him, and he thought there was a hint of regret about her.

“Yeah, same for me. Medium, though. Don’t like it too rare. Coke to drink. Thanks.” She wiped a spot from the table, lingering long enough to let their eyes meet.

The conversation turned to the hunt, and Dean said, “Don’t feel too bad about today, Sonny. I used to go fishing at Deep Lake near Spooner in Wisconsin. Some mornings I’d come out of the cabin early and a doe, I think she was almost a pet, would be standing there eating leaves off the bushes. I’d look at those big, soft eyes, and I knew I could never be a deer hunter. I’d glance down at the water and back again, and she’d be gone – not a sound.

“That was a pretty fox today, going over the fence. When I saw you hesitate, I thought about the doe and figured maybe that’s how you felt about the fox.”

“To tell the truth, Dad, I don’t know what I was thinking. I was daydreaming when the fox got up. If I’d been ready and had snapped the gun up and fired, I’d of got him. But I wasn’t quick enough, took time to watch him run. Like you say, he was something to see. I hesitated, and he was over the fence and into the brush.”

“Well, like I said before, them other guys no doubt got him. Once they start to run, there’s no place for ‘em to go,” said Ed.

“I remember you saying that,” said Sonny, “but the more I think about it, the more I hope he got clean away.”

“Food’ll be here in a few minutes, Dad. I’m going to the john.” Sonny left the table.

“You guys want steak?!” Lisa exclaimed, wheeling a cart to their table. “Well, here you are – steak a plenty. Where’s Sonny?”

“He’ll be right back.”

As she put Ed’s plate in front of him, he winked at her, and she whispered, “You guys going to want the special dessert tonight?”

“Hang loose, Lisa,” Ed said. “We got Dean’s boy with us. It’s a touchy situation. We’ll see what happens. Okay?”

“Chances are slim tonight,” Dean said with irritation.

“I’ll play it cool, guys,” said Lisa. “How about another Bud? Want another one, Ed?”

“Yeah.”

“Right. Two Buds.”

Sonny returned. “Hey, Lisa, I’m just in time for the food.”

“Anything to drink?”

“I’m cool.”

“Okay, two Budweisers coming up.” She left.

“That Lisa is the nicest girl I’ve ever come across,” declared Sonny.

Dean’s face darkened and he thought, Jesus, still young and dumb. I shoulda told him. Dammit, how do you tell a kid about this kind of stuff? Who would think he’d care about Lisa? Maybe the best thing is to finish dinner and get the hell out of here.

Except for the occasional request for steak sauce and belch, they ate pretty much in silence. But Sonny had his own thoughts. I’ve got to set up something with her. What if I never see her again? Don’t even have a phone number.

From where he sat Sonny could see that sometimes a waiter or someone from the kitchen put on a coat and went out on the deck. He figured they were taking a break. As he anticipated, Lisa eventually pulled on her jacket and went out the door.

“I’m going to put some money in the jukebox. I’ll be back in a minute,” said Sonny, getting up and heading across the room. He quickly chose three tunes and then ducked out onto the deck, where, as expected, he found Lisa. She was standing at the railing looking out over the dark river. If there was a moon that night, it was behind a thick layer of clouds.

“Hi, Lisa. Cold out here.”

“It is, and you don’t have a coat. You’ll freeze.”

“I suppose this is a little unexpected, but I’d like to come down here when you’ve got time off and take you out. What do you think?”

“Long way to drive, Sonny, to go out with someone you don’t even know. And believe me, you don’t know me.”

“I’ve never met anyone that I felt so certain about so fast. That’s all I can say. I feel like I got to give us a chance. What do you say?”

“I say it can’t work.”

“What do you mean?”

“For one thing, I live sixty-five miles east of here in Indiana. My folks’ farm. I come over here to work on weekends because the tips are high – hunting season, you know. Ha, ha”

“You’re right, that’s a long way. But here’s what, I can tell we hit it off, at least a little. You won’t deny that. If I leave here tonight without a date, I’ll probably never see you again. If we make a date or you give me your number, we at least got a chance. There’s no downside to that. Is there?” She was beautiful in the dim light filtering through the windows. Sonny caught the faint scent of her and was filled with hope.

“Sonny, I’m tied to what I do. This is a crucial time for me. Saving every cent that comes my way. I’m determined to get off the farm – got plans for next September. No time for what you’re talking about.” She took a breath and looked at him, unable to hide a sense of longing. “Look me up in five years. Maybe things’ll have changed – okay? Right now, I gotta get back to work.” For a brief moment their eyes held; she turned to leave.

“Lisa...”

“No.”

He thought her shoulders trembled as she walked through the door.

Their meal almost finished, Ed asked, “Where the hell did Sonny go?”

“Here he comes,” said Dean, watching his boy’s approach. “Looks sad. Bet he’s been talking to Lisa.”

“Bet she didn’t offer him the special dessert,” replied Ed.

Sonny sat down. “I just had a talk with Lisa. Tried to get her to give me a date or her phone number. Turned me down cold.”

“What’d she say?” asked Dean.

“She’s intent on saving money for college, I guess,” said Sonny. “Wants to get off the farm – trapped there, sounds like. Not much of an excuse.”

“You’ll get over it,” said Dean. “You’ve only know her a day.”

Sonny was silent. Dean thought, So he still doesn’t know about her.

Many hunters were leaving, and more than half the tables were empty. While the busboys cleaned, Lisa and the other waiters took dessert orders. “You guys want dessert?” Suddenly there she was again. “We got apple pie and cherry pie – a la mode if you want it. A farmer’s wife near here makes the pies fresh every day, so they’re good.” She looked at each man, her deep brown eyes wide and soft.

Like a doe’s, Sonny thought.

“You want pie, Sonny?” said Dean.

Lisa was standing close enough that Sonny again caught the scent of her.

“Couldn’t eat a bite.”

“No pie, I guess, Lisa. I’ll have coffee, how about you Ed?”

Ed nodded.

“Sonny, coffee?”

“No, none for me.”

“Two coffees, Lisa.”

As she left, Ed observed, “How about that old coot, Parker, with that antique shotgun?”

“I’m just glad he didn’t fire it,” said Dean. “Someday that barrel’s going to blow apart. Not a question of if but when. He seemed like a pretty good guy. Maybe we can cultivate him a little and eventually get to hunt quail on his place.”

“Yeah, next time we’re over that way, we can drive by and see what it looks like.”

Without a word, Lisa set their coffee on the table. The two of them talked on, and the crowd continued to thin.

Sonny sat quietly, his eyes idling on the dwindling activity in the room and then on following Lisa’s movements. When she walked, or brushed crumbs from a table, or carried a tray on her shoulder, there was an inviting, sensual gracefulness about her he could not escape.

Ed fidgeted, rotating his empty coffee cup between his hands. Eventually, he slid his chair back and got up. “There’s a guy at the bar I want to talk to.” And he walked across the room.

Dean tried to talk to Sonny, but Sonny would not respond, one eye over his dad’s

shoulder, watching Ed.

Ed stood at the bar near several other men. Presently Lisa came up to him, leaned in close, and they spoke. Then she went into the kitchen, came out, crossed the dining room and took a stairway to the second floor. Within a few minutes Ed followed.

“You know what, Dad, I’m dead tired. You care if I go out and lay down in the car?”

“Nah, I don’t care. Get some rest. There’s a blanket in the trunk. Here’s the keys. Warm the car up if you want to. We’ll be along in a little while.”

“Thanks.”

Sonny got the blanket from the trunk. He started the engine, turned up the heater, and tried to listen to the radio. As soon as the car was warm enough, he shut off the engine and lay down on the back seat. The blanket would keep the cold away. He thought of that moment on the deck, of the look in her eyes. There was an unaccountable loss of something that seemed so near and so possible. Then, as he succumbed to sleep, he tried to work through what his dad had said, “We’re all decent – even though we ain’t.”

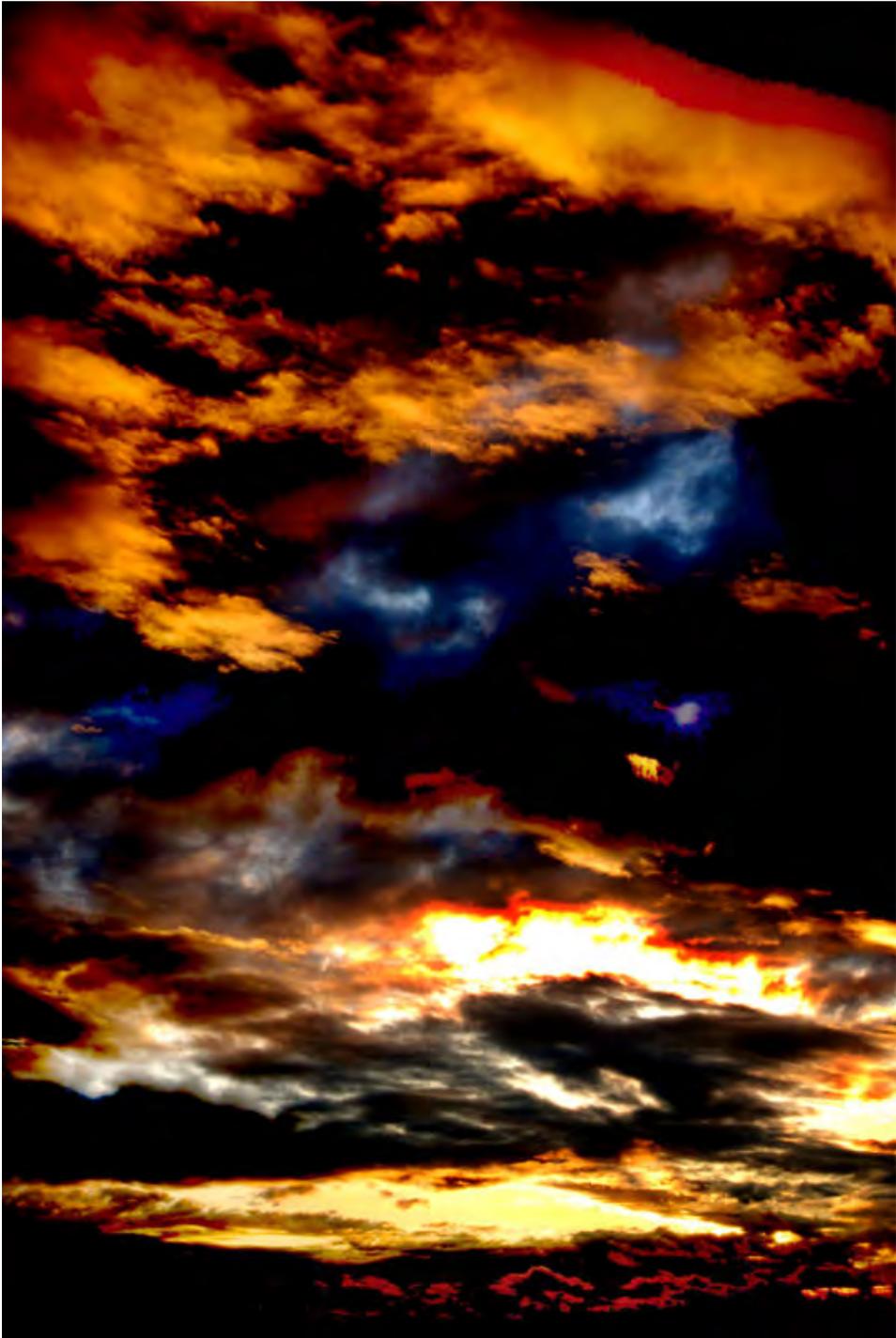
Brooke

- Georgia Roulo



What Caught My Eye

- Elliott Lyon





Global Warming Abatement Decree  
- Joseph Glaser

By executive order  
carbon dioxide  
is declared  
a noxious gas  
...a pollutant  
.....a climate destroyer.

Every citizen  
...and legal resident  
.....and illegal alien  
is hereby ordered  
to observe strict limits  
on its production  
and to restrict  
all uncontrolled discharge  
into the atmosphere.

Those patriots  
who voluntarily cease all respiration  
may do so without charge,  
and their names  
...will be greenly inscribed  
.....on a biodegradable memorial  
honoring enviroheroes who have made  
the ultimate sacrifice.

All continuing breathers  
will be issued petite breathalyzers,  
stylishly worn over the face,  
that are designed  
...to blush bright red  
.....and beep rapidly  
when the personal emission limit  
is exceeded.

For those physically unable  
to exercise adequate control,  
a special indulgence is hereby granted,  
permitting them to channel  
...all inhaling  
.....and exhaling  
through an approved breath-recycling device  
snugly worn on the chest or back.

All should take careful note  
that compliance will be continuously monitored,  
and all persons  
who do not adequately limit their emissions  
may be sentenced to shallow breathing  
...in a hermetically-sealed greenhouse  
.....with respirationally-matched plants.

Finally, stern warning is hereby given  
that those recalcitrant miscreants  
who totally reject their planetary obligations  
are subject to involuntary demetabolization  
.....followed by composting.

# Thinking About You

- Joseph Glaser







The People  
- Jo Stewart

*An Ode to the Americans*

We are The People  
a living organism  
in hues without number drawn  
from the entire globe.

Many gambled with their lives  
to be unyoked, to assemble for  
whatever reason, to work, to pray  
or not pray.

They came for freedom  
in pursuit of elusive happiness  
adventure  
They came for bread  
Their coming an unbroken chain  
to this day  
still risking  
treacherous voyages  
guided by slim hope at best  
their courage fueled by  
propagated tales of fortunes  
without number in a new world  
certain with the gambler's  
sense of surety.

Some came yoked, snatched from  
primal villages, betrayed by kith,  
man-handled by strangers. Their  
voyage not a risk of choice but a  
heart-breaking, back-breaking  
voyage to be placed as choice  
commodity, denuded  
of recognizable words  
of knowing ways, no home  
a cacophony  
of the marketplace.

On these shores lived  
those who it is said came from  
the east. In bands of  
kith and kin, without the wheel

without the gun, hunted and  
lived off the land, encroached  
upon by civilization's blind fury  
diseased, betrayed, isolated  
their sacred ways vanishing in  
the white man's firewater.  
Neither  
all good nor all bad, after 1492  
their footprint a matter for history.

Merely four centuries later  
three thousand miles were  
crisscrossed with rails  
factories, and farms.  
It took two more centuries  
to unchain the captives  
to unchain women.

The new world became a caldron  
a tabula rasa  
a wild new life-form  
growing  
in every direction  
The place where survival of the fittest  
applied  
and where the new people  
had to prove themselves  
to be accepted by those  
who set foot upon the rock  
earlier.

We are an enigma  
Our existence gives pause to many  
to others, we are a wonder  
Some call us *the great experiment*.

Guns and brains collaborated  
ruffians and gentry created  
a nation, declaring  
for the first time ever  
the pursuit of happiness  
an inalienable right of  
humans, even while many were  
not counted as fully human.

Rich and poor teeter-totter

Their fortunes and needs forever  
intertwined. The Haves and Have-nots  
often cannot resist greed. The People  
tarnish but prevail  
the balance of power  
at issue, a struggle  
in the pursuit of happiness.

Women and men earn  
butter and bread  
Capital makes the wheels turn in  
factories, farms and railroads  
It does not stand alone  
Workers toil  
day after day  
their rewards  
often denied  
yet they build the high-rises  
the libraries, roadways  
and the schools.

They care for  
their young for  
their neighbors  
they cut the grass  
shop in  
the neighborhood  
serve on school boards.

It is The People  
who heal the sick  
put out  
our fires, patrol  
our streets, fight  
our wars.

We  
did not spring fully formed  
from the body politic  
We have emerged and  
are emerging from the four  
corners, from the fire in the  
belly of our parents, and from  
Gatsbian dreams.  
We are not  
only voters

and non- voters.  
Our favor sought  
Our interests sold.

The People are not  
soulless sheep  
not marionettes  
deaf to music  
mute to injury.

You will know us  
we hold justice  
in high regard  
we  
write the books  
make the murals  
and the music.  
Watch for us.

## No Secret Where Elephants Walk

- Carol Kanter

They strip bark,  
trample underbrush, uproot  
bushes in wide swathes, topple  
enormous trees.

To deal with such destruction,  
officials in Zimbabwe  
cull whole families  
leaving none to mourn, none  
to remember.

But South Africa lets nature  
take its course,  
so this family grazes  
the vast reaches of Kruger Park  
approachable and unafraid

though the wind whistles  
warnings through the large round  
symmetric hole  
in the matriarch's flapping earlobe

its tune the triumphal march  
from Aida,  
the part where women dance  
with tambourines

the crescendo part where all  
hail the parade  
of real-live horses  
and elephants decked out  
with conquerors.



“No Secret Where Elephants Walk” by Carol Kanter and the accompanying photo by Arnie Kanter are from their book *No Secret Where Elephants Walk*, which includes Carol's poems and Arnie's photos from three trips to Africa. You may preview the first twenty pages of the book at [www.dualartspress.com](http://www.dualartspress.com)

Rothstein Before the Fall  
- Robert Sachs

Rothstein was listening on a headset to a male voice describing *The Child's Bath* by Mary Cassatt. Suddenly there was some static, and a woman's voice said, "Charlie, come here." He looked around the Art Institute gallery. There was a museum guard and two plump, gray-haired women, but the voice was that of a young woman.

"Where?" Rothstein whispered.

"I'm in the next room. The Rodin."

Curious, he moved into the next gallery. There was a marble sculpture of a nude woman less than three feet tall, a Monet on either side. No one was standing by it. Rothstein didn't walk directly to the sculpture. Instead, he looked nonchalantly at the Monets, while keeping an eye on the guard walking back and forth among several of the galleries.

"Over here, Charlie." There it was again, that voice. He walked to the sculpted woman and stood facing her. It was Rodin's *Eve After the Fall*. The woman looked ashamed of herself, her arms shielding her breasts, one hand held as if imploring God not to strike her down. "Put your hand on my ass," it told Rothstein. He looked around. There were other people in the gallery, but they seemed not to hear what he was hearing.

"My ass, Charlie," the statue repeated stonily.

He drew closer to the woman. She was all marble and completely naked. A practical joke, he thought. Or some kind of sting operation – as soon as he touched the statue's behind, uniformed police would swoop down and arrest him. Of the two, the joke hypothesis worried him more. He did not like being made fun of. It's not that he lacked a sense of humor. On the contrary, he felt he had a keen sense of humor. And he could be suitably self-deprecating when the occasion called for it. But he detested being the butt of practical jokes.

He noticed a small video camera high in a corner of the gallery. Those are in every gallery, he told himself. Part of the security system. A museum employee risked losing his job if he used that system to play jokes on patrons. And was he the only one who heard the sculpture's voice? Was everyone but him in on the joke? And how did the voice know his name? He was beginning to sweat.

He turned to leave the gallery. Walking toward the modern wing of the museum, he heard, "Don't leave, Charlie. Please. My hips – please – caress my hips." He pretended to smile. If someone was watching, he wanted them to know he was in on the joke.

"Very funny," he murmured. When he removed his head phones, there was silence. But for a few seconds, he heard the small crackle of static in the phones. It was just loud enough that he could also hear his name being called through the tiny speakers.

He walked through the gallery of some post-Impressionist painters: Vuillard, Signac, Rousseau. He put one of the earphones next to his ear. A man's voice was describing Toulouse-Lautrec's lithograph, *Adolphe – The Sad Young Man*. He slipped the earphones over his head and tried to concentrate on the man's voice. But it was no good; he was thinking about the Rodin, about Eve and her lewd entreaties.

As he was about to enter the modern wing, there was another crackle of static and the woman's voice, "Rothstein, come back. I need you."

"Enough," he shouted, ripping off the headset. People turned to look; a guard, startled, stood up and moved toward him. Rothstein dropped off the headset and hurriedly left the museum. The joke, if that's what it was, rankled him.

On the El train back to his Albany Park apartment, he ruminated on the failure of a day that had started in such a pleasant way. He'd set his alarm for eight, a luxury only a Sunday could afford. The attractive young woman from the night before was long gone. He showered, skimmed the morning paper, and made breakfast for himself. Eggs over easy, just the way he liked them. Cora, if that was her name – it was loud at the party – was a good sport. He knew she was just as sure as he was that they'd end up in the sack by the end of the evening.

After breakfast he'd walked to the park for his regular Sunday morning game of touch football. They called him the Old Man, but, at forty, he was tall and still athletic. Maybe he no longer had the legs to be a receiver or even a running back, but he remained a formidable quarterback. He had thrown four touchdown passes, but his team lost 49-28. It was a good workout nonetheless, and the brisk autumn air was exhilarating. He had planned to leave the entire afternoon for the Art Institute.

Rothstein liked to roam the galleries on his own. He could sit when he wanted to spend time with a painting and not feel the pressure of someone waiting for him. He might wander past the large Caillebotte one Sunday, paying no attention to it, and the next stand in front of it for twenty minutes. Meandering through the galleries, Rothstein often lost sense of time. During the week, he trolled for clients for his investment business. Saturday he cleaned his apartment and shopped for the week. He saved Sunday afternoon for the Art Institute.

But now, as the train approached Kimball Avenue, he was angry about the woman's voice which had driven him from his Sunday sanctuary. Rothstein stepped onto the platform and noticed a tall brunette ahead of him; he recognized her. "Mary?"

The woman turned. "Charlie! How nice to see you." Her smile was genuine. The two had dated for a couple of months several years ago and parted amicably. Although they lived in the same neighborhood, Rothstein couldn't remember the last time he'd seen her.

"I'm getting an early dinner," he said. "Care to join me?"

Mary hesitated and then smiled. "Sure. Just don't get me home too late."

There was pleasant chit-chat at a little Italian place not far from her apartment. Rothstein felt a slight dizziness from the red wine he was drinking. Mary was talking at length about something, but he wasn't paying attention. She was the only woman he'd ever met with green eyes; this particular evening her eyes looked greener than he remembered. Going to bed with Mary, he thought, would make up for the unpleasant visit to the Art Institute.

During the ensuing week, he didn't think about the voice. But after Sunday football, on the El ride downtown, he began to worry. He decided to dispense with the headset. There were two special exhibits, and the museum was more crowded than usual. He'd stick with the Asian galleries where it was less likely to be jam-packed.

Eishi's *A Courtesan Reading a Letter* struck his fancy, and he sat on the wooden bench in the center of the gallery admiring it. Rothstein recalled sitting in the lobby of a posh hotel in Sydney some years earlier, watching as a young Japanese man procured a prostitute for his aged grandfather. The grandson put both of them into an elevator and stood watching as it rose to the seventh floor and stopped. The young man then joined his family in the coffee shop. Rothstein admired a culture honest enough to provide for the sexual needs of the elderly. To him, it seemed civilized. This got him thinking about whether he'd ever have children, let alone grandchildren. And whether he could expect a grandchild in America to round up a prostitute for old granddad. As he mulled this over, he heard a voice call out his name. It was the same voice!

He stiffened and looked quickly around. There was the guard, of course. And three teen-aged girls who seemed to be passing through to some other part of the museum.

"My ass, Charlie. I've been waiting." The voice reverberated in the indoor ether, but was it only for him to hear? This worried Rothstein. He feared he might be losing his mind. But why this voice, why only in the Art Institute? "I miss you," it said more softly.

"Leave me alone," he said. The guard walked over and asked Rothstein if anything was wrong.

"No. No problem," Rothstein said. He left the museum without stopping at the Rodin. When he got home, he called Mary to see if she'd have dinner with him. He needed to talk with someone about the "voice," someone who could assure him he wasn't going mad.

At dinner he explained what had happened earlier that day and the week before. Mary laughed. "You're not the kind who hears voices, Charlie. At least I don't think so. Must be some kind of idiotic joke. Do yourself a favor: Stay away from the Art Institute for a few weeks. See what happens."

Rothstein agreed. He made plans with Mary to have a picnic the following Sunday at the Foster Avenue beach. It was a nippy, early Fall day, and they spread their blanket far from the sand and water. Mary had made sandwiches, and Rothstein brought the wine. It should have been a pleasant outing, but he couldn't get the Rodin out of his mind. "Grab my ass," she had said.

When Mary took his hand and said, "Penny for your thoughts," he was startled. They were there, he knew, only because he was staying away from the Art Institute. It felt more like therapy to him than a date.

"I'm okay," he said. "Guess I've got a lot on my mind."

He decided it had been a mistake to confide in Mary. He could tell she felt sorry for him, and this made him angry. No one had to feel sorry for Charlie Rothstein, he told himself. He went through the motions before taking her home and giving her a kiss on the cheek.

"Thanks," he said.

"Any time."

The following week, he skipped football and arrived at the Art Institute a few minutes before it opened. It was raining hard, and he joined a young woman in an archway.

"You're a regular here," the woman said. "I recognize you."

"Yeah, I usually come on Sundays."

"You missed last week."

This unnerved him. "You're checking attendance?"

The woman laughed. "Hardly. There are just some people I notice. I watch for them. I came early today to avoid the crowd. I see you did, too."

"Yes." Rothstein admired the woman's brazenness. Unusual, but not, in his experience, unique. He knew he was good looking, kept himself in shape and liked fashionable clothes. He understood from an early age that women found him attractive.

The museum doors clicked open. "Shall we?" he said. The woman smiled and entered ahead of him. Together they climbed the wide marble stairs to the second floor. Rothstein wondered if she was following him or he her. They both stopped momentarily before the Caillebotte.

"Cheers," she said, turning to the gallery on her left.

"See ya." Rothstein waved, moved around the Caillebotte to Eve. He'd decided to confront the sculpture first thing. He found her, still between two of Monet's watery landscapes. Charlie sat on the wood bench and stared at her with an intensity he usually reserved for stock tables. He could feel his heartbeat and realized he was waiting for her to speak. There was only silence. He took several deep breaths and tried to see this Rodin as simply a work of art. He let

his eyes move to the Monet on her right.

"Hi, again." It was a woman's voice. Rothstein tightened and turned around. It was the young woman he'd just left. She was standing next to the headless, armless *Walking Man*, another of Rodin's masterpieces. Rothstein didn't know why he hadn't noticed it before. There was the headless man in mid-stride, facing Eve. So was she turning away from God or from him? Rothstein wasn't sure.

"You're following me," he said with a broad smile. He was relieved that the voice belonged to a real, live person.

"I love this *Walking Man*," she said. "For some reason it speaks to me."

"It talks to you?"

"Just about," she said, returning his smile. "I find it exhilarating. I must see it every time I'm here. I see you're a fan of Eve."

"Yeah, I guess she speaks to me." He was amazed that he could make a joke of it.

"Don't you wish you could touch her?" the woman asked. Rothstein must have looked startled, because the woman immediately apologized. "Sorry. I didn't mean you should actually touch her. It's just that Eve seems so human. To me, at least."

Rothstein relaxed. "I understand," he told her. Early thirties, he estimated by the freshness of her skin, the way she dressed. "Care to have lunch?"

She smiled. "Sure."

He took her arm and guided her toward the staircase. Once outside, he wondered briefly what he was doing. She's not your type, he told himself. Too short. Too young. But her auburn hair looked silky. And when she looked up at him, he knew they would share a bed before nightfall.

They were sharing a sandwich across the street when Rothstein heard, "Charlie, my ass is nicer than hers. Come to me." He looked quickly at the young woman, but it was clear she had heard nothing. No one in the cafeteria was looking at him. "Charlie?" The voice was driving him mad. He knew now that it wasn't a trick. The voice had the tone of a command. Staying away was not an option. She wanted him.

He fumbled in his wallet, gave the waitress a twenty and told the woman he had to go. "An emergency," he said. "Stay and finish." He hurried back to the Art Institute, ran up the stairs and back to gallery 243. He moved close to *Eve After the Fall*, and waited.

"So," he whispered, looking directly at the sculpted woman on her pedestal. There was no response. The gallery was filled with mendacious silence. Rothstein eased closer. He bit his lower lip and leaned in. Ever so slowly he reached around to the back of the statue.

## Lily Pond

- Adagio Micaletti

Ancient rocks

Cherries and berries

Dragonflies older than dinosaurs

Seek the water lilies

Alight

Land –

Black mesh wings

Translucent

Sheer

Peacock pearl bulb sensors

Alert at rest



The Anniversary  
- Charles Shepherd

They had been married for nearly twenty years – a life journey together long enough to leave footprints from their happiness, troubles and travails. Today was their wedding anniversary. They sat on the beach, the very spot where they had spent their first married hours. The smell and sound of the crashing waves and the warm ocean air which caressed them were the same as those many years ago. Still, there was a chill in the air.

He sat close to her to watch the sun give up its last gasp of energy for the day. Giving her a hug, he hoped to show his affection and symbolize their lives together.

She didn't respond as she had on their honeymoon. She sat as quietly as the disappearing day. Disappointment crawled across his face. Silently, he stared at the fading sun, dropped his arm, and sipped his wine, emptying his glass. He reached for the bottle and found it, to his dismay, empty. He lifted it to look through it as if it were a spyglass. She watched him with no humor, no sympathy, for his plight.

She brushed away the wisp of blond hair that the wind had blown across her eyes, and dropped her hand to her lap where she twirled her wedding rings around her finger. She wiggled her feet into the sand and buried them. Lifting her head, she looked sadly at him – focused on his bloodshot eyes. She said in a low voice, "What a life we've had together. What a wonderful human being you were until four-fifths of your personality became defined by a fifth – and it still controls you. I know you're sentimental about this day, this spot, this time, but it's booze motivating you. It gives you pleasure. It promises you a rebirth of love and romance that died years ago. Let's get this straight, there's not going to be revival of our marriage. It went down the drain the moment you took your first swallow after rehab. I can't feel otherwise – and, I'm not going to pretend otherwise just because this is our anniversary."

He said nothing for a moment. Then he slurred, "You accuse me of being an alcoholic. Always have. Well, for your information, I'm not an alcoholic. How could I be? I don't go to AA meetings."

Without glancing at him, she stood, brushed off the sand clinging to her dress, and ambled back to what had been their honeymoon cottage. She slammed the door as she went in, turning her back on the last rays of the sun. He picked up his bottle and its last rays were gone, too. Their souls were absorbed into the darkness of the night.

The Jakes sat in the theater, motionless, as THE END flashed on the screen. Jim Jakes stood to go, but Ann continued to sit, frozen, watching the credits until there were no more. Finally, she got up and asked, "Do you have a hanky. Mine's soaked, and I don't want to walk out of here looking like a raccoon." He handed her his handkerchief, and they left.

She pulled her sweater over her rangy body as far as it could go to ward off the evening chill as they walked to the parking lot. She asked, "So what did you think of it? I know it'll be up for an Academy Award. Has to be."

"Yeah, I suppose so. I saw you bawling during that last scene. In my opinion, it doesn't have a chance."

"Why do you think that? It was a powerful movie. The acting was superb. I was right there with them."

"So I noticed. Well, in the first place, it didn't have the Hollywood formula for a

winner. No sex, no drugs, no violence, and they didn't use the word that Hollywood writers typically use every other sentence. Not once. And, as far as my personal reaction goes, it was too touchy-feely for me."

"Not for me."

"I know." Jim yawned. "But there's one thing that was kind of eerie."

"What's that?"

"With the exception of two things, you and the wife looked an awfully lot alike. You both have a rare beauty and the same soothing mannerisms."

"What are the two differences – be careful."

"Well, first, her hair was blond and yours is red, and, second, she had very big..."

"Watch out."

"Feet. Feet! Didn't you see how big they were when she dug them into the sand?"

"You got out of that one, didn't you? Preeety slick," she purred. "Thanks, though, for the backhand compliment."

They drove to their two-story, red brick colonial. A cocoon snuggled in a quiet, upper-middle-class suburb of Chicago. The drive home was short but long in silence – a silence of contemplation more than of disagreement. Parking on the driveway, Jim cursed as he wiggled his 6'4" frame out of Ann's Beemer, a yellow convertible. "Your car is too damned small for me."

"You always say that. Why don't we take yours next time?"

"I need to drive yours once in a while to see if it's running OK."

"Are you sure that's the only reason? Or is it that you don't want me to ride in your car?"

"Why would you ask such a goofy question?"

Ann ignored him as they entered their hallway.

"Did you hear me?"

"Yes, but I don't want to go there right now. Want a nightcap before we go to bed?"

"No. I'm dead tired. Got a big day tomorrow, and I need all the sleep I can get."

"OK. I'm going to have a glass of wine. I want to think some more about the movie. It moved me. Gave me something to consider."

Jim trudged up the stairs, tore off his clothes, scattering them helter-skelter on the floor. He fell onto their king-sized bed, not bothering to put on pajamas, and fell fast asleep.

Ann opened a bottle of Merlot and took a glass of it to the den. She purposely sat in the big leather chair considered Jim's. She crossed her legs and cuddled the wine in both hands. She didn't put on a Sondheim CD, as was her custom; instead she sipped her wine and stared into space as if trying to find the limits of the universe – at least hers. Soon tears from her blue-green eyes gathered in the wells of her tanned cheeks. Then they swelled into a wet, mushy sob, which she struggled to stifle. After composing herself, she took a last sip, wiped her nose on a cocktail napkin, and stomped up to the bedroom.

Unlike her habit of changing into her nightclothes in the dressing room, Ann undressed at the foot of their bed, making as much commotion as she could. The nightgown she put on was not her usual attire. Rather than a short, near-see-through, silk

gown that emitted a sexy enticement to her body, it looked like a gunnysack. She stared at her sleep-heaving husband and blurted, “Are you awake?”

No response from the dead.

“Jim! Wake up. I need to talk.”

“What? What? Ohhh, no,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “You want to talk? What could be so important at this hour? I told you I have a big day at the office tomorrow – today,” as he looked at his watch. “Can’t whatever is on your mind wait? Is it that movie?”

“No”, she interrupted. “It’s about us.”

“Us. Oh, brother! What about us? Don’t answer. I’m afraid to ask at this time of night. Can’t we please talk later?” he pleaded.

“No.”

He pulled the sheet up across his chest, grabbed the remote and surfed. Finally, he settled on the weather channel. “OK. What have I done this time?”

“Will you turn that thing off? What I have to say is important, and you’d better wake up and listen. Get this. It’s not what you’ve done. It’s what you’re doing.” She continued to stare at him, and focused her fury into his sleep-filled black eyes. “You are having an affair and don’t you deny it.”

“You’ve got to be kidding or fantasizing. How could you ever come to that half-brained conclusion?” He turned off the TV.

“Do you want to hear it all?”

“If I didn’t, why would I ask?”

“The reason you never want me to ride in your car is because you’re driving around a woman who isn’t too careful about what she leaves behind. About a week ago you asked me to get your briefcase out of your car. I found lipstick-smearing cigarette butts, a Kleenex with lipstick blotted on it, and several hairpins. I didn’t think too much about my discovery until we, or probably you, got several calls – at least three. Each time I answered, the woman who was calling hung up. I know it was a woman because callerID showed me her name and phone number. A Ms. Autry for your information. A Mary Autry to be exact. I called the number, and she, or a female, answered. I hung up immediately.

“Sometime later you said you had a meeting at the office and that you’d be home late. When I called there to tell you that Bill Martin needed to talk to you to cancel your trip the next morning, no one knew where you were. I insisted that you were in the office somewhere, but the security man said, ‘No ma’am. I’ve just made my rounds and there’s no one here. Any place.’ Then you came home. You smelled like a French whore from the perfume smeared all over you. Like tonight you went straight to bed, didn’t say a word to me, not a routine good night kiss, and faked going to sleep. What more do I need to conclude that you’re having an affair?”

Jim dropped the sheet to his waist, ran his fingers through his thinning hair, coughed and grunted, “OK. You’re such a great detective, I’ll let you in on my affair. Let’s go back to our twentieth anniversary. Remember, we sat on the same beach in Carmel as the one in the movie. We were happy as clams and pleased as punch with each other. After we finished our glass of wine, you, too, hugged me. Remember what you said next?” Ann twisted her head sideways so violently, her hair covered one side of her face.

“To refresh your memory, you said, ‘Jim, I know you’re sorry you’re an orphan, but I couldn’t share you with another woman, even a mother. You’re all mine, and I love it.’ I didn’t respond; you’d struck a note. I don’t think there’s an orphan in the world who doesn’t at some time wonder who their parents were, and what circumstances caused them to give up their baby for adoption. Plus, I would like to know my parents’ medical history, my DNA.” Ann’s face lost some of its rage; her eyelashes flickered.

“After we got home, I got on the Net and started a search for my parents. How many times did you accuse me of looking at computer porno sites? Many. I wasn’t. I was on a quest, and I wasn’t going to let you intimidate me before I finished it – and it took time, a whole lot of time. My adoptive parents were a big help, gave me whatever info they had. Finally, I struck pay dirt. I found my mother. I think my dad is dead, but my mother lives about ten miles from us. I called her, told her who I thought she was and waited for an answer. At first she denied everything, but when I gave her the details I’d discovered about my birth, she broke into tears and confessed that I must be right.”

“She begged me not to call again, but said she’d meet me in the park near my office, and then we could go someplace to talk. She must have called me ten times, obviously here at home and at the office to try to get out of our meeting.

“I prevailed. After the park, we drove to a fast food restaurant on the other side of town and had what is called a dinner. She smokes like a chimney. It was her stuff you found in the car and her smelly perfume. I don’t want to go into the circumstances surrounding her decision to give me up for adoption now. They aren’t relevant to the issue of your idea that I’m having an affair.” A tinge of righteous anger suffused Jack’s voice, but he was also aware that this scene would not have occurred had he not been so secretive.

“I’m not, nor will I ever, have an affair. And you needn’t worry about having to share me with her, if that’s still your wish. She wants to keep my birth a secret. She’s married, has three children a little younger than I, and has no desire to broadcast to the world, to her husband and family, what she considers a mistake. So there. That’s the story, believe it or not.”

Ann crawled onto the bed next to him, let the sack nightgown fall, and put her arms around him. After a moment, she said in a faint voice, “Thank God. I love you so much. I’ve been nearly crazy thinking of a life separate from you. And I have you all to my own, too.”

“Yes, I guess you do. But think about this. If you hold a bird in your hand, and you hold it tight, squeeze it, it will struggle to get away. But if you hold it in the palm of your hand with your fingers open, it will sit there and sing to your heart’s content.” He turned over, pulled the covers up, and said, “Good night, Ann. Don’t forget, our anniversary is next week.”

## Spring Sign

- Roy Slovenko



Organist at the Broadview  
- David Hart

Her top half swayed as if charming the music,  
her wanton hair sashayed across her face  
revealing only the rouged essentials.

She smiled at the clink of coins in her cup,  
drew back her lips from stained teeth  
just far enough for thanks. She took requests,

but we were locked in reticence. Squirming  
on our bar stools with the effort to be cool,  
we preferred the safety of our fantasies.

Snow, heavy with spring, slapped at the window.  
Chained tires rumbled out of sight across the night  
like the gears and levers of Oz,

and the Hammond's electric notes wobbled  
with romance. In our adolescent dreams  
we were fools who made everything fresh.

Before and After

- Arthur Altman





The Silence of Superspace  
- David Hart

Superman's mother lives  
above the music store. The tortured  
violins remind her of abandoned  
children. Across the square,  
chiseled in granite, she can see  
the names of the war dead.

When Superman flew, in a sky empty  
of everything save himself, his fist thrust  
to punch through the air, cape flapping,  
boyish curl glued to his forehead,  
we had imagined ourselves  
in the delicious stratosphere  
of immortality.

Alas, Superman is dead, from causes  
undetermined. His mother dials his number  
in Metropolis and listens to the silence.  
A body hurtling through space  
hisses like a bad connection.

Stay Together, Don't Let the Parade Pass You By

- Susan Myrick





When Winter Comes, Can Spring Be Far Behind?

- Wally P.





## Submission Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.

- If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
  - Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
  - If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
  - Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
  - If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
  - No erotica or works which rely on explicit language or gratuitous violence.
  - All work must be original and in English.
- 
- Fiction and essays can be up to 5000 words.
  - No novel excerpts
  - No memoirs
  - No genre fiction; e.g., horror, science fiction, mysteries
  - Fiction should deal with critical, universal aspects of human behavior.
  - Essays can be on any topic but must express a reasoned opinion.
  - Poems should have strong images and concise, evocative language.
  - Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired.
  - Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files.
  - Accepted visual arts may be reduced to fit the available space.
  - Prose and poetry may be accompanied by one or more relevant photos.
- 
- Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.
  - This magazine does not currently pay upon publication.

Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to [gphillips938@comcast.net](mailto:gphillips938@comcast.net) Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message. We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to [gphillips938@comcast.net](mailto:gphillips938@comcast.net).

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