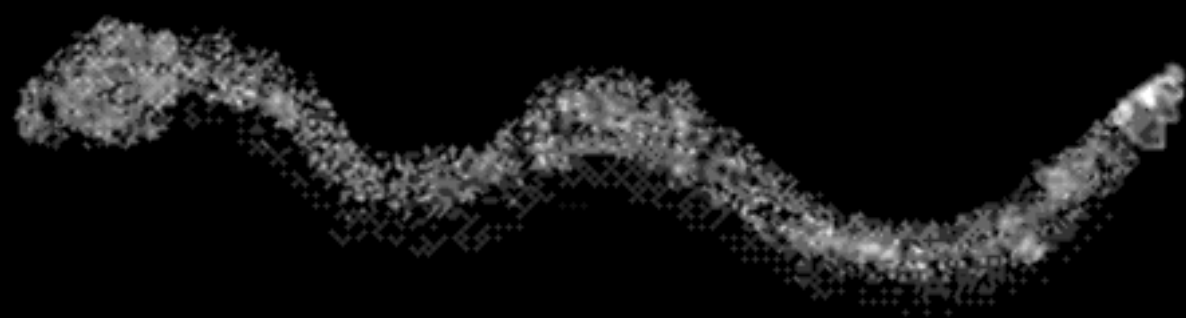


# AKudzu

an original quarterly



Summer 1995

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editor & publisher

**Steven W. Jarvis**

<kudzu@pobox.com>

associate editors

**Blake Wilson**

<bdwilson@ins.infonet.net>

**James E. Martin**

<jemartin@comp.uark.edu>

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## *Submissions to Kudzu*

Submissions of fiction, poetry, and essays may be sent to the magazine via Internet email at <[kudzu@etext.org](mailto:kudzu@etext.org)>. Files should be sent in one of two formats: a compressed, binhex'd Macintosh word processor file, sent in the body of the email message; plain ASCII. For submissions of art, please contact the Editor to work out a suitable format. For more information, request the *Kudzu Writer's Guidelines* via email or via WWW (URL below).

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How we produce *Kudzu: a digital quarterly*

# Off the Vine

Steven W. Jarvis

**W**ELL, IT'S FINALLY ARRIVED: the second issue of *Kudzu: a digital quarterly*. It's been a long, strange journey. After the first issue came out, I was amazed at the amount of sheer work that went into it (part of it because we publish in three formats and I hadn't worked out a time-saving system yet). But, like all work, it was good for the soul and kept me sane during this horrible semester (a long, uninteresting story). But, besides keeping me busy, I enjoyed doing it. It's been a dream of mine that I hadn't (until now) been able to realize (mostly due to lack of funds, ever the starving student), and finally it's here. And I do enjoy the work involved, even the day to day correspondence (adding people to the mailing list, acknowledging submissions, etc.). And I'm glad I did. We've gotten nothing but compliments on the first issue (some to the point of creating a natural high that lasted for hours), so we don't seem to be the only ones that like it. It's even reached the point that folks are coming to me to ask advice about how to do this, information (mostly opinions, actually, there are a zillion ways to do this and do it well) that I'm happy to fork over. I'm sure that it's as much that I've done it at all than that I've done it so amazingly well (I'll do my best to remain modest if at all possible). I'm more than happy to help people out with whatever advice I can lend. And thanks to all of you who have subscribed to *Kudzu* or who have taken the time to drop us a line, we appreciate it.

One of the great things that's happened over the last three months since the first issue came out is the number of great folks I've met in doing this. Other editors, writers, and just fans of good writing have been wonderfully supportive and, well, just downright friendly. Among many others, I'd like to single (triple?) out Doug Lawson of the *Blue Penny Quarterly*, Robert Fulkerson of *The Morpo Review*, and Jason Snell, editor of *InterText* and the WWW person at the etext.org archives. These three have been greatly influential—all three through the inspiration of their fine publications and Jason especially for being quick with answers to my questions and being a swell guy for answering the stupid ones, too. If you haven't already, be sure to check out those ezines; they are the cream of the crop in the literary ezine world.

There's really no way to learn how to publish an ezine other than to actually do it. Sure, I hit up other editors for info and borrowed some ideas from other websites, but it was the actual doing of the thing that made me learn it. Last issue I covered the genesis and history of *Kudzu*, but—even after putting out that first issue—

*Kudzu* was still very much in its infancy. Lots of magazines have one issue and then disappear (a phenomenon that isn't restricted to the print world), so with this issue we make it past the sophomore slump (and on schedule, too!).

That being said, however, we're making a shift in the publishing schedule of *Kudzu*. Instead of waiting for three months to see the next issue (according to the present schedule, it should be out the first of September), you'll only have to wait for two months. The reason is that all three of us will be starting new graduate or professional schools this fall. With all of that school load, the *Kudzu* load—especially for me, since I handle most of the correspondence and do all of the production work—has to be arranged better on the calendar, which means allowing us to do the hardest part (get an issue put together and out) during breaks, or at least during the “slow” parts of the semester. Therefore, we'll be moving to a more flexible schedule instead of the hard June 1, September 1, December 1, March 1 schedule. We'd like to be like clockwork (and *InterText*!), but our careers are conspiring against us. Since we're committed to *Kudzu* as well as more higher education (I'm starting degree number four!), bear with us. Those of you on the mailing lists (and we encourage everybody to sign up!) will be kept informed as to an impending issue, but it will still be seasonal and quarterly. Roughly.

This issue marks changes and milestones for more than *Kudzu*. Our entire staff (and respective spouses) are all in the throes of new schools and jobs. Myself, I've just finished my second Master's Degree (in Southern Studies, the first was in English), and my wife and I are moving from Oxford, Mississippi back to Fayetteville, Arkansas. I'll be beginning law school at the University of Arkansas School of Law in the fall, and she'll be (hopefully) beginning a high school teaching position that will keep me clothed, fed, and full of Coca-Cola Classic for the next three years of law school. Assistant Editor Blake Wilson is writing hard and starting the Technical and Expository Writing Program at the University of Arkansas—Little Rock while holding down a day job in a resort on beautiful Greers Ferry Lake. Assistant Editor James Martin (who just got married—in secret!—and cut off all of his hair!) will be continuing his English studies at the University of Arkansas—Fayetteville while his wife, Gina, finishes her B.A. in Psychology. Things are gonna be a little scattered for a while, but we're committed to keeping *Kudzu* rolling right along.

As for the work in this issue, we're excited about it. Though

the first issue was half us and our pre-*Kudzu* friends, this issue—with the exception of Blake Wilson's essay—is completely composed of works by writers from around the net. Though I'm constantly amazed at how complex a community the Internet is, I'm also delighted at how small it seems as well. One of the writers featured in this issue, James Katowich is from the same town and school (University of Arkansas—Fayetteville) that the three of us on the *Kudzu* staff lived in for years (and in which Assistant Editor James Martin still lives and I'm headed back to)! Katowich is just young enough that we didn't ever have any classes together (that we're aware of), despite the fact that all four of us are/were English majors. When I received his first letter with his submission, strains of "It's a Small World" and the *Twilight Zone* theme started floating through my head. The best part of this whole thing,

however, is that Katowich is a very promising young writer, and his story here "Not a Shadow, Not a Sigh" is one of the best I've read in the last year or so, and not just of the submissions to *Kudzu*, but stories period. I like it. A lot. And his poetry is good, too, as you'll soon see (we've got fourshort poems in this issue). Though Katowich's work strikes a particularly homey chord in me, we've got lots of good stuff this issue. James Goodwin's "The Jigsaw Man" continues in what looks to be a string of fascinating magical realism stories which began with Richard Cumyn's "The Marriage" in the first issue. "The Jigsaw Man" is an entrancing story, and a real page-turner, too. Good stuff, so is the poetry we've included in this issue.

And, as the game show hosts like to say, "But, wait! There's moore!" But I'll let you discover that on your own. 🍷

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# Colophon

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*Kudzu* is composed in Times with most heads being different width and weight variations of Helvetica (since those are the two most common fonts and look fine onscreen). *Kudzu* is created with Apple Macintosh computers using Adobe PageMaker 5.0, Acrobat 2.0, MicroFrontier ColorIt! 3.0, and Claris MacWrite Pro. Additional text editing was done using TexEdit 2.5 and BBEdit Lite 3.0. HTML markup and conversion for the World Wide Web (WWW) version was done using BBEdit Lite 3.0 with BBEdit HTML Tools v1.2 by Lindsey Davies. Graphics are prepared for the Web version with GIFConverter 2.3.7, Graphic Converter 1.7.8/11, and Transparency.

As submissions come in, I save them as text files on my Macintosh from Eudora, my email application of choice. I then use the text-munging capabilities of Tex-Edit Plus to get it all neat and clean, then save them to a new folder. When the submission period is up, I Stuff everything into one Stuffit archive, which I mail to the other editors and readers. After we make the decisions, I open the text files in MacWrite Pro for editing. Those are saved into another folder as MacWrite Pro docs and into the original folder as text files. I take the edited text files and compile them to form the ASCII version of *Kudzu*. I also use the leftover text files to create the WWW version. I use BBEdit Lite 3.0 and Lindsey Davies BBEdit HTML Tools to do the HTML markup. Graphics are created using a variety of methods, mostly involving ColorIt! 3.0, GraphicConverter, GIFConverter, and Transparency. One version down. Then, I open a *Kudzu* template in Adobe PageMaker 5.0, adding the issue specific headers, table of contents, cover art, etc. and import the stories from the edited MacWrite Pro files. That version becomes the Acrobat PDF version, which I produce by printing to PDF from PageMaker with Adobe's Acrobat PDFWriter "printer" extension. Links and bells and whistles are added to the PDF with Adobe Acrobat Exchange 2.0. After All the versions are done (and tested thoroughly on my Mac), I upload them to the various places at ftp.etext.org and www.etext.org, set the permissions, and send the PDF version to America Online. All that's left to do is send out announcements to various newsgroups, web announcement sites, listservs, and our own *Kudzu* mailing lists. Occasionally (and increasingly) we'll get a writeup in another publication, which will also alert readers to the new issue. And, generally, that's how the zebra got its stripes.

Works that influenced the creation of *Kudzu* 95/2 were: Tom Waits, *Rain Dogs*; Better Than Ezra, *Deluxe*; the dB's, *The Sound of Music*; the Police, *Ghost in the Machine*; Toad the Wet Sprocket, *dulcinea*; Live, *Throwing Copper*; the Jayhawks, *Tomorrow the Green Grass*; Sam's Choice (Wal Mart) Free & Clear (kiwi/strawberry flavor), and good food from El Charro's in Oxford, Mississippi and Lin's Chinese Restaurant in Fayetteville, AR.

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## *for Kudzu*

A little old sun blackened shack,  
leaning on itself in a patch of vines,  
brings back southern memories  
of dusty red clay and green may-pops,  
trips to the hard road to check the mail  
and the smell of hickory in the spring time,  
tangy.

After a rain,  
the puddles were for splashing,  
new cut hay steamed in the field,  
and the woman's wash flapped on a new west-  
erly wind,  
picking up sun-smell through octagon soap,  
and creek water freshness,  
while he hacked his way to a corn row  
through a tangle of kudzu,  
planted for pretty, regretted since  
and soon encompassing all.



*Bill Horne*

# Not a Shadow, Not a Sigh

James Katowich

**T**HE COTTON CONVENTION is over and Clayton feels his mood brighten. That he dislikes mixing with people is something he will readily admit, and these long two days of conferences and buffet luncheons have made him uncomfortable. The company Clayton works for manufactures pinking shears, and it is often that he is sent to meetings such as these within the textile industries. However, he goes only to observe and report changes, and is most often alone, watching the bustling camaraderie of others. But now, after two troubled nights in the Clairmore Motel, he is heading home.

It has rained all morning and afternoon, and night falls quickly behind the clouds. Dusk passes, and as he drives, the wet roads soak up light from his car's head lamps and wash it out across the blacktop. Ahead of him, a dark sedan races along above the speed limit. Clayton follows a short distance behind.

He drives with the radio off. The soft ticking and hum of the engine and the sustained, whining note of the tires are pleasing to him, and he feels relaxed and comfortable in his seat.

On one sweeping curve, the beams of his headlights break free of the road and skim across the blasted cliffs that line the highway. Blast holes from the time of the road's construction still line the rock walls on either side. He wonders if it might be his father's work. The Highway Department employed his father for twenty years, the last three of which was spent cutting a level stretch of highway into this mountainous part of the state. His father had been injured before the highway was completed, but even so, speeding through the old, worn mountains, Clayton feels a familial connection with the road, an almost protective affection and pride.

The highway snakes over or around some hills, others it bores straight through. The road seems to him an incredible undertaking, on the scale of the pyramids or the great wall of China. They were all built inch by inch not only with stone or concrete or tar, but with sweat and sometimes blood.

When he was nine his father took him to work for the day. His father parked on a rising hill near the work site and left him in the truck with a packed lunch. Clayton remembers sleeping most of the morning, curled up on the bench seat. It was cool outside, but sunlight seeped through the windshield and lay across him like a warm blanket. After some time, he was awakened by the squawk of his father on the CB in the truck.

"Get up, boy!" The CB crackled. "You there?" It was his father, though the metallic ring of his voice on the CB made him

sound unfamiliar. He unhooked the receiver and spoke into it, calling up all the CB lingo he knew. "Yes sir, big ten four, big buddy," he said.

"I want you to keep by the truck, you copy that?"

"Yes sir, I copy that."

"Now, you see that big hill next to you?"

There were mountains and hills and rises all around him. He hesitated.

"Straight ahead and down, boy, where the hole is."

Just below him was a large hill with a bite taken from it. It looked like a monstrous turtle, resting before assaulting his mountain. The brown path of open ground led up to it.

"I see it. I see it," he said.

"Well in about five minutes you're going to hear a loud alarm. When you hear that, hold on to your ass."

He heard faint laughter through the CB.

"Over and out, big buddy," he said. He climbed through the cab window and out onto the truck bed. The thin wind whipped across him, chilling his arms. He pulled them inside his shirt and looked around. The rolling dips and softened peaks of the country encircled him. He felt very close to the sky, and wispy clouds trailed just above his head.

The alarm started up, slow and low-pitched at first, then spiraling up into a loud whine. It seemed to him to last for hour, and when it abruptly stopped he was struck by the engulfing quiet that followed.

Then—silently—a crack appeared in the hill he was watching. Huge balled clouds of debris shot skyward. A quarter of the hill slid away and it was only then that he heard the explosion, felt it shake the truck and flutter in his stomach. He ducked back in the cab as splintered branches and brush and thumbnail-sized bits of dirt and rock rained down around him.

---

GRADUALLY THE HIGH WALLS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY slope away as he drives northward and enters flat country. The dark sedan gains distance from him and finally he sees only two red points of light, swelling occasionally as the sedan brakes for curves.

The road begins to wind through the country and he lessens his speed. He eases the car through the turns, half-expecting to find the sedan nose-down in a ditch, or folded around a telephone



pole. It makes him nervous to be behind a reckless driver. He finds himself becoming annoyed. It's one thing to be dangerous to yourself, he thinks, but jeopardizing others on the road is a completely different matter. He rests his foot lightly on the brake and grips the wheel.

Eventually the curves lessen. The road uncurls and stretches out into darkness. He relaxes somewhat and increases speed until the sedan is in his headlights again, flicking a light spray onto his windshield. He pulls closer, trying to read the license plate.

A semi passes, and for an instant he catches the silhouette of the driver. Then the semi is gone and Clayton sees only the road, the glint of metal and the obscure shapes of trees and houses beyond.

One day at work, an I-beam slipped from a temporary mooring in a half-completed overpass and struck his father from behind. Three of the vertebrae in his father's back were shattered, and he lost the use of his legs.

The waiting room at the county hospital was an odd place—large, with paneled walls and no windows. His father had, in the course of his youth and adulthood, alienated all of his relations, but even so, the room was full and loud. There were cousins, aunts, and uncles Clayton had never met. In a few he recognized his father's hard looks and his thin frown. These people were his family, his blood relations, but their noisy and abrupt natures seemed as alien to him as those of strangers.

A large man approached him. He had a soft, square face and a light scar that ran horizontally across his brow and ascended into the scalp. His tie was loosened and his coat rumpled.

"Hello, Clayton," he'd said. "I'm your uncle Bill." His eyes were glazed, and he swayed as he stood, patting at his slick, gray hair. "I'm sorry about your dad. I'm sure he'll be alright."

"Thanks." He looked over the room. "Lot of people here."

"We're a family that comes together, Clayton. But I don't know. Your dad, he's different. He never cared a lick for any of his family. He kicked us around until we left him alone. Like he wanted."

"Is that what everyone thinks?"

"Well isn't it the truth?"

He looked around him and what he saw in the faces of his family was bitterness, a firm will not to begrudge his father any sympathy or understanding.

"We're here because we're family." Bill gestured to his head. "You see this scar? Your dad did this. Over a woman—he did it over your mom. Yeah, that right, I didn't think he told you. It happened that we came to call on your mother at the same time. I had a bottle of champagne, your dad had a rose—something he picked on the side of the road, I'm sure. Wouldn't you know it, we met on the doorstep. There was an argument, and your dad took the champagne bottle and busted it across my head. Damn it if he didn't

knock me out. He dragged me around the side of the house, and that's where I woke up. They were both gone, and it was about a month later they got married." He looked up, as if he could see through the ceiling to the room. "I think the biggest and best part of him went with your mother. And now look at him."

Bill looked unsteady; it was as if he'd never recovered from being struck in the head.

"He'll be glad you're here, Bill, He's—"

"He's a son of a bitch, Lawrence. That's what he is." Bill spun around and stumbled into the couple speaking, who righted him, and he walked away.

THE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT EVENTUALLY PAID ALL THE HOSPITAL bills, and provided his father with a settlement and a reasonable pension. This, Clayton realized, was probably to keep his father from suing, although his father never mentioned the possibility. His father had been angry, and in constant pain, but he acted as if he'd expected it to happen someday, had accepted it as part of the job.

Clayton, however, felt shaken by the violence of the accident. To see the broad line of scars across his father's craggy back made him flinch. The world as he saw it had shifted into a darker, more dangerous and chaotic element. This feeling lasted for some time, but as often happens, it was soon replaced with irritation at his father's disability, and a sense of the heavy burden of responsibility.

Because his father could no longer take him to practice, or pick him up from events, Clayton had to quit the track team at the high school. He missed traveling from county to county for the track meets most of all, but it couldn't be helped. He had to make dinner, help with his father's bath, keep the house relatively clean. For the first six months, his father only lay in bed. Later, he would slip into the wheelchair, and move about when he was alone in the house. Clayton would see the wheelchair in a different place when he came home and know that his father had been in it. Finally, he came home and his father's bed was empty. He moved to the kitchen where his father had pushed himself against the kitchen table. He was polishing the silverware.

Clayton said nothing and sat down.

His father slid a knife across the table. "You're letting your mother's silver get all black. This set is older'n you are. You got to polish it, son, or it'll corrode."

Clayton smiled and looked at the knife. He rubbed at it with his sleeve. In the reflection of the blade he saw his father, his face stern and distorted across the length of the metal. Turning his wrist, he made the reflection of his father's head stretch and contract.

During the spring his father improved, and his back hurt him less. Clayton was in his senior year of high school and gone for much of the day. His father used the savings from his pension to have the house insulated and air-conditioned, the roof completed,

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These people were his family,  
his blood relations, but their  
noisy and abrupt natures  
seemed as alien to him as  
those of strangers...

---

and the walls sided. They had never had any resources before, and it gave Clayton some pleasure to see his father able to buy what he wanted. The day after graduation, Clayton came home from work to find a dented four-door Honda in the drive. It was for Clayton. His father had used the last of his money and sold the truck to buy it. For all its poor looks, the car ran well, and before long Clayton was taking drives of increasing distance into the surrounding counties.

They watched television together in the evenings, mostly old war movies or westerns. His father's favorite movies were those in which the hero was shot, or badly beaten and had to hide out until he was well enough to seek revenge. His father would grip and slap the padded arms of his wheelchair and curse the villains bitterly.

"Look at that. This damn world will get you in a second," he'd say. "You never forget that. It got your mother quick and it almost got me."

---

CLAYTON'S MOTHER HAD DIED WHEN HE WAS YOUNG. SHE AND HIS father were divorced, and she had just dropped him off for his weekend visit. He remembered it was a frigid winter day. The newspaper said her car had stalled on the tracks of an approaching lumber train.

He sees an aura of bright lights from a town beyond the horizon. Heavy clouds hang just above, catching the glow, pulling it up from the city in broad strands. He draws closer. As he enters the town he see it is alive with the blinking of traffic lights and neon signs; with the happy, outlandish clothes of people clustered about doors and parking lots; the flashes of chrome as automobiles turning through the intersections spray their light across each other. The stop and start of traffic and the vitality of movement around him make him feel dazed and uncomfortable. The sedan moves ahead, pulling red trails of reflection on the wet streets behind it.

The other car pulls into a drive-through restaurant, and he follows. At the window, light from inside the restaurant fills up the car. Clayton is able to see the driver, a young man with a mustache. A mauve birthmark on his temple runs in streaks down his face. It looks as if he'd been hit in the head with a handful of ripe cranberries in childhood, and the stain set. The sedan moves away. Clayton hurriedly pays for a coffee and pulls out after the sedan.

"So what was your beef with my mom?" he asked his father. They were on the sun-washed porch in late summer. All around them was the screech of cicadas in the air and on the trees and bushes around the house.

His father pushed the brim of his hat back on his head and turned to him. "What makes you think it was my fault?"

He stared away. "I just figured."

"It takes a lot to live with a woman, son." He shook his head. "You got to be jealous, but not so jealous. You got to want them less than you can at first, and then want her more than you can. And sometimes you have to talk when you're thinking shut up. It's hard to get it right, and I never really had the timing for it."

Clayton said nothing.

His father spat and scraped a fingernail against the arm rest of

his wheelchair where the metal was bare. It made a light scratching noise.

"Bring me back inside," his father said suddenly. "Mosquitos are on the rise."

He wheeled his father into the living room and turned on the television, but his father stared at the wall and tapped on the arm rest with his thumb. Clayton stood behind his father.

"I'm going to drive up to St. Louis this weekend."

His father turned, visibly surprised. "What for?"

Clayton wet his lips. He was going to look for a job. He was going to leave. "To look around," he said.

"Nothing to see up there. You going to look at that arch?"

"I've thought about it, and I figured that after rent and food, you can still afford to get some help around here."

"Help?" His father turned the chair until he faced Clayton. "How long you plan to look around?"

"I...I haven't thought about it. I don't know, maybe a week."

His father nodded. He turned the wheelchair back toward the television. "I ain't getting any help. You can look around down here."

Clayton had the sudden, violent urge to push his father from the chair. He wanted to see him helpless on the floor. The feeling jumped up his spine in a shiver that left him with goose flesh.

He went to his room in silence. He avoided his father for the next few days, leaving early and waiting in the driveway at night until all the lights were long out. On Friday, he awoke before dawn. He gathered a few clothes, bound them in a sheet, and slipped quietly out the front door. The moon was obscured by clouds and he could barely see as he pushed the car into the street.

The porch light blazed on, and the front door opened. The shadow of his father in the wheelchair appeared in the doorway. Clayton sat in the car and started the engine with a forced calm. He looked back. His father rolled onto the front porch and was trying to move down the steps. The chair tipped, and his father was pitched to the ground. Clayton felt his foot release the clutch. He was being drawn away; he was unable to resist and the car rolled, gained speed and left the house behind.

**H**E IS DRAWING CLOSER TO WHERE HE LIVES AND WORKS. WHERE he hopes to find a woman to marry and if so, where he will raise his children. The city will soon be in sight, the dome of its dull night glow around it like holy radiance. He remembers the first time the city had risen up from his horizon seven years ago. Then, with a pang, he remembers his father lying on the ground in front of the house. It is a picture he calls up from time to time, and one he saw vividly when he learned of his father's death.

He had been in the city a few years. Bill had somehow gotten his number and woke him late one night with the news. But Clayton had to fly out to New Orleans the next morning for a meeting of undergarment companies and didn't make it to the funeral.

For the first time this night he feels tired. The humming road that once soothed him now irritates him. He imagines his apart-



ment, warm and well-lit; the comfort of his day-bed; the company of his cat.

He hopes the sedan will stop in his city. The man could well be his neighbor, or even an employee of the same company. But he knows in a city of any certain size you can work with someone or live beside them all your life and never meet them.

It begins to rain, in soft taps at first, then popping against the windshield and roof of his car in heavy drops. He slows again, and the sedan pulls away. The rain increases, and finally he can't see past the hood of his car. He pulls off to the shoulder and stops. He thinks of the other driver, wondering if he has stopped also. He

thinks the man must be going home to important business or to family to be in such a hurry.

It comes to him suddenly that a world—a private existence of memories, of love, of past and future—surrounds the other man. A whole circle of influence and experience encloses this man, and it is with a strange, sad taste in Clayton's mouth that he realizes it will probably never intersect his own. He knows that such a circle must surround each person. It is an astounding thing to think of, and it seems odd to him that such an idea should come concerning a stranger, and would come as Clayton is in his car, alone, and surrounded only by the deafening, endless rain. 🍀

# Sean Brown

---

## The Spaniard

He said not to say it fast when he was drinking  
because the word sounded too much like *bastard*  
then without warning he'd swing. Times like these  
we'd soothe him with song, stare down into the dark  
heart of guitar through strings tough as jail bars,  
bring him back from the brink of old dreams,  
from a torn Guernica where Franco's bombs  
covered his peasant wife in oilfire.

If you can touch  
a guitar correctly  
you can ameliorate night,  
modify the zenith,  
transmogrify the blood  
into the hapless plain  
cut figures of patrons  
stumbling with icons:

here, I hand it over,  
play the Spaniard asleep  
while we eat, raising spoons  
of polished horn  
from deep copper bowls  
bitter with ginger.

# My Tax Dollars At Work

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## or, Baby, I Was Born to Roam

David Appell

*Two hearts are better than one.*

—Bruce Springsteen, *Two Hearts*

**T**HERE WAS A CAMERA, and it was ruining my life. The future was arriving at the Jersey shore, announced by a large orange sign with black letters that rose above my windshield: “SPEED DETECTION CAMERAS UNDER INSTALLATION. DELAY POSSIBLE.” Such masters of understatement, those traffic guys. I’d moved two hundred yards in the last forty minutes, had been stuck on the Garden State Parkway alongside Bennies and Shoebies who were either hopelessly lost or seriously adrift. I could finally see the road crew in the distance, all four lanes of us watching two guys on scaffolding installing the cameras and flash equipment. DELAY, it seemed, was INEVITABLE. As was the ruination of my life.

Because, in my life, it was not often that I was rushing somewhere to meet the desirable gender, someone you might meet, just say, while drinking beer after a softball game, someone who could actually make the throw from third to first, who would ask to meet me on her favorite beach on the Jersey shore, on the most promising weekend of the summer, in the middle of a drought.

My drought, that was.

This was the famous Year of the Syringes, and I knew that all my struggle might find the beach closed anyway. This was what passed for summer in Jersey that year, for relaxation of a sort, and for hope. This was what one might find at the shore, syringes and needles and odd bits of plastic, instead of the timeless sound of wonder ringing inside a shell from the sea. With a straight face they blamed it all on a shift in the tides.

But now, pinned down, rancor up, morning nearly gone but afternoon straight ahead, I studied a map and hatched a scheme, scammed up a way that, for the price of an hour would take me through the deepest part of central New Jersey and expel me close to Point Pleasant Beach, my goal, my dream, the sands of my desire. And so just past another orange and black sign standing, most likely, for eternity, I crawled off Exit 124, ready to push on, ready to leave everything that ever held me down or kept me back.

YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK the sign said. I can only assume it meant to cheer me up.

*It's a town full of losers  
And I'm pullin' outta here to win.*

—Bruce Springsteen, *Thunder Road*

I was alive again, was headed again for the shore, anxious and angry, but happy somehow, happy in about as big a way as you can hope for in Jersey, fighting off cars and construction barrels, all with the windows down and the radio up and promises laying somewhere on a white hot beach.

But first Route 9, and the Perth Amboy traffic circle.

It was full of other Parkway expatriates who had similar ideas, but at least, I thought, on it a person had a fighting chance, which is all you can ask for in a populous state. With everything at stake I straightened up in my seat, asked of my car everything it could give, and more. It was my first car, used; a Jiffy Lube mechanic had said it might throw a rod at any moment, as things are prone to do in places where anger seethes just below the surface. I had a cooler in back, wore an old faded tank top bought on the boardwalk at Asbury Park, such as it was, since nobody gave a damn about the place anymore, the Bennies having moved on to the sordid promises of Atlantic City, the Shoebies having moved onward to the future—in the meantime, crowding up my road, crowding up my life. Ogling, maybe, my third-base queen. Springsteen was on the radio, of course, on an FM station that played fake seagull sounds between songs, when the announcers talked about him as if he didn’t live in a mansion over in Rumson, wasn’t looking at property on the west coast, like it was still 1976.

*Hey, ho, rock-n-roll, deliver me from nowhere.*

—Bruce Springsteen, *Open All Night*

All complexity in New Jersey springs from two man-made innovations: the jug handle, whereby one turns left by going right, and the traffic circle, whereby one risks everything in order to ob-

tain what simple intersections seem to accomplish everywhere else. This time I was to be tested by the latter, lying before me like a killer in the sun.

I gritted my teeth, meant to push ahead and right, but got shoved to the left by a sausage truck with a beach raft strapped on the back. I yielded, only for the moment I said to myself, and was immediately looking at the rusty bumper of a Ford Pinto. In other words, looking into the eyes of death, and so I again veered left, into the innermost lane of the circle. Pinned down for the moment, but moving.

Forward, sort of.

I went around a few times, waiting for my chance. Then a few more times, locked in by some dynamic of circular geometry and radial motion, faster on the inside, slower on the outside, a thou-

sand other people all trying to get off the same tangential exit. I juked right, politely for a while, then bolder, with muscle, with anger. Then, with desperation.

But even that does not work in the land of the desperate.

Retreating again to the inner lane, to catch my breath and let the muscles in my neck soften, I went around. And around. Each time I entered the fray I was rejected, fought off by everyone else rushing frantically, I'm sure, to something they wanted, needed, dreamt of. Had met after a ball game, for all I knew.

Trapped in a small piece of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, I went around and around, hope fading, bladder building, around in my own orbit, around in the way that hope orbits around our lives, like darkness orbits around light, the way it creeps up with long, cold fingers, creeping, crawling, scratching, while our day, the only thing we really have, wastes away.

All the while the radio played.

*Everything dies baby, that's a fact,  
But maybe everything that dies, some day comes back.*

—Bruce Springsteen, *Atlantic City*

I wanted to fall in love that day. I wanted to fight my way through all the traffic and off that circle, blow down to the beach and spend the dusk staring into the eyes of an infielder who would change my life forever, give me reasons to keep going, to slow down, to look up. At least for the summer. Or for June. Maybe.

But this was New Jersey, the way I remember it, a place where the state legislature once introduced a bill to make "Born to Run" the state anthem, a song whose first verse contains the phrases "death trap" and "suicide rap," a song about getting in a car and driving as fast and as far away as you can.

This was New Jersey, and this was my life. And so I did not get off that traffic circle — at least, not until I had driven around it a few dozen times, and had sat still for entire albums while the motor ran and the automotive congestion unknotted itself, not until I had run out of gas and managed, hours later when the traffic had finally died down, to make it to a gas station to buy a gallon from a surly attendant named Vinny. By the time I returned to the car my dusk had come, and as I filled it and restarted my engine, I purposely avoided thinking about what might have been further south.

In New Jersey, I learned, you learn to just block certain things out.

I pulled away and eased into the outer lane, swung around and pointed home, back north, off the circle and onto Exit 124, back onto the Parkway, about a half-mile south of where I had first exited hours and hours ago. Dreams detached, hope resigned, I hit the open road, driving again, driving forever. In New Jersey, always driving. Sick, angry, I shoved the accelerator, thought of the way she would scoop up a dribbling grounder, moved into the left lane, the fast lane, remembered the beauty of her pivot, faster still, the way the ball would pop in the first baseman's glove. I turned the stereo up, Bruce again, running again, like all the others, faster and faster, away from something as much as towards, my tires zip-ping with speed, waiting for the night to blur.

When the flash went off. 🌿

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# The Jigsaw Man

James Goodwin

**L**YLE WAS JUST THINKING how much of a shit assignment this all was when the clouds above stopped brooding and finally dropped a cool May rain over the faded circus spread. It was late afternoon; a time when the rains tend to come. Lyle turned up his jacket collar and trudged through the sudden muck underfoot. Within a week of arrival, the Edward Farlington Carnival and Traveling Museum of Natural History had transformed Widow Vaughn's back pasture from a lush meadow into a rough and rutted patch of bare dirt.

This annual transformation took place each spring in this same field as a means of slight income for the aging widow ever since her husband died. The Nazis had claimed her only child a decade earlier during the war, leaving nobody to help work the farm.

And then one year young, handsome, smooth-tongued Eddie Farlington came to town. A man with still much of the child about him and so full of ambition that her heart tumbled and she saw nothing but her own son, Charles, there on her doorstep, asking to use her pasture. Every year ever since, the carnival nomads had sprout up in the shadow of her house with the coming of spring.

Lyle sighed, jamming his hands into his jacket pockets and hopping across a puddle. He ducked into a nearby tent. He knew the story of the circus, everybody in Coretta county knew it. The article he had to write was the same article written each year by the newest reporter on staff. It was the same shit assignment; go out to the carnival, get a quote or two from Farlington, recant the history of the troupe in Coretta county, a few "man-in-the-street" reaction pieces for local color, and that was it. It was simple-minded and Lyle was more than a little dissatisfied to have it handed down to him.

"Hey Buddy, hey, let's see your ticket!"

Lyle blinked out of his sulky musings and looked down. An old midget in a dirty orange and brown plaid suit scowled back at

him around an unlit cigar. He jabbed at Lyle with a sawed off cane. "Come on in, where's your ticket? Need a ticket to enter."

Lyle fumbled at the badge clipped to his lapel: The Laslow Chronicle, it read.

He muttered, "Press," hopefully. The midget frowned holding his hands out. He shook his head.

"Sorry kid, I need a ticket or you go back out there to swim."

The thought of braving the rain and mud of the gaudy midway was enough to make Lyle wince. He pulled out a handful of tickets he had to purchase with his own money. They were already damp in his pockets. With the rain still on his glasses, Lyle could only

see a blue pulpy lump in his hands. He picked at it, then stopped, feeling them tear. The midget suddenly reached out and snatched the entire wad.

"That'll do," he grunted and turned to scurry under one of the inner flaps.

"But!" Lyle stammered, then was silenced by the sharp clanging of a bell from inside. The show was beginning. He sniffed. Water ran down to hang from his nose. He looked through the gaping outer flaps. The rain was falling harder now, causing a wet chill to rise from the soaked earth, to rise and mingle with the empty light of colored bulbs and twisted neons. Lyle sniffed again and turned down his collar. Spreading the inner flaps,

he bowed his head and entered the warmth and noise of the tent. He wondered absently what the attraction was, he had forgotten to read the billboard outside.

The stench of stagnant air, humid with all manner of bodily fluids, primarily sweat, was almost overpowering. Cheek to jowl, the decent folk of Laslow had come to see the sights and be enriched. Packed in the dim tent, lit by two lanterns hung on the center support pole, they all resembled neanderthals huddled in a cave, expectant and fearful of the storm outside. There was a buzz of noise, Lyle couldn't quite catch any meaningful phrases, but

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One year, handsome,  
smooth-tongued Eddie  
Farlington came to town.  
A man with still much of  
the child about him and  
so full of ambition that  
her heart tumbled...

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apparently this was a show to be seen. Down front was a stage of sorts; a platform of wooden slats set over large cinderblocks. A dirty red curtain blocked full view of the stage, but its very presence was working the crowd into anxious agitation.

Lyle stayed near the back, securing himself a seat at the end of a rickety bench. The midget suddenly appeared from under the curtain clenching a bunch of lit incense sticks in his fists like dead flowers. He grunted, hopped down from the planks and busily stuck each stick into the dirt along the base of the stage. The crowd calmed somewhat with his appearance, some laughing malice and taunts at his expense. He finished abruptly and turned hands high over his head.

"Silence!" He shouted, louder than had seemed possible, loud enough to stun everyone momentarily. There was a gleam in his eye now. He scrambled back upon the stage and nodded to someone in the back. The lanterns were dimmed to near pitch. By the smoke and glow of the incense, the old man seemed to double in size, triple; larger than the voice which now boomed from everywhere. Lyle glanced around nervously, seeing others do the same.

"Ladies and gentlemen," He began to walk the length of the stage, hands behind his back.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please, if you will. Consider yourselves for a moment. Creatures of God, children of God fashioned and molded in His divine image." It was completely quiet now, save for the rain against canvas. All eyes were on the old man, strung on his words, his presence. He leaped down from the stage and scooped dirt into his hands. Holding them up, he slowly turned them over, letting the earth fall out.

"Creatures of dirt and earth, of stones and worms...taken and pressed like clay into His image, His divine image." He dusted his hands together, all the while his eyes alive and on fire, wide and wet and unblinking. Moving into the crowd, slow and inexplicably menacing, hands up and active, molding and working imaginary figures, somehow god-like himself.

"And we live our lives, secure in the belief that what we see in each other as beauty...youth...age...or as grotesque, that all these things are reflections of God and are still somehow, good." He paused briefly with each step, fixing the audience one at a time with his withering gaze. Then he suddenly spat on the ground and turned violently, storming back down to the platform. He leapt up and leered.

"But good people, I'm here today to tell you that there are things, creatures like you and I, creatures that stand and walk like a man, that can think and kill and bleed blood as red as yours...and mine...but exist outside the light of the Almighty! Yes, things that

take and twist the divine image of God Himself into the most hideous perversity."

"Ahh, but I sense some disbelief still lingering in the room...I see that I will have to do more than just tell you, my friends...I will have to show you."

He grinned, obviously pleased to have all these mortified faces upturned and pensive, awaiting his next merest gesture. He quickly paced over to the curtains edge and deftly reached behind it, pulling down on the drawing cord with a flourish.

"And so, now I ask you, Is this too, a man?"

The curtain parted, splitting down the middle to the sound of a hundred gasps and a backstage cymbal crash.

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It was too dark to see  
what it was clearly,  
and for a brief moment,  
the imagination  
conjured images of  
tentacles and beaks  
and wings and snouts  
and barbs and, and...

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Nothing but rain and the clinking of chains from inside a large cage. It was too dark to see what it was clearly, and for a brief moment, the imagination conjured images of tentacles and beaks and wings and snouts and barbs and, and...But then there was movement. A cry from the front row. It was still too dark and Lyle squinted wishing someone would relight the lanterns. As best he could see, there was a large shape shuffling about inside the cage. The midget strode into view holding a small torch. He circled the cage once, twice, tapping the bars with his cane.

"Can you see it?" He yelled to the crowd. There was a low murmuring now, a young man stood up and pointed.

"It's just a nigger, he's got a nigger in that cage!" Others stood, looking and leaning forward. Nods

of agreement, questioning shrugs. The old midget came to the edge and motioned for them to all sit back down.

"Oh no, young man, I know what you are thinking. But no, what is before you is not that simple freakish creature from the black pits of the jungle. Beasts that were so common in the fields and plantations of these parts. No no, this is so much more—look closely, look carefully, see for yourself the abomination within." He thrust the torch into the cage. The resulting howl and clamor knocking him back, knocking the torch out of his hands. In the flare of light, what reared up and shook the cage was the oddest thing Lyle had ever seen before in his life. It looked human, meaning it had two legs and two arms and a head and so on. And in places, the skin did look a rich dark brown. But splashed over and criss-crossed, sometimes in patterns, sometimes in rough blotches was white skin. Its head was covered with thick black ropes of matted hair, tangled locks that hung away from the face like a great mane. On the left temple though, sprouting from a small patch of white skin, was an obvious length of straight, blonde hair. A delicate young woman had apparently noticed that "it" was definitely



male and suddenly screamed, fainting dead away. There was a tumultuous uproar of confusion and the preliminary motions of a rush on the stage en masse, when the midget regained his footing and shouted for everyone to be quiet.

Lyle snapped out of his stupor almost immediately, never before had this show be mentioned in the yearly carnival synopsis. Farlington must have just added this attraction. Now here was a story, a chance to actually record something new. The midget was speaking, but ineffectually since the crowd was all trying to get down front, passing by the cage and babbling loudly. Lyle decided to wait it out and get the story after the show.

**W**HEN THE LAST STRAGGLER WAS RATHER RUDELY ushered out, the old man came after Lyle, cane out front.

"Alright, let's go, show's over." Lyle was sitting on the back bench at the time, and almost made the mistake of standing up before he spoke. Looking the old man in the eye he said,

"I'm a reporter, with the Laslow Chronicle, remember?" He fingered his badge again. The old man grunted.

"So, you want a medal? That was the last show for today, beat it."

Make or break time, Lyle thought.

"Now wait just a minute, think about this: I saw something this afternoon I've never seen or even heard of before. If I write about it, if you'll let me get this story, I guarantee you a good write-up. Think of it as free advertising."

"Nothing in this world's free, kid." He relented, chuckling...and turned from Lyle shuffling away, no longer the dynamo on stage but a grizzled old man. Over his shoulder he said, "If you want to see him so bad, his trailer's out back. He don't like questions too much", he turned, "And he's not too keen on white boys either, so watch your step. We take care of our own around here." Cigar from pocket to mouth, patting himself for matches, he exits out the flaps and is gone.

"Out back" turned out to be the least helpful way of putting it. After wandering around the rainy backside of the circus tents, stepping in first camel then zebra shit, Lyle stumbled upon a rusting trailer with a stream of smoke pouring out the top. In smeared black letters was painted the words "Jigsaw Man." Hopeful, he stepped up to the door and knocked. Through the rain, he heard a radio from the next trailer. A tent was pitched out front and several clowns, in various stages of costume were busy smoking, applying makeup, swapping lies and dirty jokes. One was painting another's lips blood red, acting as a mirror. He turned, hair slicked back for his bald cap, and stared Lyle directly in the face. The others looked over at him as well, then started to laugh at something Lyle couldn't quite hear. They made him nervous and he banged a little harder at the trailer door.

"Who is it?" from inside. The trailer shook slightly. Lyle stepped back, in view of the curtained window in case he meant to look out. But nothing happened. The eyes of the clowns like coals on his back. Reach out to knock again and the door clicked open then partially shut.

"Come on in, it's open now."

In time, his pupils relented, dilating to suck in the meager candlelight. That was the first thing he could see, a large candle, melting in a mason jar, the ashes of flies curled around its base, some trapped in the cooling wax. The Jigsaw Man was sitting on a crate, washing himself by a basin at his feet. Lyle cleared his throat. It was warm inside, the same scent of incense filled the cramped room as in the tent.

The Jigsaw Man lifted a cupped handful of water and tilted it into his face, splashing everywhere. Reaching for a towel, he wiped himself dry then flung it at Lyle.

"Here, you look fit to drown, yourself." The voice was calm and low. Not the howls and screeches from the performance. And Lyle came to realize that it actually was a performance, a show. The creature in the cage was here before him, washing and humming and cool and collected. Obviously a man, ridiculously so in this setting. Lyle tried to remember the intensity from the tent, the air charged with tension and xenophobia; a fear that eluded him at the moment. He looked around awkwardly. The Jigsaw Man stopped scrubbing greasepaint off his foot and pointed, black soap in hand, at a low stool.

"You can sit there if you like." Back to his ritual, humming softly. Lyle sat and took out his notepad. He click his ballpoint, almost dropping it.

"Um, I'm Crawford, Lyle Crawford, uh...I'm with the *Laslow Chronicle*—the paper in town." The Jigsaw Man picked at his toenail, nodding. Lyle continued.

"I'm here to do a story on the circus coming to town and all.. It's nothing much, but it'd be nice if I could ask you a few questions." The dark man, satisfied with the state of one foot, switched to the other; immersing it into the basin. Lyle sat near the edge of the stool.

"Here's my badge." Outstretched in his fingertips. The Jigsaw Man didn't even notice, didn't even look up. Lyle put his badge away. He sighed.

"Look, they didn't give me a budget for this; it's supposed to be a simpleminded article, but I'm willing to pay you for your time. I don't have mu—"

"Keep your money, boy." Lyle stiffened. So now he was *boy*, eh? Fine, let this black fool keep his damn tale. He—

"Now, calm down. Sit. Be still. I'm not a reporter myself, but I believe that's unethical." He looked at Lyle carefully, then let the soap plunk into murky water. He reached out to Lyle, reaching out for the towel. Lyle gave it back to him. His hands...

"Your hands!" The Jigsaw Man furrowed his brow at Lyle and turned over his hands, not understanding the young man's outburst.

"You had your hands in all that soap and water, but those spots—"

"Ah, I see." Thin smile. He moved, fast, shifting off the crate and kneeling before Lyle. The smell of lye soap and new sweat. Bright eyes, one dark brown, one brown with a pie slice of ice blue. He held his hand close to Lyle's face.

"You want to look? One show not enough for you... *boy*?" The skin was not just mottled, that he had seen before. He'd seen a old Black one time who forearms speckled and faded to bone white from the elbows to the fingers. But that was a sickness. That was



nature, God even, at work. There was no pattern. The Jigsaw Man's hands were the large hands of a black man with lines, zebra stripes, circles and polygons of flesh with skin tight and pink. Fine blonde hairs growing from the patches of white skin. He stood, smiling humorlessly, pushing back the fallen lock of limp hair. A streak of gold against the black mass around his face. He could see Lyle's bulging eyes and blinked slowly, stepping away.

"There, I think you see now—yeah—I think you do." He sat down again and resumed his wash.

"No, ain't all paint and bullshit for the stage, was it? Naw you could see it wasn't. Of course I couldn't just show the truth like I did just now. The only reason they eat it up, they love it so, is cause at the end of the day they can leave that tent and believe it was all a trick, a show. They can leave and feel secure about who they are. Cause in a cage, I'm safe.

"See, put me in a cage, and they can go home and sleep. Home to their pure little girls and wives. Don't wanna think about me, don't wanna see me unless I'm locked up. 'Less I act it up and make it seem fake and phony-like, they gonna be scared of me. Scared of what I might mean."

Lyle looked to the door. The Jigsaw Man chuckled.

"You think I'm crazy. You wanna bolt like a rabbit 'cause you thinking that right now, you're trapped in this tiny room with a crazy nigger." He nodded and tapped his forehead.

"Yes, I can tell how you think. You see this? It don't just stop at the skin. It goes deep.

Deep inside, my brain is a little like yours, Mister Crawford." He hissed "mister" as though it were an ancient curse. The sun was beginning to set. A blue-grey twilight cast through the trailer's curtained windows. The Jigsaw Man yawned and stretched, rubbing his stomach. The markings, in the gloom and at a distance, appeared as scars. They erupted everywhere on his body, curling around muscle patterns, straight lines like knife wounds. The Jigsaw man turned at his waist, reaching back into the dark recesses of the trailer. He came up with a loose shirt and threaded into it. Buttoning it, he watched Lyle watching him.

"Sorry Mr. Crawford, but I charge admission for my...show," he grinned.

"As it is, you've already seen me up close for next to nothing and you still gonna want a story ain'tcha?"

Lyle swallowed and nodded, remembering his pen, his pad, his job.

"Oh, yes. Yes, that's right.. thank you for co-operating. Um, perhaps you can tell me more about your... your—"

"My stains?"

"Well, yes. Were you born this way?"

"Like this? Oh naw... I'm an old fashioned nigger whelp, just like my mama."

Lyle shifted his weight.

"Or am I? eh, reporter man? I mean if I admit to being a nigger then you can set in your mind that some poor sorry fate has befallen this poor negro and so here he is. And the world is sane again. But what if? What if I was some misfortunate white man in the last stages of some horrible disfigurative disorder. What then? Would that add some drama to your report?" Lyle listened, hearing the man's tone shift as he spoke. He was like a two headed coin spinning on edge.

"I think the readers would like to hear the truth, mister, uh...ah..."

"Smith, Mr. Smith," will do fine, and I don't think your readers would know the truth if it bit them in the neck."

An awkward and hostile silence.

"Mr. Crawford, are you a reading man? You script for a newspaper, but do you read yourself? I mean, are you familiar with the concept of assimilation? Of identity loss? Of slavery? Oppression? Emasculation?"

Lyle stared blankly.

"No, of course not. Want one?" he asked, hand out with a package of cigarettes. Lyle took one and held it. The Jigsaw Man pulled out another with his lips, deft despite their lopsided appearance. A match flared, then smoke.

"How 'bout in your life, then. You been beat down for who you are, for no better reason than who you are? Hell, you ain't got to read a book to know what I'm getting at. We all think at one time or another how things would turn out "if only this" or "if I were only that." And sometimes, you get to hating yourself so bad that you dream about it. That you go to sleep at night and dream about it, about waking up and being different, about being like *them*. Them that's got the power over you. Like a caterpillar going to sleep and coming up a butterfly. You dream about it and then after a while when things get too bad, you crave it, you reaching for it so long and hard that you'd do anything, give anything to slip off your skin and your old life."

He inhaled deeply, red ember glowing.

"See, I made this man a promise, a deal, a long time ago. Funny thing is, at the time, it was what I wanted; at least, what I thought I wanted. Times was hard then, harder than now for black folk if you can imagine, and I was desperate, eager to change my world. He came and offered me a way out and I took it, just as any man would.

"Of course, just like any man, I couldn't see the truth beyond

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my desperation, the truth of the price he asked.

"I've got your story, Mr. Crawford. Here, write this down:

I'VE BEEN WITH THIS BUNCH for about four months now. And before that, I was with another show traveling out west. Yes, I've seen every state in this damned country; some more than once. Never could stay put, even before It happened. In fact, I've been across the water. Down south on a galley out of New Orleans, sailing over to the islands. The Carribean, Haiti. You see me smiling? You see this? This the smile I get when I think of homeplace, Haiti.

Was born there years ago, many, many years ago. And I aim to die there too. I was son to a slave - yes a slave, to my mother, Ma Mary, and my father who she said was a tall big man with nine fingers. Yes, nine—lost the little finger off his left hand for slacking in the fields. Joe was a slacking negro, he was. It was a way we had to swing back...to needle the Massa and cut holes in his pockets. We all claimed to be lazy and shiftless; fighting back without fighting back, you see? They'd whip my daddy to strips, she'd tell me. I don't remember him none. I was still suckling when he got killed trying to head for the bush. The dogs tore him down, she said. He had gone to meet a few others in the hills, they were coming together in knots out there; plotting in the dark. But he didn't make it.

And my mama, she got sick, bad sick, a few months after. One of the white hands, I think it Massa's cousin, took to my mother when Joe died. He was young and mean, a evil man. Came by the place and scare us and smack Ma Mary around all the time. Came sometimes with this small whip or switch in one hand, his cock in the other. I was the man then, had to be with Joe gone, though I was no more than 12 or so. Couldn't let that happen, you see. First time, I jumped him like I'd seen cats do. Low and fast and all tooth and nail. Made to kill him if I could. Broke my arm and he left. Came back that night with Massa that shit nigger foreman, Cain. "Cain," do you believe that? That's what they called him, that's what he was. Did the whippings when Massa wanted to make a point.

So they all come down into camp looking like the wrath of God and call my mama to bring me out. And I'm hurting bad with my arm swollen and stinging. And that man had me whipped...had this child whipped. Wanted to show me and the rest what acting up was going to cost me. Wanted to put me in my place and I cried and screamed, not so much from the pain as from the bound... helplessness...

It ate at my soul. I was a child, but dry and angry inside.. brittle as glass. Left me in a bloody pile in the dirt, torn open from the lash. I don't remember this, I passed out, but Ma Mary told me later that Massa wanted me fit to work by week's end or I had to go.

Don't look at me so. I don't give a shit if you believe or not.

I almost died that week. Word went out bout what happened, and folks kept coming by to see. All kinds of people, but mostly other slaves to see for themselves the child that was whupped for fighting a white man. I think back now, and I could almost feel lucky I wasn't killed outright. What it was, I believe, was that Massa

was more mad at the idea of Ma Mary and his cousin. He wasn't a righteous man, mind you, but it was known that he had his eye on mama for himself. And I knew that, I could see the boiling pit we all were in, black and white alike; we were cooking out in that heat. Under a wet sun that burned us to cinders inside, left us empty. No hope, no redemption, just pain and suffering and death.

DEATH CAME FOR ME THAT WEEK, just as sure as us talking right now, Death came to claim me after that beating. I remember it clearly. One of the house niggers had just left. It was Marcus, stopping by with a little food.

Heh, he told me—he told me that I was a damn fool. That I was too smart to die like that. Marcus claimed to know the facts of life, of living in the white man's world. He said I was born a nigger and was going to die a nigger slave's death if I didn't learn to stop fighting it. I didn't say a word, I was crazy with pain, but not crazy enough to think he was right. I could see I was different, that I was somehow special. And then I heard this voice. Laying on my stomach, I couldn't see who it was. It was an easy voice, like honey and flies, flies on my back; landing and crawling over dried blood and pus. I could only barely feel them, but it suddenly sounded like hundreds were dancing on my wounds. And this sweet voice in my ear. It was a man's voice, but low like thunder. He says to me, "You are special." It was the truest thing in the world from those lips, he said it and I knew it was so.

"Too special to pass in this manner." It was strange how he spoke, calming me with those buzzing flies, almost as if his voice was the music of their wings like a sweaty jazz band. I felt a light hand on my neck move and vanish into the nest of pain along my spine. He was touching my welts, but there wasn't any sting...just cooling honey over my wounds.

"There is a man outside, here to take you away." Images in my mind of the shack from above, covered in shadow and the dust of ground bones.

"But I can keep him busy for you. I can make him bide his time," he says. And I'm seeing my father, just standing there waiting for me to come and go with him. I want to be with him, I want this pain to end, to go into the bush with big Joe and be free and an upright. And this voice goes to shushing me and the shack gets a hot as the sun, almost full with flies from the sound of it. I can't see anything but my daddy shot with holes all over, just waiting outside.

"You don't want to die like this, do you? No. You are too young, there is so much you don't know about... life. A real life, with no whips and dogs and burning fields. When you die, do you want to die like this?" The voice is in my head now, coming out Joe's mouth like its always been his. And I see that he's right, I'm bout to die wallowing in scabs and flies and—

"You deserve a white man's death. And the respect that comes with it. I can give it to you. I can help you. Will you let me?"

Well, that room started to spinning and my heart seized up tight and all could keep thinking was that I was afraid and didn't want die. So I said yes.

I said "yes, you are right. Help me, please." But them flies just got louder and louder and though I couldn't see, I could feel them

burrowing and sinking into my back, into my bones. And next thing I knew...

**H**E SHRUGGED, letting the smoking butt fall into the basin to sizzle and spit one last time.

"Well? And then what?" Lyle was gripping both pen and pad tightly. Now covered in a sheen of perspiration, now leaving greasy print marks on the blank yellow page. His heart was pounding and he didn't know why. It was stifling in here, he needed some air. The Jigsaw Man watched the reporter loosen his tie and top collar. Standing from his shadowed corner, he stretched, cracking several joints at once. Then shrugged at Lyle.

"What do you mean 'then what'? Then I blacked out." He bent and lifted the basin with a grunt.

"Scuse me." Lyle shifted his stool so he could pass. At the front door, the Jigsaw Man propped the tub on his side, letting himself out. It was evening now. A welcome cool breeze flooded the room, the sounds of crickets just starting to screech. He heaved the water out to the ground, drawing the attention of someone nearby.

"Naw, you go on, I got company. Huh? Hell no, get out of here with that." he drew back inside, chuckling in darkly good humor. The door closed with a bang. Closed darkness, a loud piercing roar. The two so close together in time, it made Lyle jump. The Jigsaw Man set the tub down and kicked it under a cluttered counter.

"Oh, that's the tigers; they always get hungry around this time." He raised his shirt on the side.

"See this? That's where one bit me, when I first got here." Lyle blinked, his hand moving before he knew it to touch, to feel the large, jagged white ring, an eclipsed sun emblazoned on the skin. The Jigsaw Man staring down at him knowingly.

"It's pretty innit? Better then a goddamn tattoo. Look, look right there. You can see where each tooth went in."

"How does this happen to you?" asked Lyle, wide-eyed. The Jigsaw Man shrugged.

"I don't try to reason it anymore. The day after He came, I woke up to the sound of birds in the trees. That was the first time, it was what saved me and is what's keeping me alive today. I've been alive for a little over a hundred years. What do you think of that?"

"I said, how does that strike you, Mr.Crawford?"

Lyle blinked. Too many odd things in succession, unbelievable revelations.

"That's what I thought. I've gotten pretty skilled at reading people, Mr.Crawford. And I think you understand what I am, what kind of man I am, what I did that day, long ago, to save my hide." He grinned, boring into Lyle.

Lyle stood up, stepping back, knocking over the stool, almost falling himself.

"Stay back! You, you sold your soul didn't you? You made a pact with the devil!"

"Oh, well I don't know who He was. Can't say for certain; lot of odd things crawling around over this earth. And I didn't *sell* anything, far as I'm concerned. I don't know what *He* wanted with

me. Shit, I've never seen anyone like *Him* since, either."

He looked away from Lyle and sighed.

"All I do know is I been around a long time, long enough to scare me if I think about it too hard. And the bloody cuts that could hurt and kill another man, heal faster than you can blink. But you seen my scars, you know how they leave me. I'm turning white bit by bit, scratch by scratch, hunk of flesh by hunk of flesh. The way I see it, I won't die till I'm a white man, I won't even bleed—

"Oh sit down, Mr.Crawford, and stop looking at me like that."

"No, no, you're not human! You're evil or crazy or—or, both and—"

The Jigsaw Man scowled at him.

"And just what the hell do you know about me? That was an act out there. You struck me as being smarter than that, Crawford. Now sit down and be quiet, I'm not finished."

Lyle relented hesitantly, the man's demeanor was disturbingly calm and rational, at odds with all he was saying, all that he appeared. He pulled together some spine.

"I think I'll stand right here, thank you." The Jigsaw Man cocked his head, assessing Lyle. Then he arched his brows, nodding.

"Suit yourself. I won't make you stay, but you want to get the whole story, don't you?"

Lyle nodded and said, "Yes."

**L**IKE I SAID, that Man was good on his word; I didn't die after that beating even though by all rights I should have. The next day, I felt fine, better than fine even. No pain, no aches, not even my teeth were bothering me, and I'd always had rotten teeth. Which was fine as far as I was concerned. See, to me that Man had kept his word. I reached around to feel my back and the skin was smooth as ever; almost like it'd never happened. And my arm was better too. Heh, the way I was feeling right then, I had a mind to go jump the first white man I could find and tear him to pieces. Ran outside with no shirt and no shoes, just ragged pants Massa's boy had outgrown. Ran outside laughing and whooping. Tore into the fields to find Ma Mary. Folks stopped picking and came around me to see. They all knew what had happened. But when I got right up too her, all flushed and breathless, someone out that field screamed. And she pointed, they all were pointing and staring, with faces twisted up into hard masks. Looked round to mama to find she was backing away, they all were; like you just did. Oh it's alright now, I got used to it and worse after a while.

But that first time, when others saw me, saw the white streaks criss-crossing my back in angry bolts...

Well, of course I couldn't see. But one ran off to get the foreman and I knew something was wrong. Ma Mary came up behind me then, held me by the shoulders shook me.

"Boy, what's wrong with you?" she cried. And I wanted to tell her nothing, that I was fine and that nothing was ever going to be wrong with me anymore.

They got a doctor out there to look at me. Master was afraid I had some disease, something that might be catching, you see. We was in the Big House, in the kitchen. Smell of cooked meat tainted

with rubbing alcohol. Stripped me down and poked me with his metal rods. Master had Cain hold me, but I wasn't squirming, I was calm. All of them, in that room, quiet and scared of me, looking at me like I fell out the sky. The doctor is nodding and perspiring, stinking in the heat. He tells Cain to be ready and pulls out a scalpel. Puts his hands on me and draws a thin red line into my chest. It hurts for a second or two, then closes up just as fast, leaving this white streak over my nipple. They all get quiet and look round at each other. Then the doctor just grits his teeth and stabs me with that knife, right here in the belly. And I wriggle fishlike in pain, but before I can cry, it passes and I feel fine. Cain is bugging his eyes at this point, digging into my arms as he's holding me.

"Jesus Christ," he says.

Heh, I was on top of the world.

"But now, that was a long time ago."

"Could you say that last part again?" asked Lyle, looking up from his frantic scribbles.

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[torn from *The Laslow Chronicle*]

*CIRCUS CONT'D*

*"...clowns certain to delight children of all ages and those still young at heart. By far the most intriguing attraction at this year's carnival is surprisingly not to be found under the big tent, but on the midway. Daniel Smith, a mulatto performer with the circus and part-time actor, is presenting a unique show entitled, 'The Jigsaw Man.' His costume and antics are bizarre enough to merit a second or even third visit to the midway, and make for a interesting contrast to the sugary world found beneath the striped tent. While Junior is enjoying himself with the lion tamers, a stop at 'The Jigsaw Man' is highly recommended for the more adult patrons to..."*

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"Yeah, I read it."

"Well what are we going to do about it?"

Thin lips and hot blue flecks of ice.

"Come on, Samuel, we got to do something. Can't have that, that—"

"Abomination!"

"Right, that abomination loose right outside of town. Hell you know how those circus folks are. They're probably all part nigger anyhow. I almost took little Emma to see that damned thing. She begged me to see it for God's sake!"

Hard stares, slight nods all around.

"Samuel, we got to do what's right. What's gonna happen if we don't? What if we just sit here on our asses and don't do anything? They come here every year, you know that."

"Yeah, Emma's almost twelve and so are most of her friends. What's going to happen when they get a little older? What if that thing decides to come to town for a drink before the show? Or does something to one of our kids he sees down in the audience?"

"What about your boy, Samuel?"

Slow blink.

"And what will the others say if we sit here and do nothing?"

Fists clench and uncurl and squeeze shut again.

"Right. Get Bobby and Earl, tell them tonight to come over to my house before we go. I know Earl done lost his, but I got a spare uniform in the attic."

"We're doing the right thing. It's God's will."

**T**HE JIGSAW MAN awoke with a start. The same dream of a thousand nights lingering in his head. He is back in the room, the room with the flies and savannah heat. There are drums resounding outside. It is a rhythm he can't quite catch; non-repeating, ever changing. It is his father calling him out of this cracked and peeling room. Turning over to get up, he disturbs the flies on his back. There, standing beside the bed, a man with skin like honey, shining and drizzling onto the dirt floor. He smiles, holding out his hand. Drums in his ears and he wakes.

Not drums, pounding fists at his front door. The trailer shifts uneasily on its cinderblocks. Bang. The windows crash. Small eager flames dance from the landing torch to catch and devour. The Jigsaw Man leaps from his cot. There is fire everywhere now, crowding him out of the small trailer.

He tumbles out into the night, into screams all around. The suddenly beautiful and terrible sight of the Big Tent ablaze snatches his breath away. Still tangled in sheets he feels around for a foothold. The earth is spinning in crazy loops. Burning monkeys screeching and howling, rolling by like tumbleweeds. Hands pulling at him. The sound of gunfire all around. His head pulled back by his hair, his neck cool and exposed to the night. White shadows snap into view. White ghosts with hollow black eyes.

"That him?" A nod and a sack cinched over his face, drawn tight at the neck. He is dragged to his feet. More sounds of Hell; the tigers are loose and clawing back. Someone screams. His heart pounds itself into an aching bruise. He feels he will explode soon from sheer adrenaline. More hands on his body. Rope. Around his neck. Around his hands. Wet tree bark against his bare back. Sweat filling his nose and blackness his eyes. A bright light and heat, even through the sack, draws near. Dogs barking now. Smoke rising around him. They set him on fire to the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers."

In the quiet morning that followed, Coretta county police and volunteer fire fighters, picked through the charred bones of trapped elephants, dispensing consolation and wide-eyed looks of disbelief. Those that escaped had come back during the night, scavenging the tattered calico for keepsakes beneath the ashes.

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On a nearby hill, an old dwarf poked the burnt tree stump and shook his head sadly. He couldn't meet the perfect eyes of a naked white youth sobbing in the dirt. He kicked at a rock and looked up at the sky, just now turning red with the dawn. 🌱

# Mark Hallman

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## Thanksgiving Eve

I could hear him coming from a mile away,  
humming along with Chrissie Hynde  
in that off-key drone that sprang smiles in us all,  
including him,  
as he approached the last crossroad  
before the lane to the farm,  
having given myself up to the gift of my kin:  
to know the distant doings of those  
who belong to us (most never aware),  
their secrets betrayed by the muted sounds  
sluicing through our heads --  
until a rush of silence stilled them all,  
coalescing like thick fog in a bottom,  
and I knew the trip he was taking  
was his alone.

## September Son

He came straggling up the road  
after a night of lowdown and high spirits on Rat Row,  
his belly full of booze and his head gone to seed,  
but still good enough to drive a tractor at dawn,  
the same morning my mother told me  
with a look of resignation in her eye,  
"Watch your ways . . . the Devil's afoot today,"  
knowing I was ripe at the age when He comes a-knocking,  
before she sought respite in church and ladies,  
leaving me behind with idle thoughts and empty rooms,  
the echo of mantel clocks inching toward my prime,  
yearning for a taste of future wasted  
within four walls and murmuring the name  
of Daddy.



# Shopping and Staying:

## the Arthur Avenue Retail Market

Scott Malone

THE REAR ENTRANCE of the Arthur Avenue Retail Market opens onto a stand covered with fresh portobello mushrooms. Michelle and her husband say that they have run this stand for the last five years.

"Yes, senora, the figs are fresh. We only sell them if they are fresh...if they weren't they would be outside in the garbage, not inside on the cart."

Michelle grew up in the neighborhood and, after she returned to the Bronx at age 30, decided that this was what she wanted to do. Besides, she says, the kids can walk to school, to the store, or to friends' houses on their own. The woman in the worn gray overcoat looks at the figs skeptically. She puts them back and sticks to the basil and plum tomatoes. Michelle bags her order, thanks her and turns to her next customer.

Turning to the right, I head for the sandwich stall. Energy and patience are a critical part of shopping, and food helps that.

The man behind the counter smiles, and insists that today is not a day for a cold foccacia bread sandwich. He picks up a weathered ceramic bowl from the wooden countertop and begins to ladle pasta e fagiole into it.

The drawer on the aging register looks as if it has stuck been open since before the *Gasoline Alley* cartoon taped to its side was totally yellow. I carry the bowl to a small round table and settle into a rickety chair. Next to me, two men catch up over coffee soda.

"How was the drive, Johnny?"

"Not bad, Mike. Traffic on the parkway has been light lately."

"That's a life you got. Westchester."

"Yeah. The kids like it, but the taxes are ridiculous. And every Saturday I have to drive down for supplies anyway: deli, bread, and then across the park for bagels."

"There is no food to be had up there. Restaurants, but just for looking."

"It don't matter. It's green, it's roomy."

The aisle that leads away from the sandwich stall, passes between high metal shelves and a long glass counter filled with imported foodstuffs: balsamic vinegar, pine nuts, espresso-flavored candies.

"I need a quarter-pound of sun-dried tomatoes."

"Sorry, sir, we don't have any today. But how about his romano? It's just in."

"Pass on that. I'll take a box of biscotti."

AROUND THE CORNER, the smell of ripe cheese and cured sausage announces that I have found the deli counter. A robust older man in a white butcher's coat sings a vaguely recognizable aria from *Rigoletto* as he opens a large jar of black olives and empties it into a tray.

"See, honey, that is what we need. *Real* mozzarella, not that machine-made stuff."

One of the old man's dark-haired sons smiles at the young couple and winks at their fidgeting son. "You like cheese, big guy? Try some of this, it's home made."

The boy fidgets and stares at his canvas sneakers.

"Come on. Mangia! You want to get big and strong don't you?"

The child accepts. His father is less hesitant and takes a large slice of pepperoni from the counter.

"O.K. Give me a pound of fresh proscuttio, a container of marinated peppers, and a little bag of dried mushrooms."

The father takes the bag and smiles. "C'mon Andrew. We're going to the bakery next. What type of cake for grandma?"

LONG ROWS OF TOMATOES are satisfyingly uneven. The varying colors and shapes convince the local gourmands they are grown naturally and give them something to fight about.

"What are you, crazy? That's not a good plum tomato. Look at the color. Too orangey."

"No, no, no. It's firm, that's what matters. When they're mushy, you get in trouble. No good for slicing, and your sandwich goes to hell."

The men smile while they raise their voices; the cart's owner shrugs as one bites into the tomato to prove his point.



TWO OLD WOMEN lift shining black eggplants onto a dusty hanging scale. The large needle swings reluctantly, and the merchant nods, "That'll be a dollar sixty for you, senora."

He places her two crumpled bills onto a pile of spinach and pulls a handful of change out of his pocket: "eighty-five, ninety, ninety five... sorry, I got a lot of nickels here, two dollars. Thank you very much, see you next week." He turns and starts to empty the contents of the next basket onto the scale. Two pounds of red onions, a bunch of broccoli rabe, two cloves of garlic, one of which he exchanges for a better-looking piece from under the counter, a pound of zucchini.

The merchant looks at the other cloth bag, filled to bursting, and nods.

"Feeding the whole army today?"

"Well, two cousins and three friends."

"Be good to them. Get the parmesan breadsticks from Madonia, for with soup. Trust me."

ON THE SIDEWALK outside it isn't so much congested as it is full. Pairs of people rest their bags on the floor, examine the plants hanging from the awning, and chat.

"Yeah. He said he wants to go in the fire department, and I said why not. I mean, it's an honest comfortable living, and his kid'll be proud of him."

"But my brother was in there for four years and he hated it."

"Your brother is also crazy. Fact's a fact. Joey always said he wanted to be in there, we just never listened to him. And if he works his schedule right, he'll be able to be home a lot more than he is now."

"Yeah. Gotta be crazy driving to Jersey ever day."

The block is filled with conversations like this. There is little room to pass, but the smiling faces try to make some. And the smell of bread draws one through the crowd.

The breadsticks will go with the soup. 🍃

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# Kudzu NEEDS ARTWORK!

If you or someone you know is an artist who would like to have your work seen by a potential audience of over a million people all over the world, contact the editors of Kudzu at <[kudzu@etext.org](mailto:kudzu@etext.org)> for more information. We are looking for cover art the most, but are also looking for smaller interior pieces. 🍃

# James Katowich

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## Doris Eddy, Wife And Mother, In The Large House On I-40

Though each year a chicken or cat  
Will, as if called, wander up there  
And be ground away to nothing, and last  
Month a cow stood sleeping and killed  
A northern couple, I fear my own along  
Will satisfy.

And in my dim house,  
At the worn spot on the kitchen table  
Where year and year again I have picked  
Bad beans from the soup pile, I wait  
For husband, son and daughter to descend  
From the interstate, come, shot out  
From the heart of the city to collect,  
For a night, and trickle back each day.

## Ritual And Observance

After every morning's shower she towels  
Dry and draws lines of lotion on each arm  
From wrist to shoulder; on the flat soft  
Rise of each narrow foot up to the waist;  
On her neck, from her chin and downward  
Between each breast to just above the navel,  
Creating in effect a stick-figured woman  
Until the lines are erased, smeared and spread  
As she smooths a hand across her skin,  
Into the hollows behind each knee,  
Along the tiny ridges of her shin, circling  
Upwards to her stomach and chest, sliding  
Down each arm, massaging elbows that have become  
White, flaked, and dead from winter's wind.

## The stars were still so grand

What I remember most about my brother  
Is the way he slammed his head into the school bus  
Seat when kids would call him “Lice” or “Burple.”  
Three or four good knocks, with red hair flying  
Up and falling down against his reddened cheeks,  
A raging, clenched look on his face.  
I, by this time, would be sunk low in my seat,  
Staring only at the scrolling fields, and trees  
That clacked against the window as we passed.

And once he cast his fists toward the stars,  
In the truck bed while our father drove us home  
One Friday from the all-night laundry mat;  
Lying on the green plump bags of sheets and clothes  
Still warm from all their heated tumbling,  
And us with cool air rushing just above our heads,  
And power lines all slung against the sky:

He punched the bags and told me finally how  
Fucked his life was, and I pulled  
A blanket from the bag of linen  
For the two of us, and didn’t say a word.

## Pulling In

I was twelve, a poor swimmer, and paddling down  
A dirty stream that feeds Lake Wedington with a friend  
And my near-sighted cousin, a mean-hearted child  
Who spoiled the ride by doing his best  
To tip the canoe, shouting and smacking his paddle  
Just right—to soak us all and scare the fish.  
We cursed and slapped him until he cried and hunched  
In silence as we cast along the bank for bass.

We soon decided that the stream was barren, and let  
The current spit us from the stream’s small mouth  
And out into the glassy lake, and when the banks  
And trees were far enough away, my cousin stood  
And leapt from the canoe, nearly spilling all.  
He laughed hysterically at first, then found he’d lost  
His glasses in the jump, and kicked and splashed around,  
And groped beneath as deep as he could dive.  
He came up scared and bawling, looked at us  
As if he’d realized, had felt at once the depth  
Below, as if he shared my vision of the glasses  
Sinking down and down into the mud and murk.  
As if, as he swayed, suspended at the surface,  
He felt a sucking coldness at his feet.

We pulled him slowly back to us. The look  
He gave—for passing moments—was surely love.

# John Adam Kaune

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## Sarajevo, One

Our Children are born without arms,  
into this land laid bare  
by centuries of strife—

The blood-stained ice of lives  
scraped clean from streets  
by those who choose to remain—

The city holds no secrets, only silence:  
voices, raped of strength,  
once strong and proud  
are refugeeed, adrift in violence—

To regain the ancient motherland,  
the fields,  
encrusted unknown blood,  
the geneology of the land  
encrypted on their very souls.

I wept clear pools of tears for them,  
as they travelled farewell speed  
through faraway lands—  
They are helped and yet without hope.

I have lived here for all my eighty years,  
as Croats, Serbs and Muslims fight,  
I graze the grass in search of food  
I cross the street for scraps of bread—

I see the dead through makeshift curtains,  
hanging limp like snakeskins shod—  
these windows hunger for my laughter  
as children's bellies ache  
for rays of sun unshone.

Alas, alone, enclosed within  
is Sarajevo's endless soul.

I saw the city disembowled,  
rending spirits echoed shells—  
Yet still I see bright blue and white,  
not green Spring blossomed forth.

# The Politics of Cynicism

## and the “Cultural Elite”

Blake Wilson

**T**HE THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 1995 EDITION of Little Rock's daily newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, carried an Associated Press story about Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole's campaign for the presidency. It seems that Dole delivered a speech in Southern California in which he blasted the entertainment industry for allegedly promoting various and sundry cultural deviancies as being normal. As his tirade continued, Dole claimed that “a line has been crossed—not just of taste but of human dignity and decency.” Dole rhetorically bludgeoned rap groups like 2 Live Crew for their sexually explicit lyrics and sniped at films such as *Natural Born Killers* and *True Romance* for allegedly reveling “in mindless violence and loveless sex.” Dole's speech is absolute proof that the 1996 campaign has officially begun, as his caustic and hateful remarks recall similar pontificating by such noted cultural authorities as Pat “the beetle” Buchanan and the irrepressible Dan Quayle. The only thing missing from Dole's tired attack on all things immoral and un-American was the term coined by The Man from Indiana himself. Not once, at least not in the AP report, did Dole utter the words “cultural elite.” He didn't have to, really, as Quayle's phrase merely serves as a convenient way of concisely describing all of the forces of darkness that Dole dragged into the light one by one for all right minded people to vilify.

While those with a critical mind might point out that Dole statements reek of hypocrisy for all but calling Ice T's “Cop Killer” the work of Satan while failing to bring the same self-righteous sword to bear on Eric Clapton's “I Shot the Sheriff,” there is no doubt that these inflammatory statements struck a resonant chord in the souls of Dole's constituency, middle America. Dole and countless other cultural conservatives are all playing to the same Branson, Missouri crowd, and there's no better way to strike fear in the hearts of Andy Williams and Johnny Cash fans than to flash the hideous spectacle of deviant films and music before them like so many shrunken heads while calling for America to get back on the righteous path. According to Dole and others, “the cultural elite” is a fringe element of liberal intellectuals and entertainment types that are bent on destroying human values, and ultimately human worth.

I understand quite well the people to which Dole is speaking. Arkansas, after all, almost borders Dole's home state of Kansas,

and Branson is only thirteen miles across the border into Missouri. I also understand that the devils that Dole speaks of must seem very real to his supporters. There are no movie or recording studios in these parts, and one can only imagine what kinds of decadence take place on the coasts. But I also understand that Dole's comments are both pitifully close-minded and cynically manipulative. I could take the time in this essay to carefully point out the inaccuracies in Dole's statements, but that would only lead to a

war of words in which the two sides can't decide on the ground rules. I've decided instead to bring forth one of Satan's minions himself and allow him to address the audience in his blasphemous tongue, to cackle in delight with tales of all manner of human debauchery, to reveal his twisted, impish form to the purifying light of decency. I have decided to allow a member of “the cultural elite” to tell his story, the sordid tale of his fall into human depravity.

I WAS BORN IN 1963, my parents' only child, in Memphis, Tennessee, a city that to this day can best be described as down-home. My ancestors

chopped, picked and sold cotton for a living, cotton that had been raised on land that some of them owned and some did not. At the time of my birth my father was a floor manager in a local department store. My mother stayed home and raised me, except during the Christmas season, when she worked in the same department store playing with Kenner toys in a display area for the amusement of children, children who would surely be mesmerized by the intricacies of the Easy Bake Oven and hope to find it under the tree on Christmas morning. My father was born in Memphis to sharecroppers and Mississippi River barge drivers. My mother was from Biscoe, Arkansas, the locals call it “Biscuit,” which lies one hundred miles to the west of the river at the top of Arkansas' Grand Prairie region, but had decided to move to Memphis with her brother and sister after graduating from high school. My early years were filled with hours of helping GI Joe fend off Communists and waiting in restless anticipation to board the Greyhound bus with my grandmother to ride down Highway 70 to her home in Stuttgart, the duck capital of the world, home of Riceland Rice, for summer vacations filled with swimming, walking up Main Street to the drug store, and eating fried chicken and watermelon in the dusk of another mosquito-filled Grand Prairie July day.

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I was enrolled for the first grade at Grace Saint Luke's Episcopal Day School in the fall of 1969. The year and one term that I spent there mark the only time in my life that I haven't attended a public school. By that fall Memphis had instituted a busing policy to comply with integration. However, my parents didn't send me to a private school to keep me from being forced to attend school with black children, though both of them had attended segregated public schools. I was sent to a private school because the public school that the city had assigned me to was both far from home for a six-year-old and was located in what was known then as a "bad neighborhood." My parents also weren't wealthy, nor did they come from wealthy families. We lived in an older middle class section of Memphis known as Midtown in a World War II era house that we rented. I was sent to private school because it was close enough that I could be driven to school in the morning and because prostitutes didn't frequent the neighborhood as they did the public school's neighborhood. There was also the nagging feeling in my parents and maternal uncle, Vernon, who helped pay my tuition, that there might be trouble over integration.

I was five years old in the spring of 1968 when my father called home to tell my mother and Aunt Marlis, who lived with us, to lock the doors and not go outside until he came home. I could hear the ring of countless police sirens racing up what seemed like every street in the city, and my mother told me that someone had shot Martin Luther King, the great advocate of civil rights. While no one in my family could be called an activist in regard to civil rights, all of them understood that the racial caste system that they had been born into was wrong, wrong for white Southerners as well as black Southerners. While they knew that change was both inevitable and right, no one wanted to see a six-year-old boy become a pawn in the struggle for change. The decision, then, to send me to a private school was based solely on my family's desire that I receive a solid education. My parents told me why I was going to Grace Saint Luke's before I was enrolled, and I understood my parents' decision as well as any six-year-old can. I knew what integration was and I knew that some neighborhoods were scary for a little boy. However, once school started the only things that mattered to me were coloring in the states on the big map and arguing with Miss Seal, my teacher and a recent graduate of the University of Mississippi, over whether Coach Frank Broyles could lead the Arkansas Razorbacks to vic-

tory over the forces of evil themselves, the Ole Miss Rebels with their red-headed favorite son, Archie Manning, at the helm, in the 1970 Sugar Bowl, whatever that was.

We left Memphis when I was eight, and the thing that I miss to this day about the city that sits at the top of some of the poorest land in North America, the Mississippi Delta, was going with my mother to the city library on Saturday for books. Neither of my parents had attended college, nor had anyone else in my family, but everyone believed that education was both good and necessary. I was read to by nearly everyone in my family, and I particularly reveled in the story that Aunt Marlis read to me nearly every evening before bed, the tale of Bugs Bunny's struggles with the wily Tasmanian Devil. When I began to read on my own, my tastes moved to tales of future space exploration. After all, Neil Armstrong had set foot on the moon the summer before I began school.

After a few years in Houston, my father decided that it was time to move to "the country." The town we settled into was Greers Ferry, Arkansas, a town that in early 1975 had fewer citizens than the United States House of Representatives. Located in the foothills of the Ozark Plateau, Greers Ferry is eighty miles north of Little Rock and can best be described not as down-home, but as back-woods. My first months there gave me my first taste of culture shock. Before the move I had known only other middle class children like myself. I had no idea before the move that all states could not afford the kind of education that I had received in the private school in Memphis or in the Seabrook, Texas public school system. Greers Ferry introduced me to poverty, and not just individual poverty, but regional poverty. As I passed into adolescence and adulthood, I came to understand that with this poverty comes, to a large degree, ignorance. While Greers Ferry is only eighty miles from Little Rock, a city, by the way, that is mainly known for two things: the ugly spectacle of a white governor creating with one decision in 1957 a lasting symbol of three hundred years of white southern racism in attempting to halt the integration of Central High School, and more recently, as having one of the highest per capita murder rates in the nation, Greers Ferry is also less than one hundred miles from Harrison, Arkansas, which is thirty miles south of Branson, Missouri and is the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan. A large portion of my formative years and formal education, then, took place in an area of the country where difference of any kind is considered dan-

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gerous.

I graduated from the high school in Greers Ferry in 1982 in a class of thirty-six and enrolled that fall at the branch of the University of Arkansas in Little Rock. This proved to be a disaster, but after working for a few years I enrolled for the spring term, 1988 at the main campus in Fayetteville. I took my BA in English at the end of the summer term, 1992 and entered the graduate program in English. While the University of Arkansas is considered a research institution, it remains in many respects provincial. To most of the population of Arkansas, the flagship university's major achievements are not its top-notch MFA program in creative writing and program in Architecture, but an unacknowledged national championship in football in 1964 and the 1994 NCAA men's basketball

championship. The citizens of Arkansas are largely more concerned with Danny Ford getting the Razorbacks back into a bowl game than recent groundbreaking research in superconductivity. It is even safe to say that more students at the University are aware of Sidney Moncreif's accomplishments than are aware of Miller Williams', who recently took the Poet's Prize, the poetry version of the National Book Award.

Since the move to Arkansas I haven't lived in any other state, and I don't seriously intend to. The state that I call home is consistently at or near the bottom of every major economic category in this country. Our people are poor, our schools, including our universities, are largely underfunded, our teachers are underpaid, and our highway system, particularly the interstate system, is largely inadequate. Arkansas has the distinction of being the smallest state west of the Mississippi River and sports a population that is one quarter the size of New York City's. Our main exports are not manufactured goods but chickens and rice. Other than the much-maligned Bill Clinton, our two most notable politicians have been the above-mentioned Orval Faubus and Wilbur Mills, the congressman who will be forever known as the chair of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee whose political career came to a crashing and shameful end in the early 1970s when he was found drunkenly wallowing in the Reflecting Pond between the Lincoln and Washington monuments in search of an Argentine stripper named Fanny Fox, Wilbur's "little Argentine firecracker." Before Bill Clinton's election to the Presidency in 1992, the most prevalent depiction of an Arkansan in the national media could be found on *The Beverly Hillbillies*, one of the most offensive television shows ever aired. I don't choose to live in Arkansas because I am unaware of better economic conditions in other

regions of the nation, nor do I choose to live here out of some sense of "southern pride." I live in Arkansas because this state, despite its flaws, has made me who I am. I live in Arkansas, and love Arkansas, for the same reasons that William Faulkner loved Mississippi "not because, despite."

I haven't told you about myself and the place that I am from because either is special. Quite the contrary. I am a white southern middle class male from a poor, small, land-locked state whose history is filled with racial strife and a seemingly willful ignorance of and opposition to progress. In many respects I am average in every way. The only thing that could possibly set me apart from the norm is my education, and that, in many ways, is negligible. All of this does not, however, qualify me as a "good ole boy." I can assure

you that no one has ever addressed me as Bubba. I've never donned a baseball cap with the moniker of a feed company emblazoned on its front. I don't like to fish and have never shot an animal or target with any kind of firearm. Nor have I wanted to. In the six state and federal elections that I have voted in since I became eligible in 1984, I have failed to vote for a Democrat only once. I didn't vote for Ronald Reagan in 1984, I voted for the Republican candidate for US Congressman for Little Rock. I did this only because the Democratic candidate from this district, Tommy Robinson, had only run as

a Democrat because he knew that he could not be elected as a Republican. Arkansas does, after all, have the strongest Democratic party in these United States. Alas, my attempt to keep this man out of Washington failed, though I have since watched with glee as Robinson switched parties, gained notoriety as the biggest hot check writer in Congress, declared personal bankruptcy, and was unmercifully stomped in the 1990 Arkansas Republican gubernatorial primary by a small-time hack named Sheffield Nelson. Because I love Arkansas, and because I am a life-long Democrat, I care about academic developments and achievements at my alma mater, but I also care about how many games the football team wins.

What I am, the person that this state and its people have cultivated, is a liberal intellectual. A southern one to be sure, but a liberal intellectual none-the-less. I am a member of "the cultural elite." I hope that no one is shocked by how average I am. I am not deviant, and I do not promote anything that could really be called deviant. You wouldn't know that by what you get from cultural conservatives like Bob Dole, Dan Quayle, George Will, and Rush Limbaugh, though. According to these men and others of their ilk,

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“the cultural elite” adhere to liberal, intellectual, counter-cultural notions of America which, if instituted, would completely destroy the family and replace it with a large, ineffective federal bureaucracy. According to these people I place no value on human life or worth because I don’t believe that someone else has the right to tell me what I can say and who I can love or what kinds of art I can enjoy. They will tell you that my belief that no one should be stomped into the ground and left for dead because they happen to be homosexual is proof that my only real desire is to rip this nation apart at the seams by creating a whole series of minority classes. The stupidity of their “logic” doesn’t even warrant a response. However, these conservatives are using me, or rather a cynical caricature of me, to scare you into electing them. Now that I’ve hopefully convinced you that I’m not one of Satan’s imps, please allow me to point out a few things about these fine leaders and their plans for getting America back on track.

**A** S I WRITE THIS ESSAY, the House of Representatives has just completed its “first hundred days.” Among the items on its agenda to take America back are plans to dismantle Affirmative Action and plans to dismantle or at the least severely restrict funding to the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The argument for the last two measures is that both serve only a small portion of the American population. What portion would that be? The “cultural elite,” of course. Cultural conservatives paint an image of well-to-do, liberal intellectuals who thrive on a steady diet of discourse whose aim is to undermine the greatness of our cultural heritage. Primarily products of the counter-culture born out of Vietnam and the struggle for civil rights in the 1960’s, these intellectuals by and large hold down high paying faculty positions in some of our most affluent colleges and universities. For all of their alleged knowledge, most are not qualified or interested in disseminating valuable knowledge and skills to their unsuspecting students. Indeed, most are actually contemptuous of a student body who is either unaware or distrustful of modern theoretical constructs which paint American culture as, at the least, inadequate to address the problems of many underprivileged minority groups, and, at the worst, composed of malignant forces which act to keep these groups disenfranchised. While Public Television may offer programming that doesn’t always paint America in the most positive light, cultural conservatives would be hard pressed to find anything subversive in “The Arkansas Traveler,” which is produced by Arkansas’ AETN.

The essential conservative position is that if members of “the cultural elite” are the people who call for Affirmative Action and make up the audience for “liberal” programming on public television, and are also the producers and audience of “liberal, un-American” art, then why should the tax dollars of hard working American citizens go to fund these kinds of projects when we have a staggering national debt looming over us? Cultural conservatives have succeeded over the last two years in painting a picture of a “cultural elite” which is made up of liberal Northeastern intellectuals and their cohorts, an equally liberal West Coast core of media and

entertainment types, that is bent on sucking the blood out of America as it thrives on that very blood. However, for all of their ranting about “un-American” programming on PBS and immoral movies and music, at least one conservative, our man Bob Dole, doesn’t seem to have a problem with people carrying assault weapons. Perhaps my information is not current, but the last time I checked neither *The McNeil/Lehrer Newshour* nor the film *True Romance* had been used to kill someone.

ON THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DEBATE, I find a few things worth pointing out. Newt Gingrich has come out as strongly against discussing homosexuality in high school sex education classes. The Man From Georgia, however, has a lesbian sister, and he admits that he loves her as a person regardless of her sexuality. He has never said that he loves her but hates her lifestyle, he has said that he loves her regardless of her sexuality. He has basically said that the fact that she is gay has no bearing on his feelings for her. This makes Mr. Gingrich a hypocrite, for he seems perfectly able to realize that a person is much more than his or her sexuality, yet he uses the issue of homosexuality to gain political brownie points with conservative voters. sorry, Sis, I guess being Speaker of the House is worth the price of Newt’s soul. However, Newt is far from the worst hypocrite in the conservative camp. Rush Limbaugh has also come out against Affirmative Action and other legislation aimed at leveling the cultural playing field, claiming that the culture has moved beyond the need for such laws. Mr. Limbaugh, however, has also revealed himself as a staunch racist. He has on more than one occasion ridiculed our former Surgeon General, Dr. Elders, for her diction. I’d just like to remind Rush that Elders is probably old enough to have been forced to attend underfunded, segregated schools in Arkansas. And even if she didn’t, her parents were certainly forced to. Does Rush really believe that these pitiful excuses for schools were able to provide an adequate education for millions of southern blacks on the pennies grudgingly tossed to them? The fact that Ms. Elders has been able to rise to her current stature is a testament not to her ignorance, but to her intellect and determination. Mr. Limbaugh, however, cynically uses her provincial speech patterns to create an image of liberals that is both buffoonish and very possibly dangerous. No one should be surprised at this, though, as this tactic is a part of every conservative’s arsenal.

I’m afraid that their strategy is working. While it was once acceptable to refer to oneself as a liberal, now the very mention of that term will brand one a member of “the cultural elite,” at once over-privileged and bent on biting off the very American hand that feeds you. The very term is insidious, for “elite” can only imply privilege. This so-called privilege can not be privileged *knowledge*, for every academic, at least, is attempting to spread this knowledge, and the media figures targeted are certainly doing the same in their art and public cries for various kinds of social reform. What kind of privilege can these people possess, then? In a capitalist industrial democracy the ultimate privilege is economic wealth.

While some media figures do command great salaries, none possess the economic power wielded by captains of industry, nor do they possess the international political power enjoyed by Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole. While some academics may draw a salary that is above the national average, none come even remotely close to the kind of economic power wielded by the above-mentioned groups.

The linking of liberalism with privilege is at the heart of the conservative strategy, and it is frankly brilliant, for I can't think of a better way to alienate a group for your average American than to paint this group as both stridently anti-American and strangely able to enjoy spoils which the general American populous so richly

deserves. It is also a categorical lie. I'm both surprised and disheartened that no liberal to my knowledge has exposed this lie to the general American population. That is what I'm attempting to do in this essay. As I write this essay I'm sitting in my home in Greers Ferry, Arkansas. I don't believe that American culture is inherently evil or corrupt, but I also don't believe that we are "the shining city on the hill." I attended an underfunded southern university, a football school, a cow college whose faculty is paid below the national average for their profession. My

courses in English drew their texts from reading lists compiled during the conservative 1950's: Milton and Bronte, Whitman and Faulkner. During the week I read and discussed themes and formal characteristics, and on fall weekends I sat in Razorback Stadium hoping against hope that the Hogs could finally find a way to beat Texas. The men and women who served as my instructors and advisors were decent people with families who seemed genuinely concerned about education and the welfare of their students. They believed that their charges should be equipped with a critical eye, and to insure that end some taught the fundamentals of traditional literary study and some assigned readings in Karl Marx and Michel Foucault. All of my education has shaped who I am, but I have not been indoctrinated into anything. After all, indoctrination flies in the face of an education aimed at producing critically minded individuals.

As I sit here writing there rests on my bookshelf *The Communist Manifesto* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I find both of these texts meaningful, as both offer penetrating insights into

capitalism generally and the United States specifically. I'm a liberal and I'm proud of it. I'm not, however, bent on destroying America. I said earlier that I choose to remain in Arkansas despite its problems. This sentiment applies to America as a whole. I do hope to change my culture, both for my own benefit and for the benefit of others, and this desire is grounded in the principles of liberalism, including its critique of US culture. I believe that all of this nation's citizens deserve the right to personal dignity and the opportunity to succeed. If forces act to inhibit these rights because of someone's race, gender, or sexual preference, then I believe laws should be enacted to thwart this malignant force. I also believe that if the federal government can afford to spend billions research-

ing an unnecessary and probably unworkable space missile defense system while giving millions to fund a group bent on overthrowing a freely elected communist government in Central America in the name of "freedom," then we are surely able to enact legislation to balance the opportunity scales for our own population and spend a few million to fund the arts in this country, regardless of its alleged bias.

I am a member of a group that cultural conservatives have branded "the cultural elite." I was born to white southern parents who were

themselves the products of segregation who never even entertained the notion of attending college themselves. They're middle class and continue to work hard for everything they have. They've taught me to be respectful of other people's dignity, for that's the only way to insure my own. I live in a state that many in this nation consider ignorant and backward. Finally, I am 31 years old and have never earned ten thousand dollars in a calendar year on my own in my life. I have written this column because I resent being pigeon-holed as "culturally elite" by people who have reaped more fruit from this culture than I ever will simply because I happen to criticize this culture in an attempt to make it better. I am further incensed by the hypocrisy in doing this for purely political gain. I am stating that this rhetoric is deceitful, divisive, and is ultimately a cynical lie. I can only wonder if Newt Gingrich or Dan Quayle would ever have the gumption to brand me as "the cultural elite," one of Satan's pawns, to my face, for I would gladly point out to them the error in their conclusions. 🍀

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The linking of liberalism with privilege is at the heart of the conservative strategy, and it is brilliant, for I can't think of a better way to alienate a group for your average American. It is also a categorical lie.

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### ezines of note

#### Macintosh ezines

Since I'm a hardcore Macintosh advocate and evangelist, I thought I'd start off this new feature with some Macintosh-oriented ezines of which folks should be aware.

**TidBITS.** If you're a Macintosh user or lover (and they're usually one in the same), then *TidBITS* is the source for up to the minute information about the Mac world. Adam and Tonya Engst (along with Geoff Duncan) publish *TidBITS* (which comes in only one flavor: ASCII/Setext) every week (usually on Tuesday), and it's filled with latebreaking news of everything from mergers to upgrades to bug fixes to corporate mergers to commentary on industry trends. They also include tons of nifty URLs to cool net resources for the Mac (and other hip stuff, too). They also include indepth reviews of products, including shareware (e.g., Tonya Engst just finished a multi-part review of desktop launchers). *TidBITS* may be found at: <http://www.tidbits.com/> where you'll find info on the *TidBITS* mailing list (so it'll be delivered fresh to your doorstep, i.e. your mailbox, once a week), the *TidBITS* FTP archive, and lots of useful and fun links.

**MacSense.** *MacSense* is a Mac-only ezine (in DocMaker format—and the best example of a DocMaker zine I've ever seen) that's somewhere between the big paper Mac magazines (like *MacUser* and *Macworld*) and newsbit-type zines like *TidBITS*. *MacSense* is published monthly by Chris McVeigh and features, well, features that run the gamut from reviews to commentary to FAQs. Their focus is on the personal Mac user, and they really shine in that respect. Whereas *TidBITS* can be downright techie and very “insider” oriented, *MacSense* does a good job of staying inclusive without talking down to its audience. The current issue includes the first in a three part series on getting started with AppleScript that looks promising for the beginning AppleScripter (such as me). One thing that really stands out in *MacSense* is the custom graphics. They are beautiful and really add a professional edge to a free publication. Kudos to Chris McVeigh. *MacSense* may be found online on America Online, eWorld, and on the Internet at: <http://tkb.colorado.edu/olm/zines.html>.

#### literary ezines

Since *Kudzu* falls into this category, it's the category with which I have the most experience, especially as a reader. The sheer breadth of the subject matter of literary ezines, however, fights their being lumped together. Just take a quick look through the etext.org at

<http://www.etext.org/Zines/> or <ftp://ftp.etext.org/pub/Zines/Zines-by-Subject/Literary/> or the Yahoo literary ezines page <http://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/magazines/> and you'll begin to get a vague idea of how varied and fascinating these zines can be. Which, of course, is the point. *Kudzu* is one of the few literary ezines that's mostly “mainstream” or “contemporary” in subject matter, though I don't like those categories, or the “literary” adjective when used to distinguish between types of zines that publish fiction, poetry, dramas, and/or personal essays. So, I'm just going to start with the ones I like at the moment.

**Blue Penny Quarterly.** Right off, I liked *BPQ*. Doug Lawson has a great zine on his hands, and, in fact, *BPQ* was one of the inspirations for *Kudzu*. *BPQ* has evolved over its relatively short history. Originally a Macintosh-only DocMaker zine, with the new issue, *BPQ* is now published in the Adobe Acrobat PDF format. *BPQ* started out publishing most of its works as reprints from print zines, though lately they've published mostly original works. *BPQ* publishes literary short fiction and some reviews (the current issue features a review of Richard Cumyn's *The Limits of Delta Y Over Delta X*, a great book—Rich also appears in *BPQ* #4 and in *Kudzu* 95/1). Good stuff. *BPQ* may be found on America Online and on the Internet at <ftp://ftp.etext.org/pub/Zines/BluePennyQuarterly>. They are also launching a WWW version as well, which is still under construction.

### places of note

**The Etext Archive.** The Etext Archive is one of the Internet's true treasures. Begun several years ago by CICnet employee Paul Southworth, the archive is maintained at Paul's expense (he pays for the harddrive storage space himself and runs the thing on his own time) and by Paul and several others, including Rita Rouvalis and Jason Snell (whose other hats include publisher and editor of *InterText* and assistant editor at *MacUser*). The archive contains the texts of well over a hundred ezines (most in ASCII format, and some in several formats in addition to ASCII)—many of which are no longer publishing but are still interesting—covering every subject imaginable. You can (and should) lose yourself for hours in the archives at <http://www.etext.org/> and by FTP at <ftp://ftp.etext.org/pub/>. 🌿



# About the Contributors

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## David Appell <appell@asu.edu>

My work has appeared in *Hawaii Review* and others, and (forthcoming) in *The Portable Wall*. I am an MFA candidate in the Creative Writing department at Arizona State University, and an Associate Editor of *Hayden's Ferry Review*.

## Sean Brown <scbrown@whale.st.usm.edu>

Sean Brown has published poems and stories at *Real Poetik*, *Transmog*, *Painted Bride*, *Anathema Review*, *Kinesis*, *Fuel* and (as fernand roqueplan) *Indiana Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *Greensboro Review*. He's been in Mississippi a year now, working on a book & trying to stay out of the casinos...

## James Goodwin <goodwin@gl.umbc.edu>

James Goodwin is a graduate of University of Maryland Baltimore County (B.S., Biology) who writes genre (though not certain which) in his spare time, most of which finds a home on the USENET newsgroups *alt.cyberpunk.chatsubo* and *alt.prose*. A frustrated writer trapped in a science geek's body, he looks forward to the day when he can pen in his memoirs, "Were it not for my background in toxicology, I might never have had the wherewithal to win my first Hugo."  
goodwin@gl.umbc.edu

## Mark Hallman

Hallman's poems and short stories have appeared in numerous venues. His work is quoted in the 1995 *Poet's Market*. Several of his poems appeared in Alyson Publications's poetry anthology titled *Gents, Bad Boys, and Barbarians*. He has published *Plump Testicles*, a collection of his more light-hearted pieces, as well as *Shared Affections*, in cooperation with David Bolduc. Hallman's short story "Knife, Fork, Fingernails" was adapted and produced as a play by Reality Check Theater in San Jose, CA.

## James Katowich <jamkat@comp.uark.edu>

will graduate this summer with a B.A. in English from the University of Arkansas and plans to enter graduate school in the fall. He

also hopes to get an MFA "sometime early in the 21st century." His spare time is spent reading ravenously, writing, or watching *The Simpsons*. "For me writing is easy: I just sit at my computer and concentrate until blood pops out on my forehead. I'd like to get email from anyone who reads my story in Kudzu."

## John Adam Kaune <jkaune@trentu.ca>

is a social worker/poet/wanderer living in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. In his spare time (what there is of it!) he helps edit *Sand River Journal*, an online collection of poetry from the newsgroup *rec.arts.poems*.

## Scott Malone <74454.3050@compuserve.com>

is a freelance writer based in New York. He writes on arts and culture for city papers and is currently completing the third edition of *Native's Guide to New York* with author Richard Laermer. Previously, he edited the *BURC Newsletter*, a quarterly on Bronx socio-economic issues. His interests include media and literature, classical music and theater, and social welfare issues. He wishes to thank several inanimate objects named Oscar for their help.

## Blake Wilson <bdwilson@ins.infonet.net>

lives in Greers Ferry, Arkansas, where he spends most of his time reading, playing his guitar, and writing. He's an M.A. candidate in the University of Arkansas-Little Rock's Technical and Expository Writing program. Blake is also the Associate Editor of *Kudzu*.

## Bill Horne <riverat@wsnet.com>

was born in Talladega, Alabama June 2, 193, but now lives in Millbrook, Alabama. He is married to Sally, and they have one son, who is 38 year old. Holding a Psychology degree from Auburn University, Horne is currently a computer analyst in the communications field, and a Real Estate broker. ♣