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# From the Vine

Steven W. Jarvis

Wow, this issue's a little behind schedule, ain't it? Just thought I'd get that out of the way right off the bat. Real life has been squeezing out the fun stuff lately, and *Kudzu* has suffered the most. Fortunately, we've made some plans and some behind-the-scenes administrative changes that will help ensure that *Kudzu* comes off the presses at roughly four equally-spaced intervals over the course of the year. But, we haven't quite figured out what that schedule will be. We have to maximize our school vacations so we won't have pesky things like final exams interfering with the *Kudzu* schedule.

In addition to making some organizational plans, we've added some members to our editorial staff. Myself, James Martin, and James Katowich are still here and will still be involved in selecting the works that appear in *Kudzu*. In addition to the three of us, we've added two new faces: John Moore and Tom Rice. You'll recognize John's name from the premiere issue of *Kudzu*. John is a poet and writer and, most importantly for *Kudzu*, a great reader. Tom is also a great reader as well as a

writer. John and Tom will add welcome experience and skill to the *Kudzu* editorial process. Also, Blake Wilson remains loosely on staff as a regular contributor, even though he's on hiatus this issue while he relocates. He'll be back for the Autumn issue.

This issue of *Kudzu* is a bit of a departure for us, our first issue focusing primarily on poetry. We received a remarkably large number of quality poetry submissions for this issue, and we decided to go ahead and publish all the good stuff instead of having to pick and chose among equally deserving poems. Though in the past we've focused on fiction, we thought it was about time for poetry to step up and take a solo. We kinda like this approach, so you may see more "special focus" issues in the future, depending on how this first one is received. Also in this issue, in addition to some fine poetry, we have six short short stories by Michael Manley. Though we love poetry, we didn't want this issue to be exclusively poetry, so we included all six of Manley's short pieces.

*Kudzu* was doubly blessed by the selections in this year's *eScene* <<http://www.etext.org/Zines/eScene>> collection. *eScene* is a "best of the year" collection for short stories published on the net. Gerald Thurmond's short story "Eating Buzzards" from *Kudzu* 95/3 was selected as one of the eight stories in this year's collection out of 117 nominated stories. Also, *Kudzu* staffer James Katowich's short story "A Brief Stay" from *Blue Penny Quarterly* was selected. Congratulations to Gerald and James and all the others selected for this honor. Check out *eScene* 96 — it truly showcases the high quality of the fiction being published on the net.

Also, some additional *Kudzu* news: starting with this issue (though it'll be a little behind the other editions), *Kudzu* will also be published in a NewtonBook edition. This new addition to the *Kudzu* editions family includes plans to go back and create NewtonBook editions for the past five issues as time permits. Now you can carry your *Kudzu* wherever you go (as long as you have a Newton, that is).

We'll be back in October or so with the Autumn issue. See ya'll then... 🍀

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# *Kudzu* needs art!

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*Kudzu* is looking for original art for the cover page of the PDF edition and for the web edition. If you or anyone you know would like to have your art seen by thousands of people from across the net, contact the *Kudzu* editors at <[kudzu@etext.org](mailto:kudzu@etext.org)>

# Joel Chace

## Speed

Mid-afternoon lull, and Randy  
takes a seat with the spectators.

“I was just thinkin’ ‘bout  
a pickup softball game.

Prob’ly 40 years ago.  
Jimmy Sanders behind

the plate, and Ike Mc Rae’s  
tauntin’ him with a lead

halfway down to  
third. So Jimmy just flat out

runs straight across  
the diamond and makes

the tag right before Ike  
steps back on second.

Never seen anything  
like it.

‘Bout ten years

later Jimmy’s Chevy hit  
that concrete abuttment.

Woman who lived  
alone on that curve—when she

called the police, she said,  
There’s someone dying on

my lawn. Like mainly  
what he’d done was spoil

her evenin’, snorin’ off  
his drunk.

Right

now, when I fashion her

sayin' that I'd

like to break her teeth.

And then her legs.”

a flashlight and tells me,

Let's go over

to Annie's place—she

and her sister'll look

just fine by candlelight!

So we start walkin', and it's like

there's a thousand

eels, snappin' and slitherin'

all over the streets.

## Randy Remembers the Winter Before Graduation

“That night ice brought down

the power lines, Jimmy Sanders

comes to my folks'

back door. He's carryin'



By God, I took every wide

berth! But that damn

Jimmy pranced and flirted

with those sizzlers,

the whole way. What idiot's

luck! I swear he loved

the nearest misses!" 🍀

# Richard Fein

## Complex

Squashed against the doors I hoped wouldn't fly open, I  
was condemned to stand for twenty stations, but there were compensa-  
tions,  
for after the dark tunnel a view exploded.  
Usual sunset business.  
Of course being pubescent what I really wanted  
was a glimpse of an intimate bedroom scene  
from one of the houses that seemed to wobble by.  
But the subway was passing at dinnertime,  
too early for lawful connubial bliss,  
too late for adultery, with husbands home soon.  
A line of two family homes, with kitchen lights and aproned women.  
A hairpin curve, squeaking brakes, we stopped.  
There, fifty feet away, beyond the chasm of door to window,  
I saw one of my first loves.  
Oh, she was fully clothed, any undressing was in my mind.  
About my age. We swapped smiles. She turned her face from side to side  
as if modeling. She could have. Pretty.

The car door parted. I floated  
across the gulf, to her bedroom window, almost.  
A sudden jerk, I fell on a muscular shoulder.  
An annoyed stare robbed me of my last look.  
The train made its turn around the curve,  
and each passing car was in turn bathed by her bedroom light.

I noted the place and for the next three weeks  
happened to be walking down that street.  
But the Hollywood coincidence didn't occur, almost never does.  
Boy, the time I wasted when I was young!  
Years after, in fact just last week, with wife and child in the car,  
I managed a wrong turn. Behold! The street!  
They asked me where I was going; I didn't really know.  
I knew the house had long since been demolished;  
a towering co-op complex now casts its shadow on the turning tracks.

# Disillusioned

Common wisdom holds around first light—

and for ages poets and singers have marked the moment,  
those minutes before waking,  
before the meddlesome sun pries open the eyelids,  
past when the sky has subtly changed from ebony to a hint of blue—

common wisdom has always held first light is first birdsong.  
The illuminated clock hands point to the proper numbers for dawn  
on this spring, calendar day,  
but it's as dark as a new moon midnight,  
for the clouds are thick and starless,  
and all the city lights on the block are broken.  
It's dawn somewhere above those clouds,  
but not here—not here.

Here is a false dawn.

Through my open window first birdsong greets the dark day.

Its shrill notes rob me of an hour more of dreams.

Am I the only one who hears, who knows  
that in pitch black night there can be birdsong?

Am I the only one lying awake listening?

For the common wisdom has always held—holds now—  
(it's the grist for poems and songs)  
that a sunrise melody marks the end of darkness.  
But birdsong and the golden dawn are not so intimate,  
rather it is the comfortless, cold clockwork of mindless instinct  
that plays this swan song of common wisdom.

## A Division of Labor

I should have known, even when we were driving home;  
the windows were opened, the ocean odors blew in, you asked  
if the scent of the familiar would rush  
over the antennas and calm our blue-green bug,  
and if we might pull over and set it free.  
I should have known;  
by the time it took you to arrange and rearrange  
the pots, pans, butter, spices and spoons,  
over and over, that the job would be mine.

With an embarrassed smile you opened your hands.  
Like a windup toy its spindly legs jerked forward.  
I seized it, up and over into the pot.  
And above I held the boiling kettle.

I turned from you to hide my slight wincing,  
my face near the rising steam.  
A second, two, then directly over the head.  
“To kill the brain, the rest is all reflex,” I reassured.  
Our meal turned as bright red  
as the grasshopper I once burnt  
when I was one of old King Lear’s wanton boys  
who picked apart bugs for sport.

Later,  
candlelight, soft music on the tape, butter over cracked opened shells,  
we scooped the meat and drank wine.  
Across from me, a steely look as you vowed,  
“Next time by myself, no more squeamish silly girl.”  
But I thought  
if you were silly, then I wish you’d always be silly  
in that way. 🍀

# Joseph Green

## Philosophy of the Motel Pool

After the travelers have all gone to bed,  
the motel pool settles into its blues.  
The filter motor goes quiet, and the water  
stops moving. Everyone who has been there  
was just passing through. Empties and ashtrays,  
candy wrappers, someone's lost flip-flops  
or tank top or towel or fashion magazine-

in the soft glow from the underwater lights these  
things lie around the deck like fragments of dreams,  
bits of evidence at a crime scene,  
yet the pool itself is unperturbed.  
The woman who swam laps early  
and the man who stopped to watch her  
are both gone. The family of four from Omaha,

the honeymoon couple, silly with champagne,  
and the boy who played frogman all afternoon  
will not be back again. No matter who dives in,  
no matter how they splash or agitate the water,  
every night the pool resolves  
to be flat, placid. It is not depressed.  
It is doing what water does at a time like this.

## The Tourists

Because it is a country most of us visit  
only rarely, we will never be fluent

in the language of grief. We speak haltingly  
and often have to excuse ourselves, saying Sorry,

sorry. What else can we do?  
Whenever we go there, although we know

we've packed more than we need,  
we refuse to let anyone carry our luggage.



In the streets, we clutch new souvenirs  
like wounds, as if letting go of them

for a moment would surely ruin us.  
But no one else is going

to want what we've bought.  
No one is going to pick our pockets.

Wherever we walk, even crossing the piazza,  
we find ourselves alone, the architecture foreign,

the buildings all painted the same conservative shades  
as the suits of undertakers. We are always getting lost.

And when we come back home again, none  
of our friends will ask to see our photographs.

Instead, they'll want to try out the few clumsy words  
they can remember from their own trips across that border.

# The Boys

“Hiroshima is famous all over Japan for its association with the neighbouring islet of Itaku-Shima, ‘Island of Light’...”

*-Encyclopædia Britannica, 1959*

We dropped our little boy off  
and an island of light fell on the city.  
It flashed our enemies into light as well  
or turned them to ash or cooked and skinned them alive,  
left them trailing the ribbons of their faces  
as they ran, panicked through their ruined streets.

We'd given him our blessing and we'd let him fly  
or fall on his own. He was a huge success.  
So we sent his fat brother down right away  
to spread the same light in another place.  
Oh, those two boys had a promise so bright it blinded us. 🍀

# Ernest Slyman

## Comes Softly Greed

When I hear the tremulous cries  
Of insects at dawn,  
I think at last I understand  
The world's yearning for power and money,  
Which comes to burst in the skulls of men  
Like insects softly calling to one another,  
Begging for love, and out of such loneliness  
Comes envy, which makes them dance  
And beat their wings in the sun's bright tomorrow,  
Deadly afraid some bit of summer shall fall and pounce,  
And steal the grass from out of their mouths.

# Divorce Settlement

Far country. Dangerous, arid terrain.

Wild animals, not enough water.

There's been a revolution.

The natives are lonely, religious.

They struggle long and hard for many years

To say good-bye. And divided over issues of a political and philosophical nature. The two sides can't agree on anything.

Two separate sovereign nations. Separate languages, currency, art, literature.

At war, they're fierce. Jealousy, mad, crazy, throwing lamps, breaking dishes.

They argue over the telephone. The economy of both countries depleted by the lack of confidence in the government.

Both camps have been hurt by the severity of the attacks. A settlement is far off. A level of diplomacy that will ensure the equal division of territory, resources and assets. They're very proud.

They each need a way out of this so that both can save face.

Bring about a cessation to their hostilities.

The two countries. It shall come as no surprise to you that these two separate cultures owe much to each other.

Bound by the union of history. Their roads intertwine. There's Abigail.

There's Daniel. Two countries divided, and the children cry pitifully, as they are being taxed, exported to the outer regions. 🍀

# Terry Tompkins

## An Apology

For all the years you lived under another roof  
missing the Wyoming wind, the fishes and the fires,  
for all the water that flows between us tonight  
as I walk a hardwood grove  
looking for owls  
with the snowflakes falling in and out of the flashlight's beam,  
for the time I stood on the tundra  
far past the timberline  
where the lichens grow slowly  
and it takes years to fill in the tracks of the moose  
and for this afternoon  
when you are missing another spring rite of passage  
there are kinglets in the pines  
meadowlarks on the wires  
and the herons are back at Brush Creek  
but it is still early  
more birds will return  
and we are still miles apart

# Autumn

Dreaming last night  
I turned my notebook over to you  
I told you I wished that poems  
would fall from your gentle hands  
about nights in the Black Hills  
when even the trees couldn't keep the moon afloat  
how it fell through the branches of the trees  
silently  
and the shadows crawled toward us  
like an army of ants along the ground  
up our legs and across our faces

I told you I wished you would write  
rainy afternoon October poems  
with the trees black and slick  
as highways in the rain  
Michael on my shoulders  
you collecting leaves into a paper bag  
and how later we pressed them into wax paper  
and hung them in your room

Waking and switching the lamp on  
I ran my fingers across your picture  
on the nightstand  
I imagined your cheeks  
warm as the breath of horses in winter  
I listened to the leaves fall  
the determined ones scratching the siding  
looking for handholds

## August

We kneel in the earth  
the same earth as the Shawnee  
there are arrowheads and ashes here  
and beads on the shore of a lake  
when we kneel  
we kneel hard into the belly of Indian legends  
and when we walk

we walk on top of warrior's dreams  
while the beanroot reaches for relics  
but we are not looking for artifacts  
we are looking for a reason to come here again  
together  
I watch you pick beans  
knowing this could be your last summer here  
I pull weeds from the potatoes  
I am trying to pull up strength enough to let you go 🍀



# Sean Woodward

## Easton Skies

In Taos Pueblos, against a wall  
A woman blanketed begins to call  
Here head tall with the water-filled vase  
Breath frozen against the shining stars

Time freezes, falling shatters  
Pieces of broken glass, overlap  
Become the backs of valleys  
The sweeping river torrents  
That are visions of ourselves  
And all that matters  
Catching peace in the growing moment  
Of a thunderhead's dark wealth.

In Yosemite's freezing elegance  
Ansel Easton Adams, in recompense  
Views the might of dagger ice  
The shadow and light  
Of eastern skies,  
The depth of the storm's dark life,  
Of tortoise turns  
On a frozen cone  
Of the forgotten cradle moon  
The scyth whisper  
Of the wild's voice  
Coaxing emulsions in the darkroom  
His heart's first choice  
Beckoning  
Ever home. 🌿

# Barry Spacks

## Lexington, Kentucky

Day after day I clawed from the lawn  
Big Daddy beer cups, gouts of fried pie,  
First Graders' writings on widelined paper.

And fed my heart on the mindless beauty  
of horses, running along white fences  
or poised on far ridges against the sky.

And sniffed every autumn the scent of tobacco,  
all over town, approvable, sweet,  
no matter the warnings on cigarette packets.

## Mayday

On Hendries Beach in this sun-drenched town  
a maypole stands, supported by rocks,  
with gift-wrap ribbons hanging down,  
a crown of mums and daisies on top.

Waves bare their teeth like news of wrath,  
Mayday, Mayday — here children clasp  
ribbons and dance to welcome May.  
They swirl like young winds learning to fly.

# Held in the Night

Certain things are slow to change:  
moist green air in a Southern forest...  
jawlines repeating through twelve generations...  
maple leaves pointing in five cool directions.

3 a.m. A train in the distance  
clicks on, and we in each other's arms  
lie still as if we could stay so forever,  
held in the night and listening.

## The Ears

Unlike the virtuoso hands  
the ears cannot act and yet they seek  
a partner, as does memory  
or mouth.  
Shameless seducers, they swirl  
immodest welcomes to everyone  
yet most disappear and none return  
and only the sweets and the poisons remain  
forever locked in the innermost cells. 🍀

# Michael S. Manley

## Asia

To top the morning off, the ax-handle broke, twisted into splinters up by the head when he hit the stump with a wild swing. Looked like a broken neck. The chainsaw was still busted even though Joe said yesterday that it would be put back together by “tomorrow.” That left him with just the pickax to chop out roots, which was like pissing in a pop bottle—he hit the ground a hell of a lot more than the target. Typical fucking Joe. Tomorrow wasn’t for another week, at least.

Kiyoko had turned on the radio or the TV. He could hear tinny voices through one of the windows even though they were all closed. She had taken a shower earlier—he could hear that, too—and he’d wished the window to their bathroom wasn’t so high up, so he might’ve gotten a look at her in there. She was from Asia someplace—Japan, he thought—but she wasn’t short or skinny like most of the Asian girls he’d seen on

campus. No fish and rice for her, he bet. She’d eaten American food her whole life. American hips and breasts, that long black hair. She’d come out back this morning, after he’d been at it about an hour and his shirt was already soaked through and hanging on the back door to dry. She was wearing this short dress with flowers all over it and looked damn good for probably just getting out of bed. She told him she’d filled a pitcher of water and put it in the refrigerator in the garage. He thanked her and went back to work, but if he hadn’t already been mad at those goddam stumps that wouldn’t come out of the ground, and at the goddam heat, and if his boots hadn’t been so heavy with mud, he might have walked over and talked to her some more. Maybe talked her into staying out there in the yard with him. She could have sat in that hammock in the shade in her swimsuit and told him about Asia, Japan, wherever, while he worked.

There was always one goddam root that twisted around down there and wouldn’t let go. He’d have to

dig all around it and try and swing the ax underneath the stump to bust it. And the fucking ax was broken. He swung the pickax and hit dirt. *Thud*. A plain, dull sound, solid and disappointing. The sound of dirt. Shook the bones in his arms, the muscles in his shoulders. The sound of work. *Thud*.

Joe and Kiyoko were his upstairs neighbors. He rented the basement and they rented the rest of the house. Joe was sort of responsible for the house's upkeep. All the cedar bushes around the house were causing some sort of problem, so Joe paid him to tear them out. He'd cut them all down with the chainsaw yesterday and now he was pulling out the stumps. Eight of the bastards on the back side of the house alone. Joe was an OK guy. Joe was going to set him up with some sort of work for the physics department, moving lab equipment or something. Joe didn't look like a physics grad student. More like he should have been on TV, reading the sports or weather. Kiyoko painted or drew or something.

He could hear the radio inside. 110 degrees. God damn. It was air-conditioned in the house, though the air upstairs worked better than in his apartment. But his place stayed cooler since it was in the basement. Yesterday he'd gone inside to ask if they'd mind the noise if he ran the chainsaw. It was as cool as a department store

in their kitchen. He thought no one was home, it was so quiet. The kitchen table was set with good plates and flowers. They had all sorts of stuff, toasters and blenders and fryers, and new furniture. Maybe they were married. He doubted it. He looked in the living room and Kiyoko was asleep on the couch, her hair hanging off the cushions onto the floor. He watched her chest move up and down underneath her leotard. Her legs were almost the same white yellow as her shorts. He watched, then decided not to wake her up. He didn't want to track mud on the carpet. He'd already left some on the kitchen linoleum.

That third stump moved around like a loose tooth. He jumped up and down on it, but it didn't give any more than before, and now his feet hurt. He jumped down in the hole and tried lifting up on it. His arms got muddy and scratched up, but he ran his fingers under there and found that last goddam root that was anchoring the bastard. Grabbed the pickax. Knocked at the dirt around the stump until he saw the root. Thick as his wrist. He lifted the pickax high, swung underhand hard. It thudded in the dirt. Again. *Thud*. Again. *Thud*.

He believed that sometimes Kiyoko watched him from their bedroom window while he worked. Swing. *Thud*. He was in better shape than Joe. Probably better

than any guy she knew from wherever she was from. Swing. *Thud*. Goddamit. He saw those guys on campus. Most of them looked like they'd never worked a day in their lives. Swing. *Thud*. But he didn't know that for sure. He didn't know them. He didn't know what they did back in Asia.

Swing. *Thud*.

The room where Kiyoko and Joe slept was right above his bedroom. Swing. *Thud*. The pickax hung up on the root. He was up to his ankles in dirt clods. Lift. Swing. *Thud*. He would hear them every couple of nights. They must have slept on one of those low, wooden things. Swing. *Thud*.

Knock, knock, knock, it bounced on his ceiling.

Swing. *Thud*. Swing. *Thud*.

Knock, knock, knock. Thump, thump, thump.

Swing. *Thud*. Swing. *Thud*.

That should have been him up there knocking. Maybe one night. He'd go upstairs while Joe was at the lab, he and Kiyoko would talk. They'd sit real close on that couch. Swing. *Thud*. She'd kiss him. Swing. *Thud*. Run her hands over his sunburn. Swing. *Thud*. He'd pull her shirt off. Swing. *Thud*. Swing.

Whoa, shit. Lift.

Swing. *Thud*. See those beautiful breasts. Swing.

*Thud*. Feel them in his hands. Swing. *Thud*. They'd go back to their bedroom. They'd get down on that wooden thing.

Knock, knock, knock.

Swing. Thump, thump, thump. Swing. *Thud*.

*Knock, knock, knock*.

Swing. *Thud*. Swing.

*Knock, knock, knock*

Swing. *Thud*. Swing. *Thud*. Swing. *Thud*. Swing. *CRACK*.

Yes, goddamit, yes! How that root split open, a little blossom of yellow wood. Slivers of purple.

The back door was open. Joe and Kiyoko were outside. They were dressed up. She was wearing a tiny black dress. He was scared she'd get dirt on it out here, a smudge of yellow clay along her hip.

"Man, you got a lot done today," Joe said. "But it's getting pretty hot. You ought to knock off for now."

"I'm going to finish this one first," he said.

Joe nodded, put on a pair of dark sunglasses. Kiyoko went back inside. He felt a little dizzy. "We're going to Indy for the afternoon," Joe said. He held up a couple of bills. "Lock up the garage when you're done. What should I do with your pay?"

He would throw the pickax. Send it flying end over

end like in a lumberjack's contest. The iron tip would puncture Joe's heart. He'd laugh at the look of surprise on Joe's face, the red bloom under the suit coat. The pickax, free of the stump, balanced in his hands, hummed for flight. Sunlight flashed gold off the frames of Joe's sunglasses.

On the roof, a dragon chattered over the shingles. White scales edged in red. Iron claws on its feet and two flat golden discs for eyes. Like something from a Chinese restaurant wall. It twisted along the gutters over Joe's head, watching. Sounded like a million newspapers in the wind.

He knocked the pickax against his boot, busted some dirt clods off. The dragon jumped over the roof's peak, farted out a firecracker as its tail disappeared behind the chimney.

He pointed to his shirt on the doorknob. "In the pocket." He didn't want to put it in his sweaty jeans. It would get soaked, and if there was anything he hated, it was wet money.

## Falling Down

A green pickup shivered at the corner, dark and any-

mous windows like a mask around its cab. Driverless, it slid past Necessity Jones, a lawnmower rattling in the back, its handle bouncing. Necessity believed she was the only person in town that day. The sidewalk blurred, the air thick with August. The stoplight at the end of the block turned; Necessity saw the red bulb switch off, its light crumple away in the heat. The green bulb lifted itself on sweaty arms and glowed. Sweat pooled in the street. Necessity pulled at her shorts, pink nylon wrinkling, folded up between her thick thighs. The tree across the street moved its leaves with Necessity's breathing, without noise. No engines. No birds. No echoing voices. She didn't hear the stones pop beneath her sandals. She felt tiny waves in the flesh of her legs.

The promise of Mika's apartment, dark and dry and air-conditioning cool, danced 5000-Watt electric blue in the air above the stoplight cables.

The color of junebugs, bottle-flies, old soda cans caught in Necessity's glasses, swirled in the thick lenses. Her tee-shirt began to shrink, alive, trying to wring itself dry. The air around her shook, thunder in her lungs, a giant temple bell stroked in the center of her skull. Her bones liquefied, like granite deep in the earth, and Necessity Jones fell.

The shadow of a telephone pole lay across her eyes



like a blindfold. Mika would be waiting with the cards and cold juice from the refrigerator. She'd never find her here. The pickup squealed around the next corner, the tires crying like a prehistoric beast in a canyon, the sound racing along the hot air next to the ground, breaking against Necessity's arms. The police car arrived first, then the paramedics' van, then a long firetruck, pulled there as if by gravity. Men stood above her, their mouths moving, asking questions that rose in the humid air. Necessity saw them catch currents at roof level and scramble together into crosswords.

She felt the concrete darkening beneath her. The rescue vehicles' noses pointed to her, circled like hounds at a tree, the uniforms moving without bodies in them, fingers shoved under her limbs. Necessity looked up into the white sky and said, "Am I there? Am I there yet? Am *there*?"

## The Hello Walk

People walk around me. They stare, or worse, they make themselves not stare, their heads stiffly turned away, eyes focused somewhere above me. I've got ten minutes—

there are no bells during summer session. The deejay in my ear tells me it's hit 113. With the humidity figured in, it feels like 125. *But with the wind chill, it only feels like 120, 119 in the shade.* Ha ha. There's no wind, and it's noon so there's damn little shade.

They walk around me, pass me, faster body rhythms I've long since stopped envying. I will be late for Nutrition and Diet. I have to walk from here, Grissom Hall, past the building where they have all the English classes, past the old Chemistry building, all the way across Memorial Mall to Stone for my next class. I just left my Statistics recitation. My head is swimming. My scale this morning read 314, two pounds down. Numbers, numbers.

My sweatpants are soaked. It's like wearing a steamed towel. So is my tee-shirt. Feels like plastic wrap. Two fools glide by me on skateboards, their shirts tied around the waists of their shorts, baseball caps on backwards. Skinny little twerps will give themselves heat stroke. The student hospital sees a dozen cases a day. Thank god the campus isn't full now. There are vast areas of my body that haven't seen direct sunlight since sixth grade. I don't own a swimming suit. Most of me is as white as an ivory Buddha.

In front of the old Chemistry building I stop caring.

The steps and concrete walls there are bright yellow. There is no shade, not even in the seams of the sidewalk. I set down my backpack and put my radio and headphones inside. I take off my shirt.

*Oh my god*, a passing student says. *Jesus*, one behind me hisses. The laughing begins. *Look at the size of those tits*, a guy says over by the wall, *Jeez, put on a bra*, and he is almost paralyzed with laughter. I can feel the sun touching the layers of skin beneath the surface. A girl in a huge white tee-shirt bites her lip, exchanges looks with her friend in sunglasses. I can feel the shadow of a bird flying overhead. *If I ever get that big, shoot me*. I look up at the face of the Chem building. The names of famous chemists are carved there: Bunsen, Curie, Faraday, Pasteur. They tell me what to do.

I slip out of my sandals, peel off the sweatpants, put my sandals back on since the sidewalk is frying my heels, and it is done. Underwear wasn't even a consideration this morning. There is nothing but a continuous gasp around me. I almost believe it is reverent. I put my clothes in my backpack and head again toward Memorial Mall.

People stop. They stare. They laugh. They turn away. They walk away. They scream. They hoot. They whistle. They pretend not to notice. They elbow each other. They look down the front of me, but I know what parts still

aren't seeing the sun.

Another shirtless skateboarder rolls past, grinds to a halt a few feet away. He nods, says, *Hey, what a great idea*, and he takes off his shorts and underwear in one motion. They are baggy enough to fit over his Chuck Taylors. He balls his clothes in one fist, picks up his board, and begins walking beside me. I say nothing to him. I have to get to class.

We cross Memorial Drive in front of a car, walk down the sidewalk alongside a city bus. Faces gape at us behind its smoky windows. I am now late for class, and I will be counted absent.

As we start to cross Memorial Mall, I notice a girl underneath a tree at the lawn's edge. She is naked, bent over putting her clothes in her bookbag.

She slings the bag over her shoulder and skips over to me and the skater. Her hair is brown and pulled back into a short pony-tail. She is good-looking, I guess. The skater shifts his skateboard around front.

We walk down the asphalt path across Memorial Mall towards Stone Hall, the skater on my left, the girl on my right. Every person out in the lunch-hour heat is watching us, our shining bodies marching across the grass. The path we're on is called the Hello Walk; you're supposed to say hello to each person you meet on the path.

*Hello*, I say to my two friends. *Hello*, they say. *Hello*, I say to the silly sunbathers. *Hello*, I say to the people going to lunch. *Hello*, I say to the other students late for class. At the far end of the walk, in front of Stone Hall, two campus policemen get out of their car, shaking their heads. *Hello*, I will say to them. *Hello*.

## Fishbowl

The four of them lined up on the wall in front of T.D.'s building just like every night in the summer. It was light out and hot so late that it was as good as having another day to run around in after work. T.D. tossed his empty pop can toward the trash barrel at the curb, his arms stretched out and his feet in the air like he'd been photographed taking a jump shot. The can rattled against the bottom of the barrel, stirring the bees hovering in the trash. Three points. T.D. settled his shoulders and looked down the street, bouncing the heels of his sneakers on the wall. Pinko and Sam sipped from their cans. Dougie opened another button on his shirt. He hadn't been home to change out of his office clothes yet, and T.D. had the shady spot.

From the wall they watched the bar across the street fill up with summer students from the university. The front corner of the bar was all glass, the table there highly prized on Friday nights. Groups of women and their boyfriends would sit there all night, and everyone that walked by—who couldn't get in because it was too crowded, because they were too young, too old, too much not the people at the table—could see them. T.D. called it the fishbowl one night, so then Pinko and Sam called it the fishbowl, too. New fish old fish red fish blue fish, Pinko said almost every night.

Pinko belched, and T.D. pulled another can off the plastic ring.

There were already two couples sitting in the fishbowl. They'd arrived on red, waspish motorcycles, the women perched behind the men, their bare legs dark against the bikes. Sam sneered at them. Fuckin fools, he said. Ain't no fucking way you get on a bike dressed like that. No helmet. Bare legs. Asking to fucking die. Then he laughed, a stuttering, low huh-huh-huh-huh. He did this most nights, too.

Dougie wondered what it was like to want to be seen and to get it. He'd never been in the bar. Four years living a block away. He shook his head. They would sit there for another hour and watch women until T.D. got

hungry, and then they'd go someplace and eat, and then throw darts or watch TV on T.D.'s balcony until two in the morning. Just once Dougie would have liked to have gone into the bar. Every night Dougie felt something inside him begin to spin out of control. He was missing something; he could feel it in the back of his head, something he'd forgotten or fallen behind on, something that should have happened by now.

*Oh gentlemen,* Pinko said. *Look what's coming our way.*

They all turned their heads toward the woman coming down the sidewalk, faces pointing, exaggerated turning of their heads. Dougie was aware that they did these things, these stupid jokes that were funny one time, but had become habits. All they had between the four of them were habits.

She wore denim shorts and a black leotard. *Oh darling,* Dougie thought, the thing in his head spinning until it snapped its axle. Her long, dark hair fell across tan shoulders. *You're the pattern I'm supposed to recognize, he thought.* She passed him, her head turned toward the street. *Oh brother,* he thought. *It's a good thing I know all my math, because I will never be any kind of poet.* She had dark eyes and a heart-shaped face.

Sam let out a quiet wolf whistle and Pinko said *Amen.*

*Hey, sweet thing,* T.D. said. The woman rolled her eyes and crossed the street toward the bar without stopping. Dougie watched her hips and the backs of her legs until she slipped inside the door.

*Oh babay,* Pinko said. T.D. squinted and sucked air through his teeth.

*Jeez,* Dougie said.

*Was that you, Dougie?* T.D. said.

*How come we never go in there?* Dougie said.

*Too many Biffs,* Sam said.

*Biff Tad Chad Brad Thad and Drew,* Pinko said.

*Chickenshits,* Dougie said. He could feel the sweat under his legs, his shirt sticking to his back. *It's too damn hot. I gotta get out of these clothes or get into someplace cool.*

*Fishbowl's got AC,* T.D. said. He hook-shot another empty into the trash barrel.

Dougie stood up. The sidewalk felt odd, vibrating as if it had just stopped moving.

*Let's get something to eat,* T.D. said.

*Cool,* Pinko said. *Cool,* Sam said. They all stood up. *Dougie?*

*No,* Dougie said. *I need to get out of these clothes. I think I stink.*

*Whatever,* T.D. said. The three of them headed up

the street into the sun. Pinko was flapping his arms as they disappeared around the corner.

## Crazyjane

When Stein and Wilcox pulled into the alley between Magna Photo and Varsity Apartments, the Varsity's building manager was waiting for them. They were only a block away when the call came in. Two weeks before, they'd pulled into this alley to deal with a minor accident—a car in the Magna Photo parking spaces had slipped out of gear, rolled across the alley and smashed a basement apartment window. That day the building manager was relaxed, leaning against the rolled car, smiling and talking with the woman who owned it. The damage wasn't bad.

Today, the building manager paced in front of the side door to his building. His brown SaniClean uniform was dark with sweat under the arms and across the stomach. He clutched a notebook and stared at the squad car as it pulled in. Wilcox thought, despite the manager's booze-sloppy gut and red face, he looked like a guilty, scared child. She pulled the long flashlight out from

under the seat. She thought they might need it to poke around. They didn't carry billy clubs anymore.

Stein pulled his sunglasses out of his shirt pocket. They got out of the car. "Where's it at?" Wilcox said.

The building manager started down the alley toward the back of the Varsity. He led them to the dumpster behind the apartments and pointed to it from a few yards away. "In there."

Stein and Wilcox each lifted one of the dumpster's plastic covers. A cloud of flies hovered around them for a second, then evaporated. An empty plastic bag lifted out and floated down the alley. The air smelled of rotting cabbage. Wilcox saw the foot, greasy Reebok tennis shoe and no sock. Pale, blue-veined ankle and sooty slacks. The arm, one hand trapped inside a pizza box, tracked with violent red from the wrist to the elbow. The thin, red-striped tee-shirt. They saw the face, open-mouthed, swollen black lips. Eyes half-open, bloodshot and yellow. Cushioned on a green plastic bag of garbage like a pillow, stringy dark hair pulled back in a bun. A fly crawled under the collar of the shirt.

Stein dropped his half of the dumpster lid, covering the face. "Shit," he said.

"I'll call in the coroner and the EMTs," Wilcox said. "Tell them there's no hurry," Stein said.

“Shut up,” Wilcox said. The building manager twisted his notebook with both hands. “Come inside,” she told him. “Come in and stay cool.” He followed her down the alley, unlocked the side door to the building and stood in the stairwell, his red face staring out the door’s small window.

After shift, Wilcox and Stein stood next to their cars and waited for the sun to go down. There was no ID on the body. They didn’t need any. You didn’t live in Lafayette a year without a story about her.

Running Woman. Gray Lady. The Crying Woman. Crazyjane.

Wilcox had just turned in the drive-through lane of the McDonald’s on Stadium when the woman drifted into the car’s headlights, a ghost. This was in December, and she was wearing her hooded gray coat, dark with dirt and wet, the hood cinched tight around her face. She wobbled in front of Wilcox’s car, then sat in the ice on top of a sewer cover. Wilcox ordered food, then saw her walk toward the Credit Union next door, off the sidewalk and out of the streetlight.

Stein’s wife had taken him to the opening of an art show at the Well’s Community Center in June. Every-

one was drinking wine on the front steps. Somebody in one of the old Victorian houses across the street was playing Styx and REO Speedwagon loudly out the windows of a top-floor apartment. In the middle of it all the gray lady came running down the hill, down the center of the brick street, wearing the same clothes they’d found her in today, her arms folded over her chest in an X. She was crying. She ran by, everyone staring at her, her shoes clapping on the bricks. She disappeared a block down.

Stein said the kid who rented the apartment above his garage had told him he’d seen her picking cigarette butts out of the mud. She was hiding behind a bench by the library on campus.

“Enough,” Wilcox said.

Stein twirled his keyring around his finger. “Be another hot one tomorrow.”

“Not this hot.”

“No. Not this hot.”

Wilcox closed her eyes and pretended the police station wasn’t there, that Stein wasn’t there, that the parking lot was a long, smooth lawn. But there wasn’t enough air moving to even imagine wind. There would be nothing to eat in her house tonight. Nothing on TV to watch. No good books to read. Not enough cool spots on her sheets and pillows to sleep.

“Vacation time in exactly...three days for me,” Stein said.

The city, already small, felt smaller. It wasn't darker, it wasn't lighter, Wilcox thought. All the colors had just shifted a shade or two, one way or another. Tomorrow they would snap back.

## Voyeurism

There was no sleep again. The neighbors were howling at something on television, and the high, foreign notes of their voices pierced the wall between the apartments and drove him outside. He sat on the brick wall next to the sidewalk. The terrible heat of the day was still with him. Even in these late hours, the pavement seemed to radiate heat. At the end of the street, the night was rolling downhill towards morning. Cars pulled away from the curb, lights went out, the buses stopped coming by. This heat would never end. His apartment was small, peeling paint on the ceiling and rusted screens in the windows. His car was totaled, sitting twisted in a dealer's junk lot. He would return to work in the morning and discover how things had changed in the months since

he'd been gone. The traffic lights far down the block blinked green, yellow, red. His apartment was small and empty and his bed was too large. So he'd come outside.

He stared at his shadow on the sidewalk for hours, was finally broken out of it by a twitch in his foot. The street was bare, like a freshly-swept floor. He could hear crickets in the bushes around the building. The moon was a blurry, yellow arc near the horizon. No one had come down the street all night. A motorcycle, maybe, buzzing by, running the light at the corner. Maybe. His stomach growled and the edge of the wall creased the backs of his legs. He stood up and shook the needles out. He had one greasy dollar bill in his pocket. The store on the other side of the block would be open.

He walked down the alley behind the apartments. All the windows in the building were dark, save for one on the first floor. There were no crickets in the alleyway. He'd never park his car there again because he'd never have a car again. He would have to walk or ride the bus or train for the rest of his life. His legs would hurt forever.

He glanced over his shoulder at the lit window. A woman knelt on a high bed inside, her arms stretched out to the headboard. She had short, dark hair, cropped close like a boy's. He turned around and moved closer

to the building. His feet scratched gravel against the pavement. The window was open. She was wearing a green tee-shirt, and underwear that was black and pink and orange and blue, garish against her skin. He thought of jungles and bright birds. Her lips moved, speaking through a smile. A hand moved up her leg and slid beneath the tropical underwear. No, he thought. No, no, no. It can't be. I'm not this lucky.

The window was open but he moved closer anyway. A short brick wall separated the building's lot from the alley. He stood on it and leaned lightly against a utility pole set in the ground next to it. Beneath her, between her legs, was a body, long and naked and dark brown, head buried deep in a stack of pillows.

Oh you lucky bastard, he thought. You're smiling under there. A streetlight at the end of the alley threw his shadow against the building. His head skimmed the bottom of the windowsill. Brown fingers pulled the underwear away from her, down her legs. She shifted, lowering her body, her lips always moving, spelling out long, slow words he couldn't hear but understood, her eyes fixed somewhere down in the pillows, her arms still holding her slightly above.

A gift, he thought. It is always a gift. He remembered being awake other nights until the late hours, the

smell of skin, streetlight through the windows. The back seat of his car. He closed his eyes. The pole against his back was studded with hundreds of staples and bent nails, tacks and twists of wire. Advertising ripped away by wind and rain, by the next event. He popped a staple from the wood with his fingernail, opened his eyes.

Between the wall and the window was a long, black truck in its parking space. The roof was polished and reflected the yellow lamplight inside. He looked up. She straightened and touched the bottom of her shirt. A pause, and then she swept the shirt off and dropped it. She stretched her arms high above her head. The other's dark hands slowly moved up her stomach and chest, then down her sides, fingers spread. She smiled, mouth open wide, rolled her head with her eyes closed, leaned forward again.

He could faintly hear music, rhythmic, chiming. It would come to no good, this sleeplessness. No one ever came back. Inside, the woman raised her hips. He turned away from the window and wrapped his arms around the utility pole, looked back over his shoulder to see her press herself against the other body. The music grew louder and louder. The staples and nails bit his skin. 🌿



# Contributors

## Joel Chace

His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in journals and magazines such as the following: *The Seneca Review*, *The Connecticut Poetry Review*, *Spinning Jenny*, *Poetry Motel*, *No Exit*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Crazy Horse*, *Kudos* (England), *Porto-Franco* (Romania), and elsewhere.

Northwoods Press, in 1984, published his collection of poems entitled *The Harp Beyond the Wall*. Persephone Press, in 1991, published his second book, *Red Ghost*, which won the first Persephone Press Book Award and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in that same year. Big Easy Press, in 1995, brought out a collection entitled *Court of Ass-Sizes*.

## Joseph Green

lives in Longview, WA, and teaches at Lower Columbia College. At home, he plays an antique anglo-chromatic concertina to entertain his neighbors and inspire them

toward new heights in music criticism. A collection of his poems, *Deluxe Motel*, is available from The Signpost Press in Bellingham.

Due out in early 1996 is a full-length collection, *Twentieth Century Deaths*, from Singular Speech Press, and a bi-lingual edition of his poems, to be published in Romania.

He is presently serving as a poetry editor for the *Antietam Review* (Hagerstown, Maryland).

## Ernest Slyman

was born in Appalachia—Elizabethton, Tennessee. Attended East Tennessee State University. He has been widely published in *The Laurel Review*, *The Lyric*, *Light: A Quarterly of Light Verse* (Chicago), *The NY Times*, *Reader's Digest* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, St Martins Press, edited by Michael Meyer, as well as *Poetry: An Introduction*, St Martins Press, edited by Michael Meyer.

## Terry Tompkins

ia a 39 year old living in Northwest Ohio. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines and journals.

## Sean Woodward

is an IT professional who has produced artwork for CAMRA and the British Association of Myasthenics. He has performed his work at the Nottingham Fringe Festival (UK), Nottingham Playhouse and on BBC Radio Derby. He has also exhibited at Derby Community Arts, where he ran a Writers' Workshop as an Arts Worker and Derby Central Library. His hobbies include fencing, aikido, travel and photography. He is a member of the Ki Aikido Society of Japan and the Tibet Society of the UK.

He has edited a number of poetry anthologies including *Derbyshire Poets* (Dragonheart Press) and *New Moon Rises* (Dragonheart Press) as well as his own collections *Deja-Vu* and *Verbal Narcotics* (Dragonheart Press).

He is the Editor/Designer of the electronic journal LIVING POETS at

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## Barry Spacks

(*Barry Spacks in 69 words*):

About 350 poems published in every conceivable journal over all these many years since the Punic Wars, also stories, two novels, etc. etc. — 7 poetry collections from such publishers as Harper's, Doubleday, U. of Georgia series, Godine, Johns Hopkins (*SPACKS STREET: NEW & SELECTED POEMS*, winner of the Commonwealth Club of California's Poetry Medal)— plus multi years of teaching, at M.I.T. & U.C. Santa Barbara mainly, shoe size 11B.

## Michael S. Manley

I am originally from southern Indiana and have a Bachelor's degree in engineering and a Master's degree in English from Purdue University, where I was the editor-in-chief of *Sycamore Review*. I currently work as a writer and editor, and have recently started a small press. I have published book reviews in *Sycamore Review* and *Literary Magazine Review*, and have fiction forthcoming in *The Long Story* and *Columbia*. 🌿