

A Handful Of Dust



nine

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All Other Artwork And Design Is The Artwork And Design Of The Editor

Editor's Note

Welcome to Issue #9. I want to thank everyone who has been a part of this little journal--from readers and submitters to promoters and contributors--this is nothing without you. I especially need to thank the anonymous good soul who got us a Call for Submission placed in The Writer's Chronicle. (I was going to mention it last issue, but had to see it for myself and not just read about it in cover letters.) You rock, fellow anon.

I asked for feedback last issue and wanted to thank those who replied. One common issue is the fact that this is a graphic-zine and some people would really love a plain text version, so they can freely print it out to enjoy in hand. Unfortunately the journal is what it has become. I might go back over the archives in the future and offer it for those, but I have no plans for that right now.

Other than this--I've nothing but good wishes to you all for a happy read & I hope to see you for Issue #10.

IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY

BY TIM SUERMONDT



**The boy clutches his book
as if he could die
if he didn't hold
it tight enough—
and he's right,
let the fools laugh.**

**A woman hangs her husband's
favorite red work shirt
on a rugged line,
dancing to invisible music
like both a pole dancer
and a ballerina.**

**An old man
tells his oft told story
about his son
moon shining with miners.
"He was a saint," he says
and yes, I believe him.**

**Devotion is beautiful
when it's done right.**

TEN THOUSAND SHIELDS & SPEARS
BY SEAN BROWN



The VA surgeons finished
my father with a genre of cuts.
I lit his cigarettes below scarlet keloids—
humor still in him
he wrote *someday these really will kill me.*
His last request was cremation
so cancer would know fire.

When it was over I took him to the place
of burning, listened to the roar of furnace.
I shook his can of ashes into Lake Michigan.
Fragrant diesel lapped them up & I prayed
“Earth, reassemble him with pig iron
bones, draw his heart in quartz.”

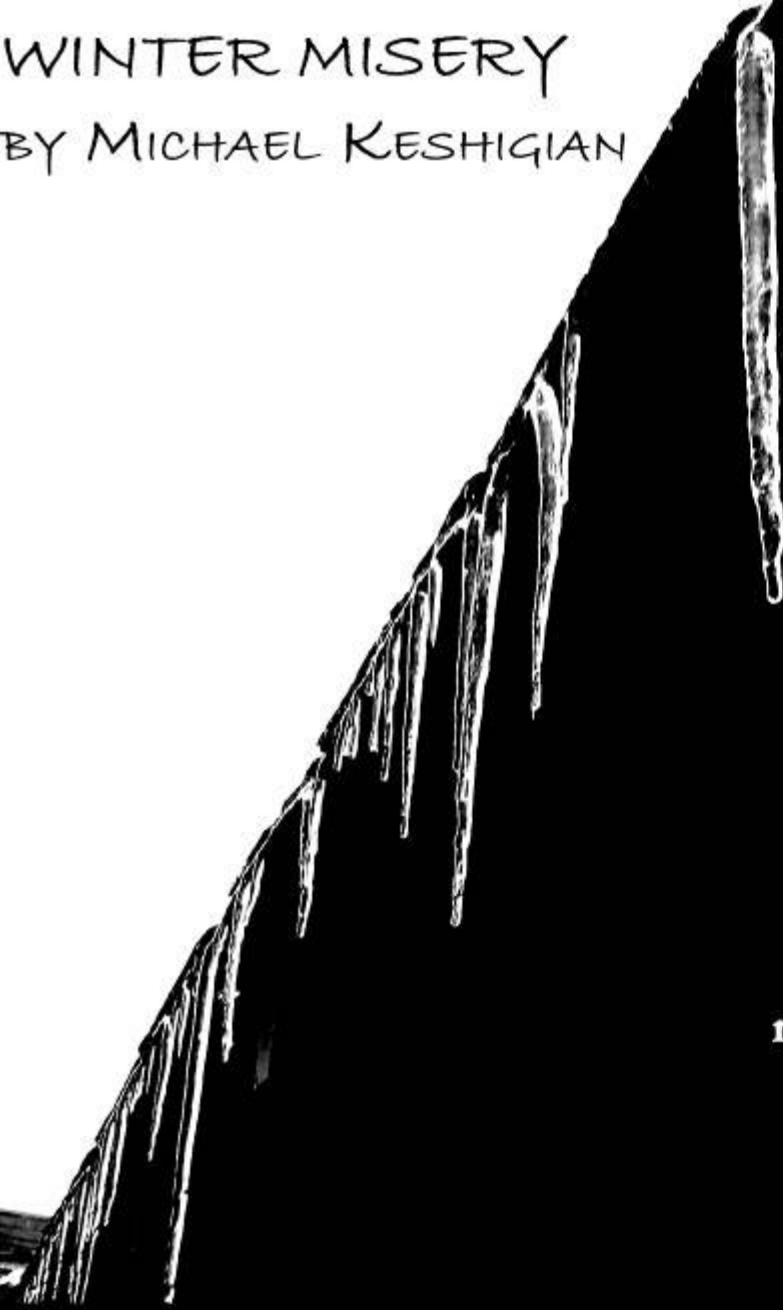
My father loved winter, laughed
at my ineptitude with cold's rules—
my inability to fix, with a slap, the radio.
Today, ice closed Cedar River, ten thousand
spears rattled glass shields. If this shack had
value I'd buy my way warm.

Santa's coming the TV warns: another sad
quarrel; trees stripped, scabrous rose petals heaped.
Expect ice dad's radio gloats. I switch it off,
vacuum tubes exhale
heat onto the bull's-eyes of my palms.

The radio doesn't speak anymore
and as dad's not here to fix it so it remains—
hot box tick-ticking, without news.

WINTER MISERY

BY MICHAEL KESHIGIAN



He despised winter, abbreviated days
when night, without remorse,
invaded the sanctity of afternoon,
when children disembarked
the late school bus with flashlights
that blinded the fading sidewalks.

It drove him to reclusiveness,
even from his wife,
who morphed into a turtle,
her head barely popped
from layered sweat shirts and socks
for the price of warmth
now that the sun had taken leave.

She huddled habitually
in the corner of the couch,
more blankets over her legs,
reading newspapers by the single lamp
that drove its light
into the heart of 5 PM darkness,
his meals cold
even before they reached
the folding table,
eaten in front of the television
that offered little more
than sophomoric comedies
followed by the day's diet
of human disaster
and a weather forecast
best delivered by a child.

But what unnerved him most
was to go to bed each night
in their nearly refrigerated
second level room
and watch her whispers
shape to a vapor cloud
that projected against the night light
and happily acknowledge the existence of Him,
along with thanks
and the blessings he bestowed.

I read about
the music sluts
flight to freedom
in the whorehouse
visualising
big motorcycles
wild, wild women
money-grabbing bosses
tall pitchers of beer
shot glasses
hitting the bar counter
and the smell of tobacco
laced with green

the veteran was
still fighting
for the cause

liberty

not firing bullets
but words at paper

a soul that was a poem

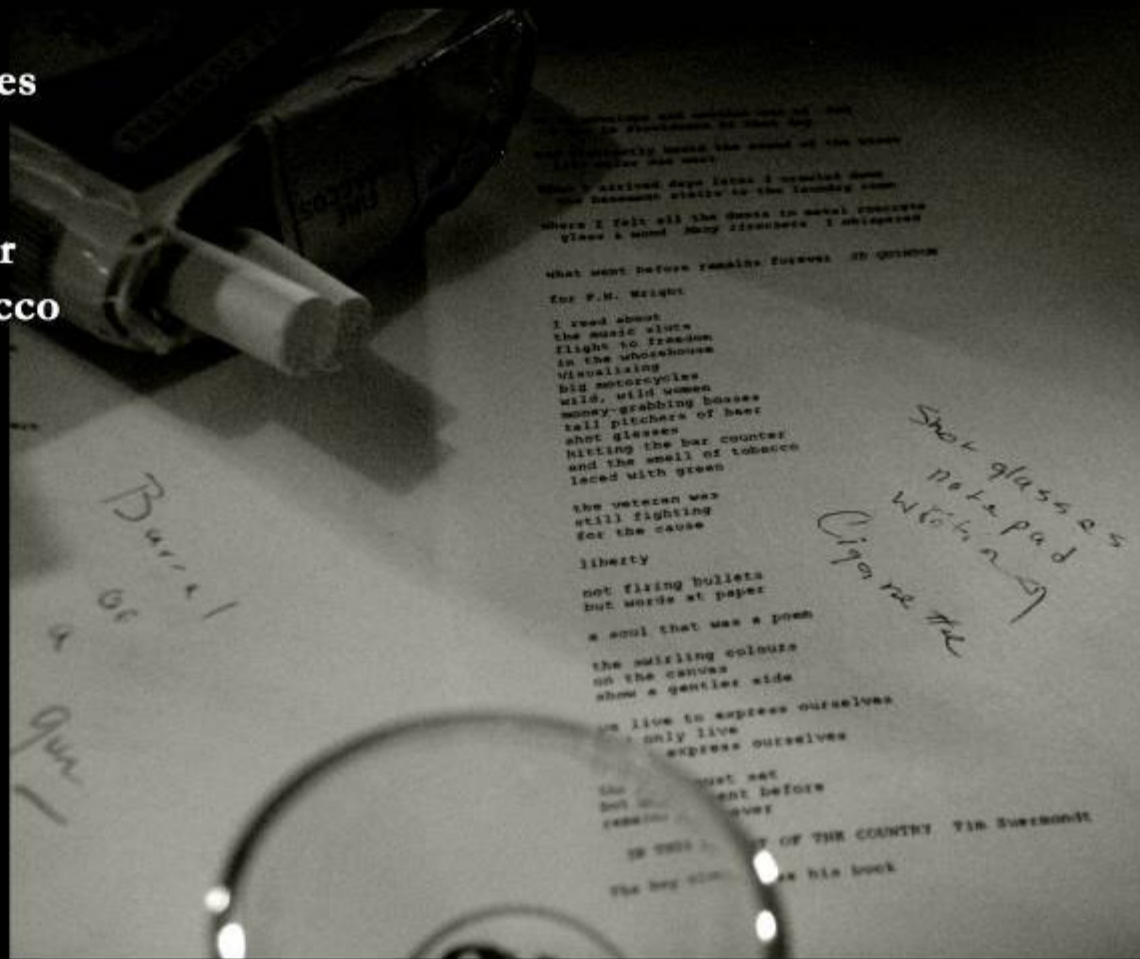
the swirling colours
on the canvas
show a gentler side

we live to express ourselves
and only live
if we express ourselves

the sun must set
but what went before
remains forever

WHAT WENT BEFORE REMAINS FOREVER

BY JAMES D. QUINTON
for F.N. Wright



VALENTINE'S DAY OMAHA 1973

BY JOHN MCKERNAN

My brother Tom walked right past all
the racks at Target stacked with greeting
cards and teddy bears and fancy clothes
and candy in all sizes and shapes of the heart
and headed straight to Sporting Goods
to buy a brand new Remington and a box
of shells and toss in a pack of Marlboros
with a new BIC lighter then head home
slim whistle of Marlboro smoke sliding
through the blue air of thin chapped lips
stopping for heavy traffic before crossing
Saddle Creek Boulevard 10 in the morning
jumping across a pothole cursing the pickup
which just splashed rain mud on new khakis
shoe cleats clicking Cass Street concrete
up the steep hill past the neighbors' homes
to the house he lived in for twenty seven years
Mother asleep upstairs with her pet rosary





finding at last the screwdrivers phillips
and straight edge Popping and draining
a can of Bud from the cold refrigerator
smoking three more cigarettes assembling
the gleaming shotgun to working order
then writing a brief note on the back
of an envelope and another can of Bud
I was in Providence RI that day
and distinctly heard the sound of the blast
1443 miles due west

When I arrived days later I crawled down
the basement stairs to the laundry room
where I felt all the dents in metal concrete
glass & wood *Many ricochets* I whispered

WHO IS AT WORK

BY CHRISTINA M. RAU



Glittering, littering,
the taller the building
the louder the buzzing,
the humming of late
night overtime and grave
yard shift janitorial actions.

Windows blinking,
winking five by two
on automatic,
like slides tinted with iodine
under a supermicroscope.

The bodies don't move
even when they breathe.
Maybe they don't breathe then,
living on remnants of iron concrete
girder burn. They need potted plants.
They need sill-hung gardens.
They need those flowers that open
only in the dark.

THINGS GOT WORSE

BY LOWELL JAEGER



Things got worse before they got better
after the mill shut for good
a week before Thanksgiving. Dad
was up early with no place to go.
He'd sit with his coffee and stare
straight ahead like a blind man.
We'd come home from school and find him
still there. Then it snowed and snowed;

the roads drifted closed, trees snapped
curbside and lay broken like wounded soldiers.
Dad shouldered his shovel door-to-door
asking for work clearing drives and walks.
A nearly grown neighbor boy did the same.
We'd report to Dad whenever we spotted the boy
slinging snow near streets Dad claimed
as his own. *He don't need it bad as I do,*
Dad said. He'd pull on his boots and march
off to see what's what and set the boy right.

A week before Christmas Dad took a job
delivering bottle gas, and he let us ride along
to see the Christmas trim on big houses
across town. Or we'd slip and slide
county backroads delivering to farms.
A big man in coveralls loaned us an ax
and we cut a Christmas tree from his woodlot.

Not much of a tree. Dad lashed it
to the grille of the truck and pieces flew off
as we sped along, our snow boots caked
with manure, our noses pinched
against outhouse smells in the heat of the cab.
At least we got food on the table, Dad said
whenever Mom looked like she felt sorry.
Or he'd say, *There's hungry people in this world
who get on with a lot less.* Which meant
we should eat what Mom dished and not complain.

RINGS
BY WILL GREENWAY



ARTWORK BY JEFF BELMONTE

Like in Driver's Ed, with teenage lovers
spilled everywhere in siren-flashing
black and white, those Navy training films
wanted to scare you with

what rings could do: fingers
severed, lying like fish in black
blood on a board, burned
through or ripped loose,

or necks branded with the permanent
electrified love chains of sailors
leaning too close to their work,

Argonauts caught and riveted rigid
by the blue snakes arcing out
from some Medusa head.

I tell her how they snag
in revolving doors,
on tailgates when you fall,
how the physical world moves on

whether you can follow or not,
what gives and what doesn't.

Why they call them necktie parties,
the site of silken adornment where
the heart-weighted body
betrays the hare-brained head,
Isadora's scarf winding on
a wheel her filmy dance,
a high school projector
spooling backwards.

So this, I tell her, is why I wear
no wedding ring, not ours nor the one
before. I want to show her those films

and say this could happen to you, pointing
my finger and chiding, like the films showed,
flashing their severed fingers of !!!!

before and after YOU,
who might be lying in blood someday
in black and white somewhere,
veins and ligaments trailing like tentacles,
tangled like hair.

AS IF THE TIN MAN
BY JESSIE CARTY



**He loves the cross eyed girl.
He wonders if she notices
how he evades eye contact;
because the eye is too viscous
for full on consideration,
so changeable. The eye is what
separates marble from the living
no matter how well chiseled
the stone. Think of the robot
(he feels like a robot
with the repetitive moves
of the morning: alarm, shower,
work) of the almost real, of how
with her, he has already
been to the wizard.**



RESERVOIR
BY LUCY JANE BLEDSOE

More than anything, she wanted to swim. They took off their clothes, leaving them in two piles balanced on willow branches. Ruthie peeled off the tape and gauze bandage and examined the cut at the base of her palm. The bleeding had stopped and it didn't look infected. She splashed into the reservoir. The water was cool and clean. Ruthie dove under, stretching her arms out in front, the backs of her hands together, and then stroked outward with cupped palms. She shot forward, the movement bathing her body in the sweet lake water. The nerve endings in her wound zinged with pain, but she continued swimming underwater for another few yards, until she needed to breathe. She surfaced into the sunlight and flipped onto her back. Her breasts floated and her toes broke the glossy skin of the lake. She could hear Travis splashing a hardworking breaststroke toward the center of the reservoir. She righted herself to dogpaddle and watch. Travis turned and stroked back. She waited and let him wrap his arms and legs around her. They both sunk, bubbling underwater, going deeper. It was as if he was taking her down with him, their own apocalyptic duet, and it felt sweet, for a moment, as if she wanted that, too. His skin was slick and smooth and she ran her hands all over him. Then, at once, she wanted to breathe. She pushed him away, panicked that he would not release her, but he did, and she shot to the surface. He followed a moment later, and before he could grab her again, she swam to shore.

HETEROSEXUAL (MALE)

BY RYAN HARDGROVE

When a woman takes over the room

**I feel powerful
for I do not need it**

or feed it

**The others all stare
utterly lost amongst endless leg
and heaving tit**

**I have the jump on them
as I watch them
watch her**

**I could slit each one of their
throats
and nobody would notice...**

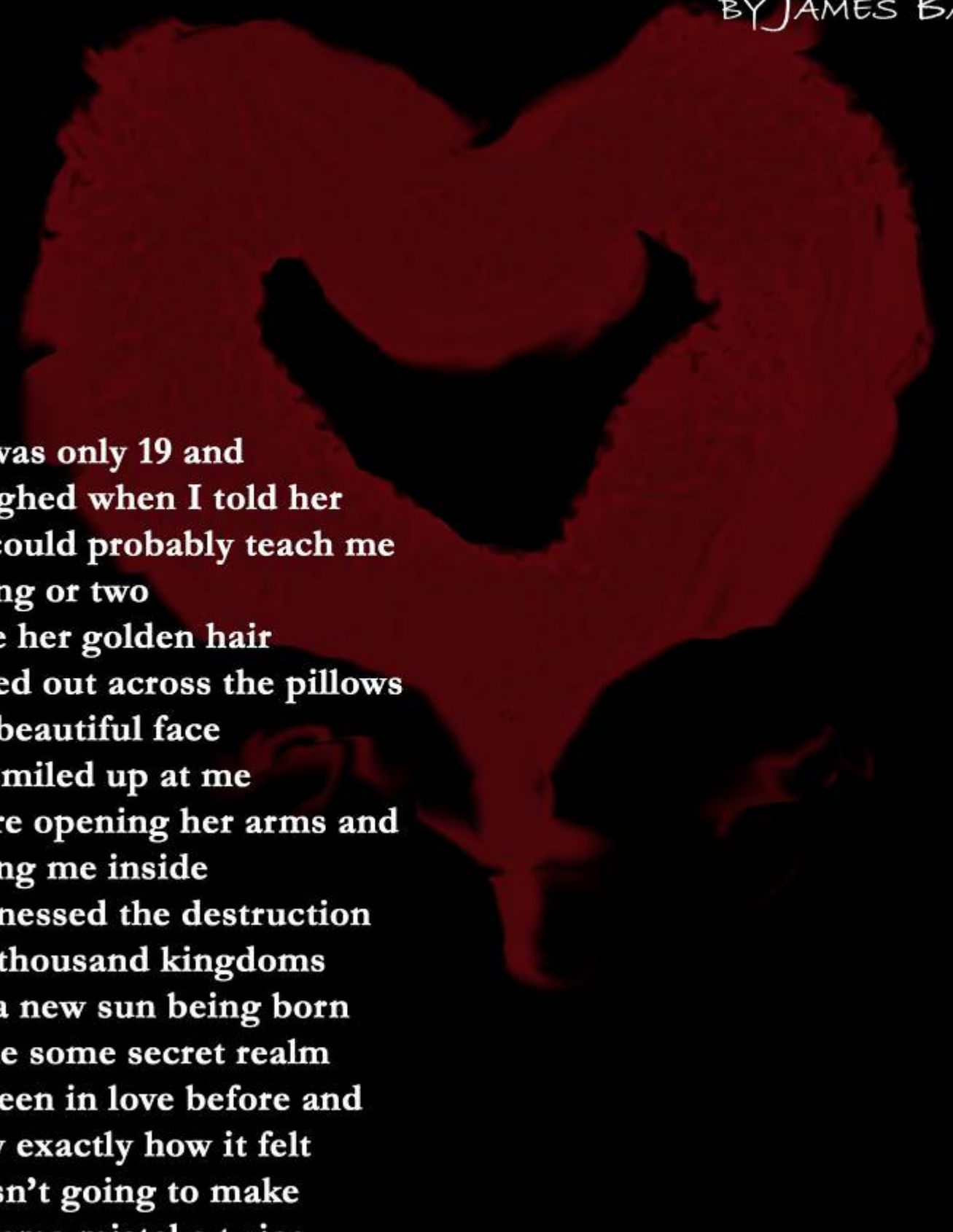
**...except maybe her
and then I would buy her a drink**

**for there is an unequivocal difference
between need
and want**



SHE WAS ONLY 19

BY JAMES BABBS



she was only 19 and
I laughed when I told her
she could probably teach me
a thing or two
while her golden hair
fanned out across the pillows
that beautiful face
she smiled up at me
before opening her arms and
pulling me inside
I witnessed the destruction
of a thousand kingdoms
saw a new sun being born
inside some secret realm
I'd been in love before and
knew exactly how it felt
I wasn't going to make
the same mistake twice

THE GEIGER COUNTER
BY LOWELL JAEGER



Wesley's dad owned a Geiger Counter,
a yellow metal box with a microphone
to listen for atomic hotspots. We'd
seen these machines on TV, hunting radiation.
The needle on the dial jumped
when the box sputtered noise like frying bacon.

We tried it first in Wesley's parents' bedroom
where we'd found the Geiger Counter stashed
in a closet. Tried listening to his Dad's
boxers. Tried the pillows. Touched
the mic to dust bunnies under the bed
and to butts in the ashtray on the nightstand.

Carried it outside to check in the bushes
and waved it over oil spots in the driveway.
The mailman halted us from testing the mailbox.
Said we shouldn't mess with Government Property.
Said we should test his shoes. We tried
both shoes. Tried his mailbag. And packages.

Maybe the batteries are no good, said the mailman.
He walked us across the street to the filling station
to ask the mechanic who'd served in the war.
The mechanic put his hands up and wouldn't touch it.
Don't need that thing, he said, to feel contamination.
Feels like nettles, he said. Or flea bites.

All afternoon we worked hard to forget
about the Geiger Counter. We walked in the sun
along the railroad tracks across town and back.
We stole carrots from a neighbor's garden. We sat
on his parents' porch steps, itching our elbows and knees.
Feels like nettles, Wesley said. Yeah, I said. Or fleas.

James Babbs has published hundreds of poems over the last several years in print journals and online. He lives in the same small town where he grew up. He works for the government but doesn't like to talk about it. He has a cherry tree and two grapevines in his back yard and several pesky rabbits. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming at The Camel Saloon, Dead Snakes, Horror.Sleaze.Trash., Red Fez and Underground Voices.

Lucy Jane Bledsoe's other short stories have been published in Hot Metal Bridge, Arts & Letters, Terrain, Stymie, Fiction International, Shenandoah, Bloom, ZYZZYVA, and Newsday (as a winner of the PEN Syndicated Fiction Project). Her story, "Girl With Boat," won the Arts & Letters Fiction Award and was nominated for the 2010 Pushcart. She won the 2009 Sherwood Anderson Fiction Award. She has been a two-time winner of the National Science Foundation's Artists & Writers Fellowship. Her novel, The Big Bang Symphony, was published last May and was a finalist for four awards, including the Northern California Independent Booksellers Novel of the Year Award.

Sean Brown has published with the Indiana Review, Southampton Review, Texas Review, Poetry East, Wisconsin Review, Notre Dame Review, and the University of Iowa Press anthologies American Diaspora and Like Thunder. He's received Fellowships from the NEA for Poetry (1997) and Fiction (2010).

Jessie Carty's writing has appeared in publications such as, MARGIE, decomP and Connotation Press. She is the author of five poetry collections which include Fat Girl (Sibling Rivalry, 2011) as well as the award winning full length poetry collection, Paper House (Folded Word 2010). Jessie teaches at RCCC in Concord, NC. She is also the managing editor of Referential Magazine. She can be found around the web, especially at <http://jessiecarty.com>.

Will Greenway's tenth collection, *Everywhere at Once*, won the Poetry Book of the Year Award from the Ohio Library Association, as did his eighth collection *Ascending Order*. Both are from the University of Akron Press Poetry Series. His publications include *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Shenandoah*. He has won many awards, including the Helen and Laura Krout Memorial Poetry Award, the Larry Levis Editors' Prize from *Missouri Review*, the Open Voice Poetry Award from The Writer's Voice, among others, and is Distinguished Professor of English at Youngstown State University.

Ryan Hardgrove is a Pittsburgh, PA based writer of poetry and fiction. He is also a musician and film-maker. He will forever continue to hone his various creative crafts. He is not an artist, such a word has no meaning.

As founding editor of Many Voices Press, **Lowell Jaeger** compiled *Poems Across the Big Sky*, an anthology of Montana poets, and *New Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from 11 Western states. His third collection of poems, *Suddenly Out of a Long Sleep* (Arctos Press) was published in 2009 and was a finalist for the Paterson Award. His fourth collection, *WE*, (Main Street Rag Press) was published in 2010. He is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Montana Arts Council and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize. Most recently Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse.

Michael Keshigian's poetry collection, *Eagle's Perch*, was recently released by Bellowing Ark Press. Other published books: *Wildflowers*, *Jazz Face*, *Warm Summer Memories*, *Silent Poems*, *Seeking Solace*, *Dwindling Knight*, *Translucent View*. Published in numerous journals, he is a multiple Pushcart Prize and Best Of The Net nominee. His poetry cycle, *Lunar Images*, set for Clarinet, Piano, Narrator, premiered at Del Mar College in Texas. Subsequent performances occurred in Boston and Moletto, Italy. (michaelkeshigian.com)

John McKernan – who grew up in Omaha Nebraska – is now a retired comma herder after teaching 41 years at Marshall University. He lives – mostly – in West Virginia where he edits ABZ Press. His most recent book is a selected poems Resurrection of the Dust. He has published poems in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Journal*, *Antioch Review*, *Guernica*, *Field* and many other magazines

James D Quinton is a British fiction and poetry writer. His two novels *Touch* and *The Victorian Time Traveller* and his two poetry collections *Street Psalms* and *The City Is On Fire And Has Been For Weeks* are now available as remastered second editions. Recently published poetry has appeared in *BoySlut*, *Rusty Truck*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *Blacklisted Magazine*, *Dead Snakes* and *Spudgun Magazine*. He is also managing editor of *Open Wide Magazine*. www.jamesdquinton.co.uk www.openwidemagazine.co.uk

Christina M. Rau is the founder of Poets In Nassau, a reading circuit on Long Island, NY. She teaches English at Nassau Community College where she also serves as Editor for *The Nassau Review*. Her poetry has appeared on gallery walls in The Ekphrastic Poster Show, on car magnets for The Living Poetry Project, and most recently in the journals *Temenos* and *Contemporary American Voices* for which she was the featured invited poet. In her non-writing life, she practices yoga, line dances, and watches reality tv (of which she is only slightly ashamed). See her writing and links at <http://alifeofwe.blogspot.com>

Tim Suermondt has had poems recently published in *PANK*, *Ray's Road Review*, *THIS Literary Magazine*, *A Clean Well-Lighted Place*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Pirene's Fountain* and *The Cossack Review*, among others. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, the poet Pui Ying Wong.

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