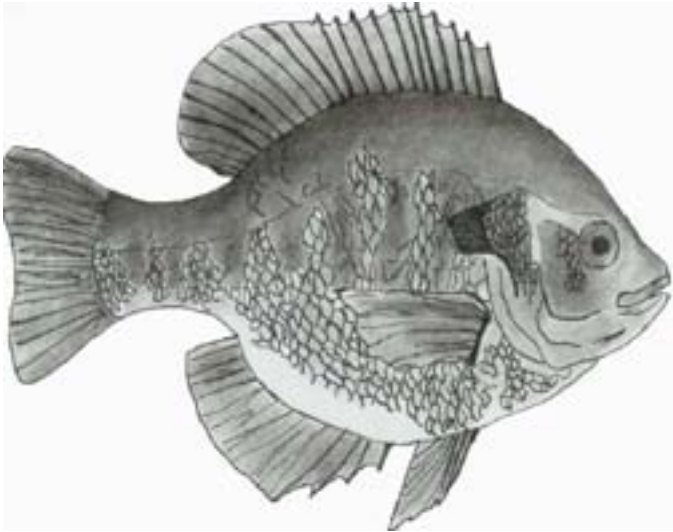


FORKED DEER

VOLUME 3
SPRING 2006



JACKSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Forked Deer, the journal of creative arts at Jackson State Community College, is printed in the spring of each academic year. Students, faculty, and staff of the institution are invited to submit manuscripts and art. Materials may be submitted at any time, but are reviewed in March.

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JSCC Publication # 06-5048

“Steel-Blue Bird” ©1985 by Andrew Kelley

Special thanks to the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Student Activities, Heather Kennedy, Veronica Goff and all the print shop staff, and all who promoted this issue.

Very special thanks to Dr. Lisa Smith and Ty Sullivan who edited the artwork for this issue and to the members of Sigma Kappa Delta, the English Honor Society, who helped make decisions about this issue’s content.

On the cover: Eron Raines, *Lepomis macrochirus*

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Jessi Koons
Untitled

A snake
glides, slim body
 muscles quiver, scales move
 in ripples, smooth and strong
 and cool to touch
 each scale a brown-
red moon, barely
 touching the autumn night
 and crunching leaves
 no footprints or
 fingerprints follow this
 calm traveler, eyes
unblinking, deaf to the world
 flickering tongue catches
 the heady scent
 of scurried mouse toes
on the fallen mushy apples.

Kenneth Young

Zoo Zoos

On the bad days, he thought about her a lot. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get her out of his mind. Like an endless train of boxcars the memory of her stricken and distraught face flashed through his mind over and over. Waves of guilt washed over his mind as he thought about the last time he had seen her and the bitterness of their parting. Her last words still rang in his ears, even after all this time. "I hate you, now get the hell outta my house!" she cried, her voice thick and syrupy with the booze and pills she loved so much. And in his mind that was the crowning injustice because he believed she loved him. Whether she did or not was irrelevant at this point because he had not seen or spoken to her in almost a year and now, yesterday the news had come that he never would. So even though it wasn't time to get up yet, he did. Dropped to the floor and began to do push ups, hoping to blot out the memory of her. Which proved to be impossible.

There's nothing like the sound of an iron door slamming shut behind you. The echo takes on a life of its own as it reverberates around the room, usually painted some sickening color, and comes back to rest in your mind. And the first time is the worst time. If you're lucky then there will be just a few people. If not, then a lot. You might find yourself having to sit on the floor, maybe even sleep there. The bunks in a holding cell aren't much better, consisting of metal or concrete. A lot of time is spent sleeping because in the holding cell there are no books, games or diversion of any sort. You are there to sit, until processed. And sometimes that processing can take a long time.

And Oh! how he loved her. But he could sense a new distance in their relationship as of late. Instead of going to bed and making love, she chose to stay up later and later watching mindless drivel on T.V. Part of it was the pills. She had been addicted to painkillers for some time and when she was on them she did not want to sleep. When she did want to

sleep she took sedatives. She was also taking other anti-depressants and drinking. He was getting a little tired of it all. Then she quit her job. All of a sudden, just decided she didn't want to work anymore. They still had bills but she half-assed looked for a job so he took another job, worked like hell and stayed tired all the time. He felt a sense of hopelessness knowing she did not care anymore. Soon, however, hopelessness gave way to resentment.

Being processed is like going to the doctor. You wait and wait and wait. Unlike a doctor's office though, you can't just get up and leave. You're there until they decide where to put you. You'll almost certainly be there for at least one bad fishmeal—not the place to seek fine dining. If you're unlucky then you could be there for all three squares. But only there because they'll have to put you somewhere before the end of the day. If you're lucky the holding cell won't be crowded. If you're really lucky it will have a phone. If you're blessed someone will be willing to accept the collect phone call.

Even now he still wasn't sure what set the chain of events in motion that got him here. They had been arguing in the strictest sense of the word, but he could also tell that not all was good in her world. That night she seemed indifferent, almost callous. He could remember going out of his way to not speak to her. As the evening wore on, they continued to drink vodka. He began to think about other couples he knew and resentment began to return with the tiniest coal of anger in the very heart of it all. Anger about her drug habit, anger about her laziness, anger about her self centered behavior. Anger about the fact that they could not know a more perfect form of love. And ultimately, anger about his own insecurity.

Staying overnight in jail waiting to be arraigned is nothing like actually having to settle in and do your time. Arrest and arraignment can be traumatic but not like knowing you are going in and won't be leaving anytime soon. You approach it in different ways. During the arrest you know you can get a bondsman. You know you'll probably leave in the morning. And by mid morning of the next day you're pretty much free. His arrest and arraignment were pretty sim-

ple. He simply called the police because he knew they were looking for him and they came to get him, promptly. They also stole a hundred and ten dollars out of his wallet and his Dad's cigarette lighter. In his mind's eye, he could see their sarcastic grins and still hear their condescending talk. This caused anger to flare in him and he resolved to do even more push ups.

In the end, what lit the spark was a cell phone. He knew she was buying drugs off the street, so naturally he was suspicious when the phone rang late at night. Lies he could count, tales and excuses beyond belief!

As they were sitting there as if in a frozen tableau, the phone rang. Quickly she grabbed it up but even then he could hear it was a man on the other end. She made a show of casually leaving the room, talking in a low murmur he couldn't hear no matter how hard he strained, anger began to well in his heart. Back she came, another elaborate show of casualness. "Who was that?" he asked the edge of his voice sharp. "Oh that was Thomas," she retorted in honeyed tones. "It's two o'clock in the morning," he said as he felt his anger rising. She looked at him blank faced for a moment then shrugged. That's when his anger mushroomed into rage.

As the cell came to life, it struck him in an almost surreal way, watching wooley heads and sleepy faces worming their way out of cocoons made of cheap grey blankets. Climbing back into his bunk, he could see it was getting light outside by the growing glow of the single window, set high in the wall, higher than a man could stand or reach. Jim was struck again by a burst of melancholy, not because he was in jail but because for whatever reason, his day had started out by thinking about her. Trays began sliding through the door and long faces took shuffling steps to the slot on the door. The first day he was in jail, Jim found he had little liking for prison food. He still remembered that first meal, which had the texture of clay, and the bland taste that comes from uncaring hands concerned with fulfilling a norm or requirement. No love went into the large ice cream style scoop of

dressing with turkey in it, or rather bits of turkey, no love went into the tasteless potatoes and green beans.

She came out of the bedroom with her coat and shoes on, striding purposefully towards the door. Immediately Jim sprang off the couch and intercepted her at the door. "Where do you think you're going?" he asked, anger growing, making his face warm and his senses reel. "I'm going wherever I want, now get outta my way. I don't have to tell you anything."

Obdurately, he refused to budge knowing even then that this was a useless battle, that he was incapable of victory and that the wisest thing to do was leave, just get his stuff and leave. Reason and sanity had no domain in this house and especially not on this night. She moved to step aside and he blocked the door. "I said you're not going anywhere." He could tell she was pissed and he could see this was going to get ugly.

The backhand slap snapped his head back and tears began to sting his eyes, but still he did not move. She was on fire tonight, he could tell, she had too much to drink, the air was alive with electric anger, seeming to vibrate the atmosphere around him but then Jim realized it was his heart and the sudden realization struck another blow this time deep down inside, to his soul. With a sudden lunge forward he shoved her and she stumbled backwards, arms pinwheeling, struggling, failing to keep her balance when to his horror he saw where she was going to fall.

"Brafus" was done, the trustees had collected the trays and everybody was sitting around. The wannabe apprentice gangsters were already talking their trash, building each other up, the lone Mexican non-English speaking Leon, soft, open brown eyed Leon who didn't look like he would hurt a fly was ambling around in his lumbering way. The other two white guys were already playing cards, talking trash. Upon reflection, Jim discerned that most of the talk was trash. He supposed Leon would talk trash if he spoke English. Jim unfolded the last letter he had received from his mother, much creased and smudged already. Even after he

had been jailed and convicted of assault he still kept in touch with his mother because she knew-she knew-that it had been an accident, no malice beforehand just plain old bad luck. So it goes.

And in a magical slow motion she tumbled almost perfectly into the middle of the glass coffee table which didn't shatter into a million pieces but broke into three large sections, unlucky Diane, always unlucky, unlucky in love, unlucky in life, unlucky in jobs, even unlucky in hate. Unlucky because had she sat still for one second she never would have cut her hand open, but that one second wasn't there. Fire coming out of her eyes, no pain because of the painkillers she took when there was no pain, no pain because between the two of them they'd almost drunk a liter of vodka, no pain because she was furious.

Slapping a hand down she impaled it on a piece of glass. She was up a feral snarl on her face and he could see that if she had a way she'd kill him right now.

Commissary, Commissary the voice called out, brisk and authoritative like you'd call out to livestock, she'd gotten worse, switched to harder drugs, morphine and ice, fishing in troubled waters, losing weight, not selling herself for drugs but giving herself away because of the drugs. And that's how it happened, she was with the wrong people, walking in mud, the mud of human life, the despicable souls not even a soul to speak of, no one knows who did it or why they did it. They found her in a coma no less beaten to death. She had been lying there a few days, emaciation multiplied by bloating, the once beautiful fair skin blackened by decomposition, raped, and left. Somebody discarded her like so much garbage and he could feel the tears welling in his heart. The eyes would follow soon and he didn't know if it would have been any different if he hadn't been in jail, but he was and he couldn't have saved her but maybe he could've talked her into rehab. Maybe if he had been there she would have been with him, but he knew, knew deep down that it wasn't going to make any difference whether he was there or not.

She didn't want to be saved. She liked being messed up. It was her life, had been her life since she was 15, and she didn't see any problem with it. Learned it from her Father, initiated by her brother, the miracle of doing drugs, destruction of family, stealer of souls and ultimately, life. So it goes.

And she tried lunging at him first then darting into the kitchen. To his horror he could hear the drawer open and slam and he knew which drawer it was, the drawer with the biggest and sharpest knives in it.

And sure enough she came running back into the living room brandishing the biggest and sharpest of all the knives in her possession and she lunged again and he dodged but when he did he made a warning gesture with his hand. In magic slow motion he saw the glittering arc of the blade, the amazing sight of watching the tip of his finger go cascading off seemingly on a tangent all of its own and she lunged again and he grabbed her, in a bear hug squeezed and squeezed harder and the knife fell from her hand but he was scared to let her go. Blood was everywhere and it seemed to have a brightness he hadn't noticed before, but then he'd never seen so much blood before either, particularly their blood mingled together, smeared on both their faces, clothes, carpet, the wall, the back of the couch, and his gorge was rising. He could feel hot acid vomit rising and sure enough it did, rolling out of his mouth onto his shirt and her back and still he did not let her go, scared to let her go, she was still struggling and he was begging her to stop and finally she did. "We need to go to the hospital." "Get out!" "Baby come on." "Get out!" and she picked up the phone, looked at him cleared eyed, hateful, and dialed 911. Quick exit stage left. So it goes.

Zoo Zoos! Zoo Zoos! The cell came alive, bustling motion, unwashed bodies streaming towards the door jostling, the contempt plain to see on the jailer's face. Back when he was free the idea of people getting excited over a candy bar or snack crackers he would have snorted with disbelief, and odds are he would have been wearing that same

look of contempt. Refolding the letter, he placed it in a book to serve as a bookmark and to keep it handy. It was like Xmas in the cell. A prisoner would get his commissary and he would be ear to ear smiling as he hurriedly tore into the wrapper. Honey buns, Moon pies, cheese and crackers, chips, donuts, candy bars, peanuts. Jim sat on his bunk and watched. He never ordered anything, didn't ask for anybody else. If they offered, he declined. Jim never understood why they called the commissary zoo zoos, never thought to ask, amused by the name and as a mental exercise would ponder upon it on the days the commissary came.

Clean, antiseptic, pastel walls, waiting, unsympathetic faces all around, waiting, trauma, fear, self-loathing, waiting, pain, suffering, wanting to call her, not doing it, waiting, great spiraling screams emanating from his mind, stopping in his throat. Tears welling, suppressed, waiting, fear, suffering, pain, the doctor--

"What happened?" young face but very old. "I was sharpening a knife and it slipped." Silence, oppressive, desultory probing, repelled out of love. Treatment. Discharge. Home. So it goes.

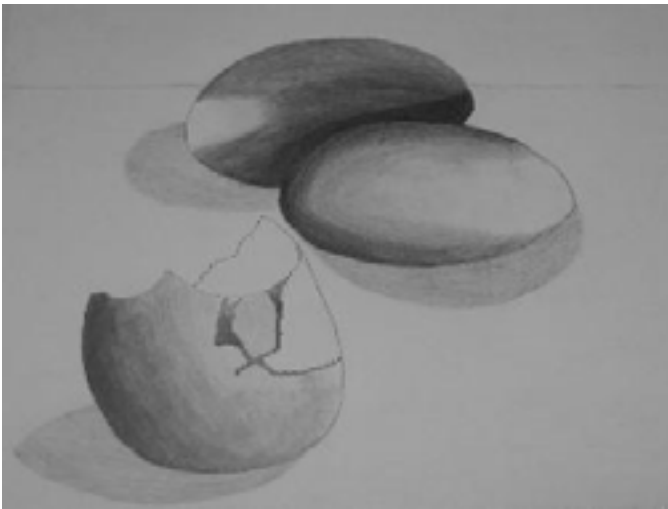
To work. Upset, tears welling, suicidal thoughts, self-loathing. Home again. So it goes.

They weren't there waiting when Jim got home but they came pretty quick. "She must have told them what time I got off work," he thought to himself, then he caught himself. They'd already been to his Mom's house with a warrant and in his madness and sorrow he'd told them where he'd be.

Docile bovine acceptance of his fate. The snick snick of handcuffs, none too gentle and then settled into the back seat of a squad car.

Watching the promenade, Jim suddenly felt bad that he had nothing to offer. Never mind the fact that his fellowship now consisted of drug dealers and drug users and wife beaters and drunks and thieves. Never mind the fact that the same people he was here with were the ones he hated in so many ways. Never mind the fact that he was hoping he didn't wind up like them. The loneliness of her death and the new-

found loneliness without her struck him to the core of his being. In spite of who they were he desired their fellowship, at least on this day. Race and crime were no boundaries in the celebration of zoo zoos. Almost like some primordial, stylistic dance celebrating the successful hunt. Each prisoner would go down the line, offering, offering, not just a donut, not just a cracker, not just a morsel of candy, but offering possibly the last little bit of humanity preserved in their world of bondage. Not offering love, not offering hate, just offering the fellowship of we! Miscreants and malfeasors. Leon passing down the line, holding a donut in his hand as though it were the body and blood of Christ. And as if in benediction, held it out to Jim. And Jim accepted the benediction, the confirmation of his soul, the confirmation of his inclusion into the fellowship. So it goes.



Valentino Gray, “Eggs”

Jerry Gilbert

That Delicate Always Soft and Virgin Spot

That delicate always soft and virgin spot
above her inside wrist--
a sensual explorer's newfound land--
remains inviolate, at once as cool and warm
as morning rain's pungent smells
melding earth with a rising cantaloupe-colored sun.

That delicate always soft and virgin spot
above her inside wrist--
a sensuous taster's heady wine--
stays nude and chaste, at once as cool and warm
as earth first turned in spring.

Lips touch gently
that delicate always soft and virgin spot,
at once as cool and warm
as commingled anticipation and desire:
moist lips to moist skin.

Breath quickens, as quick as a sailor's breath
when his ship sails beyond the harbor.



Jamie Gompf, Butterflies



Valentino Gray, Still Life



Mattellis Rogers, Skull with Broken Glass



Rebecca Harmless, Backyard Jam

Rebecca Yancey

Branches

Something's happened to my trees.
They used to stand still, rooted
in the spot where they grew:
charcoal lines on rice paper
frozen to the window,
or summer green stretched out
over macramé hammocks,
with simmering leaves.

Looking out the window,
I knew what color I'd see,
but now,

purple and white
flash like neon --
or a movie speeded up
too fast to follow --
trees of brown and yellow
turn crazy cartwheels,
and bleed to gray,
fading

the bare black branches into
shadows
I can hardly see.

Kelly McDonald, Jr.
Modern Chivalry (alas, poor gentlemen)

When a fair maiden has reached her end
And all her wits are but spits in the wind
Only few earthly choices can ease her pain
And both are probably stuck in the rain.

So she wails and wails (at the behest of quails)
Until finally her prince arrives, quite weather flailed.
But just when he revives her broken mind
Another knave, much less kind, she finds.

And so, the prince drags drably on
To help another maiden's happiness that has gone,
Within his heart a glint of hope that one day
One maiden will not cope his heart to slay.

Only in death will the prince claim his reward
For servitude in God with accord.
And what great faith it must have took
To not draw a sword and her gilded goose cook.

J. Morris Long
Discarded

Oh pathetic wretch alone in the rain
Whose life is filled with panoramic pain
It is embedded deep within his soul
Many things from long ago
It seems to be he'll always remain
Inside his house with walls of pain
He has tried but once to escape
But it seems it's still his fate
To be alone forever more
And pay for things he never bore

Andrew L. Kelley

Steel-Blue Bird

From aluminum grey clouds cruising over the lake,
the wind, hair streaming, comes a wild horseman,
iron grey sword cleaving leaves, through October trees,
bearing high on its back a grey bird--or perhaps
a steel-blue bird; I could not tell in the haze--
at six a.m. Saturday morning--
that twice circles the lake air.

I sit on a redwood table,
counting windwaves on the water.

On the third circling,
the bird folds its armwide wings
into a long, grey overcoat of age
and stands in the water at my feet,
unmoving, staring not at the water
but at me, sitting in a wool sweater,
unmoving.
And for the first time in seven days,
I speak:

Freedom birds are simultaneously prison birds.
In monsoon, the sky is aircraft aluminum grey.
Steel-Blue Bird, have you seen
in the art gallery of the mind
"Child with Mud-Dead Cat"?
Steel-Blue Bird, have you seen
"Child Staked in Road and Crushed by Convoy"?

I'll stroll down dank alley,
pockets stuffed with whispering money,
sleep by Balto in Central Park,
with clinking bank bag as pillow,
silenced pistol in deep pocket.
Spilt vending machine coins are shrapnel.
They laughed at his blued aircraft aluminum nunchuku,

thought his poisoned shiriken and two-foot arrows absurd.
When they counted the corpses at first light--skulls crushed,
poison-bloated, convulsed, heads, limbs sword-severed--
they named him Ice Man. They whispered and watched him.
Still, nights were quiet for a while on the wire.
I tore down the wire fence around the yard;
neighbors' dogs are not sappers, I told myself.

When the villagers were lifted
on whirlybirds large as cargo trucks,
he and Countryboy lit oil rag torches
and touched the heat to houses.
Flames flared like a smelting furnace
until the village was slag-grey ash.

Then he who seldom fired a shot, but stalked in shadow
outside the berm or fighting holes,
sometimes returning splashed in aortic blood,
tossed his '16 to the lieutenant,
and asked Tracker to keep his gear.
Countryboy sat cradling his Springfield;
tears colored by fire streaked the dirt and soot
on his face and darkened his faded sleeves.
"Lotta smoke, huh, Country," Ice Man said.
Countryboy spoke and the dying flames flickered
to the rhythm of his voice;
the smoke seemed to puff out his syllables:
"Our crop burned one time. Lightning.
My great-great-granddaddy said it was like that
when Sherman burned the fields."
Ice Man stared into the grey embers.
No one spoke for a while.
The wind blew flecks of straw
and the burnt smell of garlic and fish sauce.

Then Old Lion, old with the lines of many firefights
and many deaths marked on his face,
leaned upon his Carb-14 and spoke,
calling Ice Man by name.
(He was the only one who called him by name):

"Wait. If there is one, won't be no oxygen down there."
"Somebody else'll go when it cools," the lieutenant said.
"You're getting short."

Professor was slowly chewing a cracker soaked in rice wine.
Just then a dog, a mange-ridden cur, rushed from nowhere.
A bolt clicked as a round was chambered; the dog snarled.
Professor threw the last of his sop;
with a sound like a drain plunged open, the dog bolted it,
padded to Prof and lay down, its eyes on the ashes.
Prof's oratorical voice intoned,
"You have to feed the dog
if you're going down in that tunnel."
Pied Piper unwrapped his harmonica and began to play
"I Want to Go Home" as Dune Buggy pantomined.
The dog dropped its head.

With forty-five and K-bar
he walked into the airwaves of ashes
and found the tunnel entrance.
"Don't stay down long," Old Lion shouted,
"or you'll go crazy. I've seen it before.
If you see one red ant,
or floating string of hair,
or anything to push aside,
haul ass backwards."

Should I burn my credit cards
into a penny's worth of carbon
now that I'm honorably bankrupt?
On Halloween I'll dress as a credit card;
I'll sing and dance a commercial:
"Don't leave home without it."

I'll send Sanchez a video cassette commercial:
"Get the feel of the road in your luxurious wheel chair."

Forgot to tell Collier not to fly the friendly skies:
unfriendly shrapnel.

Never told Dowdy, "The Surgeon General has determined
shotgun blasts can be hazardous to your chest."

I'll exclaim to Preston, "Come on down!
And get your new, brand name prosthesis!"

Forgot to tell Johnson
not to leave the left side of his face.
Heard a woman spat on him when he came out of V.A.

And Ulysses--I don't know;
I just don't know.

Are you called hero, too, Steel-Blue Bird?
Do women tell their friends
you yell "Incoming!" in your sleep?
Would you go back and die for the others?
No? None of us survivors would.
Citation ribbons are jungle leeches.

Monday, I'll tell the office gang what I think.
I'll shout, "You were there, too!"
Hershey's chocolate bars are frag grenades;
M&M's are Claymores pellets.

I am not unusual.
I've heard fifty per cent of all marriages end in divorce.
Perhaps, though, I was never married. A dream perhaps,
or maybe my imagination working overtime.
It wasn't my fault; I did everything the manuals said.
She took Leslie--born my eleventh month over there.
(Of course, some children come late.)
She bayoneted me with "I'm glad Iantha's dead.
With you like this."
She remarried two weeks after divorce.

When I shower
I see dead men's blood
swirling down the drain.
Steel-blue bird,

should I re-up
and die in battle?
Would my death atone
for the times
I was relieved
it was not my time?

At V.A., the analyst smirked,
"You're not going to get disability."
Hadn't thought of it.
"If you were to picture your father as an animal..."
My father didn't claw his way out of a truckload of bodies.

Perhaps glow from white jade
on antique gold chain on slim wrist,
or platinum sunlight on onyx hair
and white silk mourning ao dai
made him think for a moment of Iantha,
as girl lit incense and moved hand
in sign of cross, kneeling
at leaf strewn grave beyond village.
Odd, he thought: jungle grave,
girl in silk and jade, Buddha
leather-thonged around neck,
cross traced in air.
C'est la guerre, he murmured.
Then, again, chiến tranh,
no doubt audibly, for girl moved gently
and like dancer turned head slowly,
wondering, perhaps in Lao or French
or in universal language of those who
have seen too much war, the meaning--
though she must have known--of man,
shadowed in black and green among leaves,
kneeling on one knee, almost invisible
like jungle cat staring unmovingly
into morning, not hunting, but watching.
Her eyes fell upon crossbow, then rose
to black katana hilt above shoulder.
Her face, tender as lotus blossom or rose petal,

turned back; she knew she would live
or perhaps she accepted death.
And again he saw light on her hair.
Though her body moved not in morning halo.
He knew she felt him flow again into jungle.
And though for a moment he had wept inside,
he became again predator.
She who touched memory of Iantha
had seen Shadow Tiger and lived.

I can play Debussy and Rachmaninoff and jazz and pop.
You should see them dream and dance
and lean on the polished piano top.
(They never invite me when there is no piano.)
Conversation dies a spasmodic death when I approach;
smiles stumble and become crippled or lame
as on the face of a man hit by a sniper bullet;
coffee is gulped, watches consulted,
and errands hastily remembered.
But I have friends.
I am not unloved, I tell you.
Assassins strike in crowds.
Manholes are VC tunnels.

Monsoon rain, sheet of leaded crystal, falls;
a bird--not a steel-blue bird--sways on emerald branch;
the rain stings, bites, buzzes, it seems, as it stops;
mosquitos and flies sting him back from death,
wanting to run, scream, afraid to shudder,
dig himself through roots of grass.
Jackson is wasted, and Starks, Holmes, Crow,
Adams, Krolcszek and Harrison. Gear gone.
A drop of water falling from a leaf thunders:
roar of directional mines explodes his head in silence,
tympani in Thor, symphony in orchestra shell,
drops of water falling from the trees like mortar shells,
percussion section gone mad, anvil hammered in my brain.

A russet yellow green bird
ruffles half-awake tinged with silver.

He crawls cobra-like past night leeches
moving towards the heat of his body.
A sentry stands, dead-eyed,
watching the leaves and shadows.
He moves--night tiger--to schematic "X."
The man begs to die; they hadn't left much.
What was the man's name, Steel-Blue Bird?
I can't remember.
He thrust grey steel from throat to brain.
At night, the eyes stare at me and bulge.
When people stare at me, I remember.

That is what keeps me awake at night.

A rotor blade flew like a plucked feather from the chopper.
When the crew came with plastic bags,
bullet holes were where the cross had been.
You don't have to pop smoke for city helicopters.

Once in a monsoon dream on recon,
a cadaver with yellow hair rode the wind into a mass grave,
the horse a steel-blue grey Puff the Magic Dragon
spraying millisecond tracers into his thousand bodies.
He showered in blood, the molten soap becoming human flesh.
He awoke trying to scream, a swollen leech on his eye,
Johnson's linebacker fingers digging into his jaws
and holding back his hands. Why, Steel-Blue Bird,
did Johnson leave half his face in the jungle, not me?

On moonlight strolls, I sweat and shiver.
Steel-Blue Bird, if a long feather falls
floating on the clear, flint-grey water,
I'll sharpen it on a stone and carry it,
concealed weapon of secret suicide, or protection
when I walk from car to door at night.

On second thought,
I'll sit here on this redwood table
till the leaves pile over me,

then, daoist-like, strike a match.

"Excuse me," a voice says.
"Do you always talk to yourself?"

I turn in the wind
to a child with blue-grey eyes to say,
"I was talking to that bird."

"What bird?"

I turn in the sweeping fog
to the windwaves on the water to find
one steel-blue feather.

Angela Woods Finished

The old woman sat in her dining room and looked at the spot where the old green wallpaper met the new brown embossed paisley paper. She had nearly finished hanging it. For two days she had hung the paper. About two more feet and the dining area would look like a new room.

She leered at the remaining paper, rolled up like a scroll that stood cylindrical—a broken tower leaning upright against the green corner. She could be done in half an hour.

She noticed the pile of laundry in a white basket near the washing machine in the adjoining kitchen. She had been catching up on laundry all weekend. During breaks from papering she had collected laundry from various rooms and washed them, dried the previously washed ones, and folded.

The piles of folded laundry lay on the dining table, waiting to be returned to their drawers. She was finally getting things done.

"I think I need a break," she said aloud to no one.

She walked out to her front yard. The sun was shining and the newly mown grass smelled like spring. The yard boy had come the day before. Flowers she had planted last

fall were now blooming across the front of the house. Half-way past the porch stairs the blooms abruptly stopped, revealing where she had quit planting that late September afternoon and had never resumed.

She walked to the mailbox and took out bills and advertisements. She took them into the house and passed the bill holder she had bought a month before. It was supposed to help her get organized. She set the stack of mail next to the clothes on the table.

“A break,” she reminded herself.

She turned on the TV in the living room and watched a sitcom for twenty minutes. She missed the ending when she remembered the last load of laundry.

She took a freshly washed load of towels out of the washer and put them in the dryer. “I’m tired of doing laundry,” she again said to no one. She placed the one remaining basket of laundry on top of the washer. “I’ll finish later.”

She remembered she hadn’t read her bible that morning as she usually did and she went upstairs to her bedroom. The bible lay open on her nightstand. It was a week before Easter. She read the section her day by day bible indicated for April 16. As she read the final line from the passage, she spoke the words aloud, “It is finished.” She closed the bible, took a journal out of her nightstand, and began writing.

After filling several pages, she suddenly slammed the book shut and hurried downstairs. It was as though she had come into awareness. Her every movement was deliberate and purposeful. For every beginning, she reached an end. She quickly, yet carefully finished papering the dining room. She went to the dryer and removed the last load of laundry. She folded it, and neatly put away all the clothes. She put her mail in the previously empty wooden holder and sorted papers that were strewn about, putting each one in its proper place. She finished the dishes that were piled in the sink and took the bags of garbage from the garage to the curbside. Then she picked each of her newly bloomed flowers and brought them inside with her. She lay down on the couch and placed the flowers across her chest.

Then she released her final breath.

Jerry Gilbert teaches English at Jackson State. In his spare time, Jerry writes, rides 4-Wheelers, fishes at Pickwick, usually without catching anything, and, according to Marianne, watches entirely too much tv sports. **Jamie Gompf** is a 21 year old Art major who plans on teaching abroad. **Valentino Gray's** mother always encouraged him to be creative, and he plans to obtain a degree in Art at a four year school. **Rebecca Harmless** says "well-behaved women hardly ever make history." **Andrew Kelley**, a native Tennessean, holds a doctorate degree from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and is a Professor of English at JSCC. **Jessi Koons** is a redhead who enjoys the study of bones, music, the Spanish language, and poetry. **J. Morris Long** is a full-time husband, father, and student and a part-time chef, gardener, and poet. **Kelly McDonald** believes in John 3:16. **Eron Raines** is currently serving seven consecutive life sentences for failing Pre-Calc. **Mattellis Rogers** has been drawing since he was 5 years of age; he plans to attend Austin Peay State University for Art and Graphic Design after finishing at Jackson State Community College. **Angela M. Woods** is pursuing degrees in History and Art. She writes in her spare time. After teaching English at Jackson State for many years, **Rebecca Yancey** is currently enjoying retirement. **Kenneth Young** is an American Mongrel.

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