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Issue 2

**THREE RIVERS REVIEW**  

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**OF UNDERGRADUATE LITERATURE**

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# THREE RIVERS REVIEW

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# Contents

Editor's Note 9

## POETRY

Sarah Heffner	<i>Korea</i>	13
	<i>South of the North</i>	16
Corrie Berk	<i>First</i>	18

## FICTION

Kelly Coburn	<i>The Class Hamster</i>	23
Christopher Carosi	<i>One Hundred and Eighty Six Years</i>	30
Contest Remarks		44
Meaghan Dorff	<i>Sounds of the Fall</i>	47
Christian Tsu-Raun	<i>Takeshi</i>	51

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Noah Fleagal	inside cover, contest
Rachel Belieu	poetry
Kyle McPhearson	fiction



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## Editor's Note

The time it will take you to read this editor's note is approximately 47 seconds. That is, if you have never taken a speed reading course or if you do not merely skim. So, abide here with me with me for the next 44 seconds (32 for you speed readers out there). And, whether time does or does not exist, it is within this space on the page that I have been given the opportunity to celebrate the careful hours that have been given over to writing. This will be my final chance to comment upon the breadth and depth of the writing community at the University of Pittsburgh. It appears as though my time (my space?) has almost run out.

During my years of working on the Three Rivers Review as both a general staff member and an editor, I have felt privileged to be a part of the Three Rivers Review. Each and every semester our staff receives a great number of submissions from very talented writers, writers that write stories that transcend the boundaries of time. It is my sincere hope that this edition of the magazine is one that you can pick up time and time again, without the anticipation that these stories, poems, and photographs will touch you in the same way they once had. I would suggest that this is an edition of the magazine which should make a space for itself on your bookshelf and (with each read) a new space for itself within your memory. But, in the words of Eliot, "There will be time, there will be time."

Unfortunately, I do not have any answers concerning the existence of time. In fact, I do not have many answers concerning the function of time within the writing process. What I may do is fall back on a notion that being a reader, a writer, an editor has made clear to me: we, the writers, the thinkers, are only recycling ideas. We are reinterpreting. We are reuniting and revivifying. We exist within some intangible force (time?) that, for all its mystery, gives us this chance. I am pleased to present this magazine as an artifact of that opportunity.

Erin Carr, Editor in Chief



# THREE RIVERS REVIEW

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POETRY



## Korea

It was the year you hosted the Olympics, which was our last year together.  
It was the year the ram died and  
it was the year the Han river didn't flood and the fish didn't get enough food.  
It was the year the locusts forgot to shed their outer layers.

Korea what did you do with all the lost names, what have you done with the name I  
lost?

In America, Korea you were the pictures she showed her friends at work and the  
plane ride over the Pacific,  
In the orphanage we were given lollipops; my brother put away the games after he  
was done playing with them and I jumped on the backs of girls to waste time, you  
were all these things, Korea.  
Korea you were the taxi my brother threw up in, the adoption documents my parents  
signed, and the steps where they took our picture as citizens.

Korea you are half  
immigrant half native.

When I left I was just out of diapers and I'd outgrown my red shoes.

I don't remember your streets, the ones filled with aluminum trash cans  
and fish markets; when it rains no one carries an umbrella.  
The corner store has forgotten my name, but never forgot the boy with  
moles on his nose.  
The empty bowl in the cupboard is mine and hasn't been touched, it's  
a memorial, a grave.

Korea I have only a flag to hold, a flag I've left to collect dust.  
Korea you are a little raised dot on the globe, a speck to fling  
off like flies.

Korea you are half way from where I am right now, if I dug a hole I  
wouldn't find China, I'd find you.

You are the orphanage I left, where the walls of the huts were the same  
as the dirt.

You are the aunt who sent me a letter, the cousins I don't know, but  
have seen in pictures holding a bouquet of flowers.

You are the milk I used to drink in pink and blue plastic bottles, and if it wasn't a  
dream then I remember the milk was sweet.

Korea you are the yellow in me,

Korea you are the teahouse my mother worked in and the concrete my father  
poured.

Korea you are the moment my father saw my mother and smiled.

Korea you are the moment she felt regret and then ate it.

Korea you are Eros, you are the arrow that struck both their hearts, the bed they  
slept in together without wedding bands.

Korea, you are beautiful but you are pitiful too, like my mother.

I hate my mother, who was born inside you, the placenta was warm and  
loving.

I hate the mother who doesn't search for her children;

I hate the mother who is selfish like a child.

Korea you are the moment my father took his last breath and saw everything clearly.

Korea are you listening?

You killed my father, made him hate magnolias and teahouses.

You are the barstools that knew him well.

You are the sorrow absorbed in his skin, the question marks in his  
hairs, the alcohol in his glass.

Korea,  
Why do you flow with no ambitions?  
You are my veins, the Han river, and the fish we caught but could not  
eat.  
You are my larynx, my vocal chords, the phlegm I spit out, but why  
don't you let me sing?  
Why reject everything I try to remember, Korea?

A sty, a sweet relish, you are a million endless enigmas, Korea

Sarah Heffner

## South of the North

South of the North, made with sounds like pencils, you are Korea.  
I am a visit, a quick three year epic poem, Korea.

Each day was a day it should have rained,  
a ten year drought; they blamed it on the year of the ram, Korea.

What do you call a woman who is selfish like a child, but generous with her woman  
parts? How do you say - - “ehem”- Korea?

She loved the cracks around his nail beds, the smell of his dirt,  
and the Han River he washed his palms with in that bedlam Korea.

Tea house waitress smiles with sides of spicy beans and squids  
mixed with concrete in wheelbarrows; I am born in hymn, Korea.

Then he had to pile plates and find dirty rags to wash me,  
he was so small, but he never complained, Korea.

But two Americans: a scientist and a red haired beauty  
requested us; you gave them two children, Korea.

Then we were saved and handed bars of gold  
and all problems dissolved, but it’s a sham, Korea.

My brother with moles on his nose, and brown wisdom  
at six. A soldier now, and tattooed with an anthem: America/Korea.



Somehow I will learn how to breathe  
and I will remember her name, Korea.

I remember the lullabies only when I'm dreaming  
and a voice so soft, soft like a lamb, Korea.

You can smell coconut in her braid. Now boys tell me they love  
the smell of my hair; it's a repeated rhythm, Korea.

Even when I know nothing, every piece of me is an answer  
I am Donghee, I am Sarah, wife of Abraham, Korea.

**First**

*after Olds*

He lay in the dark sheets, his arms  
against the satin crease of the bed  
where his empty glass of liquor lay, his  
shins caressing the glossy silk, his torso  
frolicking over me, thin, in the night,  
an awkward teenage boy's body, softer and  
longer with the clothes off—I was a freshman  
in high school, in a bed with a naked junior,  
a drummer, young, stupid, loved,  
not loved, together, indecisive, and when I  
said Yes, let's, let's do it,  
he had taken this, rising and falling,  
in the glistening brilliant varnish, receiving  
my body to break. I had not expected  
this, I was moved by his affection and care,  
I surrendered to him like a soldier that's been keeping  
guard too long. He shifted and moaned  
and rocked his weight, I felt I knew  
what his entire self wanted me to do, like falling  
down the stairs, receiving directions  
from gravity under the nothingness of my feet.  
In the smell of the room of us rooted in  
scotch sex just appearing,  
and the mineral liquid just inside the canyon,  
I gave custody to body like prison hope  
until he drew out and stayed on and  
something drained out of me like wasted nerve.  
We sank into time, and lay there, ribs

on ribs. *I thought I'd love it,*  
I said. His face not clear  
to me, his head in my shoulder, he said, *You'll*  
*get the bang of it eventually,*  
and fell asleep. I waited under him  
so he wouldn't ever leave, he shook in his sleep, I  
tried not to feel the ache of what just happened,  
but then I felt, in it, the unmeant  
preservation—I'll like this  
barbaric opposition someday. I waited  
and slept, under this weight, on my legs, on the river  
of fullness dripping from me, in the pink life in me,  
there where the harsh unpolished quartz dived in,  
down and through the center of me.



# THREE RIVERS REVIEW

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FICTION



## The Class Hamster

when we were kids, my brother and i used to dig up these holes in the back yard and fill them with everything we could think of: sticks, rocks, old plastic cars, a coffee mug, mom's jewelry. dad always yelled at us for tearing up the lawn, but he said he'd *really* have our necks if we tried anything stupid like that in the front, and mom always wondered absentmindedly where her stuff had gone, but she never seemed to catch on. so we kept at it, until i was eleven and my brother was almost ten.

we had another brother who was twenty-six that year. he lived in indiana where he'd gone for college, and he only came to visit for christmas and one week in the summer. he had a girlfriend named christi who we all really liked, and mom would ask when they were ever gonna get married. dad just kind of rolled his eyes and drank his beer, or soda after he found Jesus.

it wasn't really accurate to say dad had found Jesus, or even that Jesus had found him. but he stopped drinking alcohol, ever, even though he'd never been a really heavy drinker, and started invoking His Holy Name at every occasion.

"Jesus, marge, why don't you leave those poor kids alone? they'll get married when they're ready."

"what the hell are you doing with my gas can?! Jesus Christ, d'you wanna light the whole house on fire?"

"i stopped drinking, but i might have a glass of champagne at the wedding. Jesus never turned wine into water."

things like that. sometimes i would wonder if every time dad said Jesus' name, it was a prayer, calling on Him for help or patience or to smite us goddamn kids. sometimes i hoped so; even with the latter, it seemed less blasphemous that way.

but the reason we stopped digging holes was, that summer something terrible happened.

they must have told my older brother first, because that was my first clue. he came for his week in the summer, but when the week ended, he didn't go back to indiana.

i woke up on the eighth day when i heard him get up from the back bedroom and go to the bathroom. the door creaks, and then the toilet seat clinked as it went up and hit the lid. when i heard the seat close again and the back bedroom door creak shut, i crept next door to my younger brother's room.

i pushed him in the shoulder to wake him up. "Jim's still here," i whispered.

my brother rolled over and groaned, trying to ignore me. "so what?" he muttered.

"so something must be wrong," i told him, trying to make my voice as urgent as possible.

he groaned again. "can't it wait until morning?"

i glanced up to note the distinct yellow glow of the room. the sun was sitting in the low branches of the tree outside my window. it must have been about 7:30.

"it *is* morning," i insisted. i knew i wouldn't be able to get back to sleep. Jim was still here, and something was wrong.

"go find out yourself," my brother suggested, as Jim shuffled through the hallway and down the stairs.

but i was scared, and i didn't want to go by myself. i went back to bed and laid awake for another hour, turning over again and again, until my brother finally knocked on the door, yawning and stretching, and said he figured it was time for breakfast.

mom was sitting at the kitchen table with a glass of orange juice and a plate of scrambled eggs. dad was standing at the sink, rinsing out the pan from the eggs, and Jim was looking in the refrigerator for something. mom was wearing one of her book club dresses, not nice enough for church on sundays but too nice to go grocery shopping in. that was my second clue that something was wrong, because mama never dressed up except wednesday night for book club, and daddy never did the dishes.

she looked up at us slowly and drawled, "good morning, you two. care for some breakfast?" she gestured with an open hand at the bowl of scrambled eggs on the table, then swirled her orange juice with her other hand.

my brother sat down at the table, and Jim closed the refrigerator and continued



standing. i pulled out the chair next to my mother, but i didn't sit down yet. "where are you going?" i asked.

mom looked into her orange juice, what was left of it, and dad said, "your mother has a doctor's appointment this morning. nine-fifteen. we've got to hit the road pretty soon."

i sat down. "what kind of doctor?"

"just doctor whitaker, honey," mom answered, looking at me and smiling briefly, then going back to her orange juice. dr whitaker was her normal doctor. the point, i suppose, was that there was nothing to worry about.

"is something wrong?" i asked, taking the bowl of eggs and trying to keep my voice level. my brother was shoveling his in, and Jim was quietly drumming his fingers on the side of the counter.

"probably nothing," dad said with false confidence, clinking the last of the clean dishes into the drying rack. "come on, marge; we'd better be leaving."

mom tilted her glass up and swallowed the last of her orange juice, then stood and left the empty glass next to the sink. she smiled at me and my brother and Jim, and she and dad left without saying another word.

Jim waited for the two of us to finish breakfast. then he washed the rest of the dishes and sat down in the living room to watch the today show on television. he never talked to us much. he never had. i was only three when he left home to go to college, so we'd never had enough in common to talk about, and he'd never been around anyway. dad always swore he'd never gone around digging up the yard, either.

my brother had this hamster he'd gotten at the end of second grade. it had been the class pet, and they'd all taken turns taking it home on weekends, because you can't leave a hamster at school by itself for two days. at the end of the year, one of the kids got to keep it. i'm not sure how that kid ended up being my brother; i'm even less sure how he persuaded my parents to let him. but the hamster had been living with us ever since. it had been about three years. i don't know how long hamsters are supposed to live, especially in the care of kids like us, but it seemed like a long time to me.

sometime during that first summer we had him, my dad decided the hamster was useless. "it just sits around and eats and poops and chews up paper—it takes and

takes and never does anything useful. it's like a goddamn Tumor, for Chrissake.” and it stuck. we'd been calling that hamster Tumor for so long we'd forgotten its original name—i think it was Mr Fuzzywinkles or something dumb like that. the new name seemed vaguely appropriate, because of his shape and rather parasitic nature: it was true that we had to pay for his food and everything he had, but he never did anything for us.

my brother was playing with the hamster when mom and dad came home from the doctor. mom looked pale, and dad looked like he felt much more than he wanted to show. Jim stood up.

nobody said anything for a moment. then Jim asked, “what did he say?”

dad swallowed and said, “they think it's cancer.” mom sank into the sofa.

i don't remember much of the rest of the day. at eleven, i was old enough to know what cancer was, but not quite old enough to grasp what it meant. i had never known anyone who had it before. it sounded like a big scary word that should be spelled with a capital C, but everything i had learned about standard written English tells me this is inappropriate. i think everyone was kind of floating around for the rest of the day, mom most of all. that was the day she started her habit of staring off into space. it was like she figured if she died, we wouldn't miss her as much if she had been distant all along. or maybe that she wouldn't miss us as much.

the next two months were a blur of doctor visits, chemotherapy treatments, talk of surgery, and Jim coming home every other weekend, more often when he could, and shouting at christi on the phone at night when he thought my brother and i weren't listening. i spent many nights on the floor next to my brother's bed, and i'm not sure who was supposed to benefit from that. if he was scared, he never showed it, but i was older, and i was supposed to be the strong one.

the first few weeks were alright. mom would come home from a chemo treatment and hide in her room, not wanting us to see her sick. when she was feeling better, she'd come back to the living room and sit on the couch. daddy did the dishes every night.

at the end of july, they had an appointment with the doctor—not dr whitaker anymore, some specialist—and when they came home, mama went right into her room.

daddy took off his cap, wiped his brow, and put the cap back on his head with a sigh. he sat us down on the couch and knelt in front of us.

“the doctor says your mother’s not responding well enough to the chemotherapy, and they want to try surgery,” he started. i couldn’t see the tears welling up in his eyes because they weren’t there, and because he bowed his head so the bill of his cap hid his face from us. “they scheduled it for next week,” he went on. “next wednesday. Jim’s gonna come home; he’ll stay here with you while your mother and i are gone.” with that, he stood, head still bowed, and left us sitting on the couch.

my father always was a man of few words.

my brother and i didn’t know what to do, so we went out in the backyard and dug holes.

wednesday came, and daddy and mama left early. the sun was slanted in the windows at such a sharp angle that it made the glass hurt. my brother and i hugged and kissed mama goodbye, still in our pajamas. we went back to bed—how, i still don’t know—and Jim stayed up to fix himself breakfast. we both had to have cereal when we got up again.

the day dragged on. noon felt late. my brother was sitting around playing with his hamster all day, a puzzled sort of worried look on his face. about 12:30, he picked up the hamster and walked out into the backyard. i decided it would be good to follow him

my brother sat down in the dirt and picked up his spade. his eyes were shining and pink, but showed a fierce determination. he looked up at me, and my heart dropped about six inches in my chest as i realized what he was about to do. and in a strange, ten-and-eleven-year-old way, it seemed like it might work.

“goodbye, Tumor,” he said, his voice barely trembling, and in one motion, he snapped the hamster’s neck.

that was when my eyes welled up, and a few tears spilled over, but i wouldn’t say i was really crying. my brother dug the hole, deeper than usual because you have to bury living things deep, and i filled it in so Tumor would be gone for good.

daddy came home alone that night. we weren’t expecting anything different;

mama would have had to stay in the hospital for a while anyway. but we knew as soon as he walked in the door. he didn't even try to hide the tears in his eyes, and he couldn't have hidden the tears on his cheeks anyway. we all started crying, except Jim.

the funeral was incredibly strange. i couldn't cry, even if i'd wanted to, which i think i did. my brother cried a little. the funeral was in some church we'd never been to. nevernever been to. it seemed big at the time, but it really wasn't. we all walked up the center aisle together to our seats in the front row, and the other people in the church turned around to look at us. i had to keep myself from laughing, thinking how much a wedding and a funeral were alike and how silly it felt to be watched like that. there was some minister or priest who talked for a long time about my mom, but i knew and everyone else knew that he hadn't known her at all. nobody in my family wanted to say anything; my brother and i were both too young and the men in my family don't talk about things like that.

the part in the cemetery was even worse. there was this huge hole in the ground where they were going to leave my mom in a box, and they were just waiting for us to leave so they could lower the coffin down. we each threw a handful of dirt on top of the coffin, and it all felt too familiar, like it was our fault somehow.

on the next hill there was a backhoe, and my brother saw it first. he nudged me in the side with his elbow and nodded towards it. i turned to look at him, and he met my eyes, and then we looked away. we were both thinking how cool it would have been to have a backhoe in the yard, and how much bigger holes we could have dug. neither of us would admit to thinking, "and how much bigger stuff we could have buried." and both of us knew it wouldn't matter anymore.



Christopher Carosi

## One Hundred and Eight-six Years

This is a testimony to the anomaly of God. This is a truth to the vulture spreading its wings. For the jaws of war bite so hard and crack the stone on our badges and proud military parents. My kin is the first feet. Men all in uniform crouching and shooting and running and throwing themselves in front of each other. None of them die in vain. It's been a long time for me. It's been a long duty for my country. The Marlboro reds still taste the same as they do, the wake-up calls are the same, the protocol is the same. The few and proud are still the same. It's been a long duty.

One hundred and eighty-six years between military exploits. Between me and a woman. One hundred and eighty-six years between birth and death. Between twinkle and supernova. Between little legs and pure brawn. Between a recording and the real thing. Between American Revolutions. My wife took me once to an underground salsa club in Chicago. We entered the hall where the lights were red and the other women were limber and far more attractive. I didn't flinch though. I held tight and true to the real lady in my presence. The others were little tits. I trained my eyes on her and her alone. I bounced when I needed to. I swayed with that sexy music. When we left and the Cuban men had subsided their tongues I dragged her out of there with the grace and speed of an honest soldier. I took her home and we made love like the first time. It might have been the energy of the city and subway cars speeding. It might have been the immaculacy of those Cubans and their greasy hair. But really, really, sir, it was my trained eyes on her body the whole night. These Marine arms did not lock any other woman in that whirling place. She knew it so truly. Her heart was so hot for it. When we finished I rolled over her and stared up at the blank ceiling in our bedroom.

Sir, if there was another way to tell I'd be in the pit in Germany again. I'd be a skeleton laughing at the doughboys as they dig another fragging trench in the mud plains. I'd be a loaded weapon lying alone in the marshlands and dusty-boot dripping

trees. I killed thirty-five Germans on my first tour of duty in the Great War. I stalked the land like a steamroller and plowed through every living organism. I imagined the grasses wilting as I passed through them, the rats and fowl folding over in quiet death as I trudged along, flinging my body with my strong arms from trench to trench. I used to inhale the poisonous gases like nitric-oxide and chuckle at the flames of an overturned tank. I never wince when the bayonet finds the softer parts under ribcages, between sweating pores, because that's why I'm here. The steelworker doesn't grimace when he punches his time card. I don't think the American people understand the authority that soldiers, that we, have; and what that authority feels like when you see the enemy peek their heads. Sure, in the bully yard we turn away because it's smart and we smile at the teachers during recess because they want us to. But in the pit when you see the enemy all the training and the glory and the three colors of the Screaming Eagle race through your mind and you're faced with a decision. Either shoot the 'coon or the buck. Racoons are fun to kill but bucks have a respect when the bullet rips through. The veins of God run through dead eyes, sir.

I carry tattoos. They are not for me. I have a panther, U.S.M.C., my cross, the skull of my dad and fireworks spraying from breast to breast, neck to pubis, wallet to bullet scar in my butt. Really they're for anyone worth showing. I used to have little five-second dreams about me standing over a wounded person/animal/thing and bulging my pectorals and showing the panther, U.S.M.C., cross, dad-skull and 4<sup>th</sup> of July to them. Watch their eruption of pain and smile half-hearted. I wrinkle up my eyes and let the crow's feet feature my face like lightning onto a pale sky. Blood dried in the crevices. I don't want to see anyone die. That moment is truly disturbing. I believe in quick death in battle and to move along. Intimidation in a moment of battle, domination in a moment of medal, that is inspiring.

My dad died in the second Revolution of the United States. He fought under Jeb Stuart in the finest calvary this country ever had. He rode with Stuart the day he circled McClellan's unit twice in the birch-lands of Virginia. He was shot once among the cherry blossoms, twice under the command of Robert Lee, twice under the Georgian sun and three times in a crater off the coast of the ridiculous political union. In his old age he told me about the Lincoln administration, the War Democrats, the Cop-

perhead tongues and the slavery worship. He told me that about the limits of freedom and that the Inventor of freedom has a price on it. My father was a zealous man. An American in a sense that independence and irony/hypocritical exposure hold hands and skip through the park like two little faggots.

Sir, I look at a rattlesnake and take in what I want to take in. I think about reaching out, grabbing it by the aquiline head and tearing the rattler away. Use it to lure and to piss off. I think about physical people. The physical world we are tied into. The wounds and the healing process. The worship of the rifle and all the decoration that come with putting a banner over your own individual honor. I admire the stars and stripes, sir. Jesus had no colors, sir, He didn't pick one plain over the other. He didn't put anyone else on a higher pedestal than the other (exclude the tax collectors, of course). I'll fight evil everyday, grant it, but not a man with the same calm nature on a Sunday as I, not a man with the same buttoned-down shirt at dinner, not a man with three kids going through the motions and a wife that worries by the telephone like a dusty candlestick. I'll use whatever resources I have to go back to my home. I want peace for all men and their children. You can't make me kill a blue collar man, sir.

My bruises haunt me like starships echoing across the three corners of the solar system. They ghost-spiral in the Milky Way and they enter my window and comet-crash my waking eyes. On the borders of red China I was the first man that hit the rice soil. I looked up at the suffering green sky and saw my companions washed up to meet me like fireflies caught in a sudden gust of wind. I rushed to see the slanted eyes of a supposed menace to democracy. They fought with such ferocious speed and artillery that I ventured to duck down among the dead and chew on the bark of my skin until the bombs stopped burning the Asian sky. Eisenhower, didn't he have an idea of what mass warfare can do to a man? I didn't vote for him, or anyone. I voted for the view of my wife from bed as she unties her hair. I voted for a warm supper in February. I voted for a better pair of boots and a sidearm that does not aim like a drunken Communist raiding the red rooms at dusk and the concubines cowering in his wake.

All guns have a personality. They inherit the dreams of their fathers. One scope I looked through in the mill-towns of southern France in 1944 was shaped like a big glass tear. The crosshairs were bold and glaring. The depressing cough of the



weapon blended too perfectly with the everlasting overcast skies. That moment in my life lingers on and on. The day I thought about Jesus not caring about this corner of the world, abandoning all hope in His race of humans. Of Him turning His holy shoulder on our consistently bleeding above-eye-cuts. My sargent died on a Monday morning in that town. He was shot in a fire-fight on the steps of a half-building there. The Nazis were up in the top, decoding our transmissions and keeping the place nice for their cache and whatever incredible alien-abortions exorcisms and experiments or whatever the fuck they did back then in those times. Our company was eight men. Myself, Jacque, Mac, Lou Dob, Streaky, Tom-Tomless, Effer and Sarge. Jacque and Effer were caught both in the throat as we began up the stairs. There was no time to see them fall. I looked up feverishly and saw an old chandalier dangling and two sets of beady demon eyes behind there at the top of the staircase. I bolted up the flight and Tom-Tomless was right near me. Sarge stayed back and trained his teardrop on the uglier of the two and caught him deftly under the brim of his helmet. The man went down harshly, like a magnet pulled him to the tile. The other retreated to the hall on the top floor. Me and Tom were there blasting at the walls that shielded him and his cronies with extreme prejudice. Tom's shirt was too big for him, I remember that, he would wind up his arms to sling the sleeve back off of his knuckles when he fired rapidly. We killed the retreating enemy when we cornered him in a little lavatory and two more that sprang out of the woodwork. Jacque, Mac and Streaky were still caught below, in the doorway of the place, fighting off reinforcements. Fuckers had called already. When me and Tomless got to the last room of the hall we saw three of them all passed out on the dirty cotton-spilling cots. Posters of curvy blondes were tacked up all over the walls, right along with the bullet holes. Bottles of expensive French booze were broken and shattered in their palms. The smell of burning refers was still in the air. I looked at Tomless and his expression was like a courageous dog, so we lit them up with the remainder of our magazines. I turned down the steps, there was no decoding going on here, no experiments. What were they protecting? Why did the Nazis fight so hard for this structure.

When we made it back down finally, Streaky was a dead torso, his shit-tubes were drawn from post to post and down the two stairs. I ducked down and motioned

Tomless around the other corner of the building. I heard a collision of concrete and ignited shrapnel and so I forced my body around to the back of the edifice and there was Sarge, Mac and Jacque in dire straits. Tomless's body must've turned to dust. I wiped my face and gripped my weapon close to me, the other men were frantic, except Sarge. There was collapsed cement between two charred trees where Germans were shooting bricks at us. Two and a half seconds went by, metal jackets were pinging between my living ears, the pounding of solid fire were storms. In that short span of time, Jacque and Mac joined the soil. I didn't even see them get shot. They were alive and dead within an instant. I thought I was there alone with my back to the building. I looked to my left and Sarge was writhing on his knees. I dropped my firearm and scooped him up like a baby and sprinted thirty yards to cover. I laid him down and to the sound of his burning organs and sputtering bloody coughs I defended my captain with his pistol. I knelt there, shot for shot, until the echo went away and I rolled up my sleeve to look at my cross tattoo, standing. Leaning partially in the Israeli wind, like stone. I sat next to Sarge in shock and red hands were holding his shins and trying to pull him down. The devil was tonguing Sarge's ears and sliding its long feminine fingers between his lips. I pushed out with my hands and grabbed the fiend by the eyebrow and tailfeather and tossed him as high and hard as I could up to cloud. He burned into a million flaky pieces in new breaking sunlight. The heat from that creature was so intense, when I had held him close to rear up to toss him, my dogtag burned into my flesh on my breastbone. Branding me. That's more honorable than any star or fatigue, sir.

The drill sergeant grilling you is not real. He believes in arousals of the top layer of skin. I know the opposite is true. Soldiers are fighting intangible things. They see hope and anguish and depression and honor in a living skeleton in their environment. They inhabit feelings not of their free will. They receive strength from endeavor and spirit and experience, not empty words. If battles would be fought with intellect, there would be no defense system, no dead snake in the Eagle's claw.

How I wish I could tell you of happy moons. How my heart burns for a pleasant shoreline, an ivory coast sparkling. I wish for peace. I wish for the Four Horsemen to be lanced mightily and tossed as carrion into a salty abyss. I want and I need hands

reaching for mine in celebration, but not of victory. I wish for a feast in honor of our living hours. I want my weapons to dissolve and recycle into cups and dishes and forks and chairs. The confetti that fell on my head in New York City after the great victory was swallowed by the sewer covers and spurlged into a wasteland with urea and fictional crocodiles. A small girl reached up toward me on the float. A girl in a sailor-style dress put her arm on mine. Beers and liquors were passed around. I disown them all. We celebrated. We celebrate. We celebrate for a long march to come. A million mile walk to more violence stacked on top of violence on top of violence.

There is no moon in my heart, sir. There is raging stars. Thousands. The maxilla of my face glows with embers of the sun's kin. There is no break from it. There is no thought through it.

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And then there's that place. Deserts stretching for decades in all directions, sand gathered up in the toes and a dryness driving cars around the globe. Crude brown liquid filling up the pupils, pumping the machines that grind rock into smaller rock into granules of dust into the air sucked in with heaving labored breaths. My tan escapes me. My card deck scatters to the floor. Guys named Ted. Communication. The smell of diesel on the fingers that won't wash off. Communication. All hope upon a starlet out there. The men are folded into green tents with their memories, stories and pictures. Conversation. Crowdless. I cannot express the proper feeling when the bones capture the massive sigh the desert has night after night. I cannot explore the pain deep enough to make it clear. I will not.

One hundred and eighty-six years between my back and the wall, sir. My country will never abandon me but I'm rallying ever so close to a moment of flight myself. Uncle Sam is the worst psychologist I've ever known. He'll call me by name. Caffeine. Magazine women. Celebrity gossip. Car dealerships, fast food, golf, university, fraternity, West Point, coffin in a lake. Southern coast, borderline, news channel, coverage, presidential election, hunger strike. High school, pornography, cattle, frustration, old age, influenza, teenage years, pots and pans. It does not matter who is the chief, it's only the men. The men will fight. The chief can wax on and wax off week after week but someone has to listen.

I can tell you how to pop a grown man's arm out of socket in three moves. I

can demonstrate a pressure point that brings anyone to their knees immediately. In the desert we reach a dead end. *Vietnow*. Did I forget that jungle? The Viet-call. I believe in order to have a desert one needs water, lots of it, and then a proper stopper for it. There's plenty in Vietnam. Plenty of everything. There's an awful lot of water to soak into places that ought not to be wet for an extended time. Tragedy. One giant sweaty bug-bite. Chris Keenan, a man like all of us. By 'all of us' I mean he dreams more when he's awake than at night, and the ones during the day are much more real to his heart. Grew up in Texas, guided steers into enclosed areas and guided them out. Carried a loaded weapon, six-shooter, had no permit, didn't need one. He wore a cowboy hat because it was the best thing to wear. Blisters on the hands and feet like coal, knots of the sparse trees. He rooted the chicken coop daily, the smell of ginger in the spring, real homemade grits. His mother was a jolly woman of fifty-six. Her hair and skin were rosy and clean. Dad woke up each morning with whiskey in his coffee and stuck a heavy cigar in his mouth soon after, sucked on it and sucked on it. He only removes it when he kisses mother three times: at breakfast, coming in the house from work for lunch, before the light is closed for bed.

Chris Keenan was an honest boy and he trotted mighty happy with his steer, his responsibility. It was a relatively short walk to the store, his old school, Tawny, the kind girl one house over. He remembered Tawny, he thought about her everyday of his life. Texas was big enough for that, remembering and working, that is. Nothing was wasted there. Tawny had a fine figure. She had one of those disposable-looking pools when they were a bit younger. It was cylinder shaped with about a five-foot radius, filled up with hose-water. Chris swam there in the summer and Tawny's and his parents were on friendly terms indeed. As the sun began to sink on one truly vicious Texan summer Tuesday, Tawny got a little closer to Chris and showed that part of her that is a secret to boys around the world (to Chris). She showed him that part that breathes up and down when she breathes but is a separate vessel from lungs and heart and all other flesh. Tawny's breasts were nestled and bound back by clothing, molded seam to seam by Holy forces, effortlessly dolloped onto bone. The waters vanish in between moments. Sir, Chris Keenan kept going back to that pool, sir. And his young age was no deterrent. Tawny was intense and true and beautiful.

She moved away a few summers later but called a lot. Chris Keenan had a first

and last name. Tawny had a first. Tawny was *first*. Pitching the weeds and hay with an intense memory sitting on the lobes of the brain like a comfortable little monk, Chris Keenan was tilling and cowboying his way to freedom. His liberty came by way of a stern hand latching onto his big Texan belt buckle and slinging him across two great seas into the sweatiest place known to man. In moments of brutality, the feeling of water digs into eight thousand layers of clothing. He landed in a platoon of strangers. Twenty-five dead men that were so new and different that their names were all mixed in a mind bag and bouncing around. Greg, Max, Joyner, Faucet Frank, Blackie, Ted, Graham, Johnny, Bob, Deuce, Boss, Paulie, Junior, Trent, Ted, Gene, Chuck. Dead dead and dead all the way through. Grenades screaming into chests. Chris Keenan had intense memories of sex and other glimpses of life, suddenly he had none. There was nothing closer to his human core than atrocity, blood, fire, drugged-out commanders, psychosis fluttering on the tips of his eyelashes. Tawny, might as well be dead too.

He was holed up muttering awful things to himself. He was chewing on grenade pins and cigarette filters. Why was death and stabbing women that crawled away and torching straw huts and raping the life from the youth a military exploit? One hundred and eighty-six years between the flash of victory and the booming crack of its thunder. Chris Keenan leapt from his foxhole one night with heavy coats of dirt in his fingernails. He stripped his charms and meaningless green clothing. *Semper Ubi sub Ubi*. He kicked his boots into the swaying thicket of poisonous ferns. He enfurled his machine gun into the canopy of the jungle and strided into the carriage of the enemy only clothed in his still-acned skin. Atrocity, burning, dead children, riot, peace and love and peace and love, what does it all mean? They were writing music back home and everywhere. They were expanding their minds with all sorts of chemicals and performing poetry and selling millions of music records in stores in every major city. They were producing a movement of the counter-culture becoming the mainstream. He ran half-naked into the breast of the Viet-cong. In the U.S. they were protesting and getting shot themselves. They were fighting against this war and he had been down in a muddy hole with the intensity of home corrupting his mind and growing more sour and more sour. Toes in the soil, throat burning with the gasoline fumes and helicopter exhaust. Tongue tasting the blood like mist in the green woods. Take me anywhere,

Texas is nice this time of year, he thinks. He doesn't know if Texas still exists or if it's a figment of imagination festering like a stale fetus in his skull and siphoning all good thought from both sides of the brain and transmitting fucked up messages and elaborate disguised fantasy lands with parading cattle and beautifully-titted young girls wading in cool pools in (pseudo) Texas. Raining and raining. The years are ticker tape. Click click click they go by, the sixties and seventies one long cocaine line. The president a demented dragon hopped up on Qualudes and Vitamin P. George Harrison and his Club Band and 1969 screaming atrociously about chemicals and free sex.

He was shot as he ran bare chested through the wettest part of the Vietnamese jungles. A bullet hit him straight between the ribs and pierced his heart, all the ventricles spasmed and his beating muscle shriveled like a raisin and that was it. He was a race horse suddenly flashed out by the Hand of God. Chris Keenan loved Texas and his mother's cakes and his dad's simple smell of cigars and labor. He liked Tawny enough to say he loved her too. The American people put his name on a black wall in Washington D.C. and called him a hero of attrition. We're heroes for rescuing his spiraling soul from the abyss of underground. Now we all wonder why the memorial is so reflective.

What was Vietnam but a hard slap to the tenderest part of our bodies (you know where)? I believe in the modern era we look back at war and shrug our soldiers, understand it was a mistake and then turn 'round and thrust headlong into a deeper and more complicated battlefield.

I recognize a fool's paradise, my paradise. A world without war and hunger, a planet of delight where taxes, violence, politics, scorn is washed to and fro like the neap tide. A fool can dream and dream well in America. The United States Marine Corps. justifies the rules of the mad world by bearing the most extreme, most blunt attack by it. By taking the most frontal and violent attack to the broadest parts of our bodies we absorb all the hurt and suffering and pain and hate so that someone somewhere can be policed and not strike back. So that someone somewhere can go in peace. So that dreamers can dream and not end up on a plantation or in the jungle screaming for another sane independent individual to agree that existence is real.

In my final dream of the jungle I am in a crowd in the Motor City on Halloween

night in 1968. A man in a gold lame suit is pelting with his vocal cords, “Right now it’s time to kick out the *jams*, motherfucker!” And I don’t know where the music starts and my heart begins, where revolution liquid pours like hot wax on the bare chests of our fore fathers and where I decay on the hardpan as the vultures pick away.

We can’t save every life. We can only hope that love reloads and reloads and keeps its chin up in a true dogfight. In my future I’m sitting politely on a dock of the great river, skipping rocks bank to bank. My hometown sparkles in the dying sunlight...

... the sky is heavy with cloud. Dust and heat stand still in the air. The weight of the atmosphere is a huge invisible balloon. Across the river, the town’s houses look like they were planted in the side of the hill by some Godly force, a preternatural green thumb. I skip the rocks gently across the water.

“Extraordinary!” I exclaim in the humidity. My long grey beard is thistle. A small boy walking alone on the dock strolls close to me, drawn to my delight. he stands near me, looking up at the sky.

“What, sir?” he asks, excited by my sudden remark yet leery of its significance.

“Why, haven’t you ever seen anything like it?” My eyes glow.

“Seen what, sir?”

“The cloud, the beautiful cloud, it glows... like gold was cached within the white fluffiness and if one could get so close to touch it, one could tear the cotton apart, reach inside and pull out...” I trail off, I tap my right fist lightly to my chest. Indeed, the clouds are gold on the underbelly, wafting on the quick thermals. The white cumulus are upside-down hills of rolling cotton candy and butterscotch. I could see the boy smiling too, he is amused by my utter humor. “Boy, do you believe in God?” I say.

“Yes, sir.” he answers.

“Then you believe that we all have some meaning in our lives, then. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“If I were to tell you that God had a plan for every last one of us, from kings down to the lowliest beggars, you would believe my words, wouldn’t you, boy?”

“I would, sir” the boy says. I examine the sky momentarily. I look at the boy. I reveal a rock from my pocket, a flat one, perfect for skipping across the thick waters. I turn it over in my fingers, showing the boy its geography. I can see his face beginning to twist in slight confusion. I reassure him, smiling and putting my hand on his shoulder. I flick my wrist toward the water and release the rock and it bounces quickly, one, two, three along the fresh water.

“Look her, boy, can you skip rocks?” I ask him through my grin.

“No, sir. I never liked it. Why do you skip rocks all day, sir?” he questions. I pull him close, pull out another rock and place it in his little palm.

“Let me tell you something, boy.” I begin, “Faith is a little rock you keep in your pocket. It’s a nice little shiny one, you know, one of them you found down on the river road, smoothed from the waters. Now, that rock is yours to keep... forever, it’s yours to use whatever way you want to use it. Now any little boy with a pair of arms on him and a twinkle in his little eye is gonna skip rocks, but I’ll tell you, not every rock is gonna skip. And if you, if I, if anyone is gonna skip rocks and believes that every one of them rocks is gonna skip, then we might as well run into the church, tear our clothes and be set ablaze right there. You’ve got to learn and know just the moment, just the right time that your little rock isn’t gonna just *kerr-plunk* in the water and sink. There are times, my boy, when just a little rock can go a great distance and other times when it won’t go no where... you’ve got to choose well, boy.” The boy looks at the sky and at the waters and at the stone in his hand. He looks into my old eyes with such a relentlessness, such a peaceful electricity. I embrace him.

As the sun strikes his cheek, I see the greenness in his eyes, the shine of his hair. I can smell his mother’s perfume, his house, his dog. I can see it in him the spirit that I once had, the flowers I once found growing all around my home and everywhere. Still he looks stern to me now, even after a good talking-to. I snicker and he still holds the rock in his hand silently.

“But sir,” he starts, as innocent as a bug, “Why do you skip rocks each evening?” I reach and take the stone from his pink hand and toss it, it skips three times and on the fourth strike of the water the stone instantly dives to the bottom.



“Because I can, boy.” I say and sigh. The boy is still for a minute. He tugs on my beard and pokes me in the cheek. He trots away and I sit and watch the water and hear his little boots trail off back to his warm hearth. The river churns its violet cape. head. The man sitting next to me smokes a cigar and talks over the smoke. He asks me if I ever drink my beer. I tell him no. I tell him he can have it when I’m finished if he wants. He says that he’d rather drink the water from the fuckin’ river than drink warm beer. Hell, the water from the river ain’t so bad.

For the Marines of this country, sir, I compare to the black parts of the banana. So sweet, yet daring to die at any moment. How ripe can one fruit be to be thrown away? I’ve heard in my travels people say they prefer the blackest parts of the banana. And yet, my travels are controlled by the government, my arms and stories are a result of an order or a mission. They are a consequence of my service. My testimony rests with the anomaly of God because I respect it too much to carry this entire load on my one hundred and eighty-six year-old back. I, we, value to *support* that load. That future I told you is just something I’ve been thinking about, and it dins softly. It is not the prime thought in my mind. It will not be yours, either. And it is not the way I will end, because I won’t. I never die, I can’t. If I die, the stretchers will collapse, the bridges and roads will crack and crumble, the strong hearts of the civillian world will suffer and burn away like paper. I am a one hundred and eighty-six year-old man, and I will envy the dead but not the dying. Never the dying, sir.



# THREE RIVERS REVIEW

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NINTH ANNUAL FICTION CONTEST

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Judged by Dave Griffith

As is usually the case with contests, it was very difficult to narrow it down. What I was most impressed by reading all the entries was the ambition of the stories, the willingness to tackle big issues and “go long,” telling stories involving many strong-voiced and vivid characters that take place over multiple scenes. In short, I came away encouraged and reassured that the long, dramatic story -- the kind I’m usually partial to -- has not completely died out.

However, that being said, the two stories that struck me after multiple read throughs of the entire pool, were shorter and took place within the confines of a short period of time, thereby magnifying the actions of the characters and the vividness of their surroundings. As a result, there is a level of mystery and import in these stories that cannot be faked or arrived at on cleverness alone.

Congratulations to these two authors and thank you to all who submitted work for giving me the opportunity to read and be inspired by your work.

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Dave Griffith received his MFA in fiction from the University of Pittsburgh in 2001. His book, *A Good War is Hard to Find: The Art of Violence in America* was published by Skull Press in 2006. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Image*, *Killing the Buddha*, and *the Utne Reader*, among others. He currently teaches writing at Saint Mary’s College and the University of Notre Dame. During the summer he is the chair of the creative writing department at the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for the Arts. Next Fall he will be Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Sweet Briar College in Virginia.

FIRST PRIZE — Meaghan Dorff

*“Sounds of the Fall,” takes the potentially cloying and cliché event of the death of a pet and changes it by virtue of pitch-perfect tone and elegant yet minimalistic rendering of detail into a hauntingly beautiful moment that tests the limits of what a story can be. I wish all stories left me feeling this way.*

- Dave Griffith



## Sounds of the Fall

We bring him home in a cardboard carton. You can peek through the holes and see the oil-dipped pearls of his eyes, his pinpoint nostrils over the fingernail beak. We take turns staring.

“You’re scaring him,” we tell each other. “Stop it.” But my brother and sister and I look and look again, marveling at how small, how alive he is. He moves and breathes and peers back. He cowers and patters to the corner with whispery feet.

Such a pretty little thing, intricate as a painted egg, with patterned wings like quilted silk. He never wants to leave his cage, not even when we tie the door open with twine and watch him all through dinner. Still, he sings for us. Or maybe he just sings to pass the time, but we imagine the song is ours. His trills fill up the room and the dog comes bounding over when he whistles.

The morning we find him dead, the autumn air smells like smoke and cider, like burnt-leaf bonfires and fallen apples rotting. He is frozen-folded, wings tucked to his sides, pitter-patter feet quiet, curled and still.

My mother gets a box, cardboard like the one we brought him home in, but this box has no holes. We cushion the inside with Kleenex and wrap him in more, a white cocoon. My mother holds his chrysalis while we cry.

In a somber parade, we follow her out to the back of the yard, crunching the leaves like ash-burnt popcorn beneath our feet and smelling the fall.

Then my mother stops.

We all stop.

“I thought I heard him,” she says.

Our hearts jump.

Off comes the tissue chrysalis. Autumn feels crisper, smells newer. I open my clenched, clammy fist and stretch my fingers.

We want to look but she won't let us. Her face tells us he is stiff as before.

"Are you sure?" we say. How awful it would be, to be buried alive. But that's not what haunts me as I hope. All I can think of is his golden second chance, hovering just out of reach.

"Parakeets imitate sounds you wouldn't expect," the man in the pet store told my mother. "They repeat whatever they hear most often. Sometimes it's a background noise you don't even notice."

Our bird used to make an awful screeching sound, halting and deliberate, metallic friction. It took us weeks to realize that he was imitating our ancient sliding glass door.

We bury him in the garden, cold in his cocoon, cushioned by tissues, tucked into the shoebox.

I am last in line as we traipse back to the house.

"Close the door," my mother says.

I throw my weight against the sliding glass and it protests all the way, screaming until the latch clicks shut.



## RUNNER UP — Christian Tsu-Raun

*“Takeshi,” defies all common sense and conventional wisdom by being a story driven almost entirely by dialogue. I was in awe of the author’s technical skill, as well as his/her ability to choose only those details that most poignantly drove home the relationship between the characters.*

- Dave Griffith



## Takeshi

“It’s been a long time.”

“Too long, but I guess it couldn’t be helped.” I look at her. Young, slim, healthy. The house hasn’t changed at all, except.

“The shrine is missing,”

“It was more yours than mine, I thought you’d like to bring it back someday. How have you been?” Her full-moon face smiles up at me. My chest tightens.

“I don’t know where to begin...I...We...The fam...” I open and close my mouth a few times, interrupting myself.

“Close your eyes, just let it fall out.”

I take a deep breath. She smells like rosewater and sunshine. My thoughts slow down enough to pull one out whole. “I lit a stick of incense kneeling in front of the family shrine. I wanted to tell you about that day.”

I was sitting on our couch, looking at the pile of newspapers that I never really got rid of. I checked the time, then checked the oven. The doorbell rang promptly at six past eight. Meryl was reliable in her own way...

“Make yourself comfortable, what would you like to drink?” I realized we were out of grapefruit.

“Oh, maybe some grapefruit juice.” I helped her out of a heavy gray wool coat, uncovering a pale blue dress.

“Fresh out, but we’ve got Houjicha, Sencha, Sprite and Cranberry juice. The kids really cleaned me out, otherwise I’d offer some snacks. We have wasabi peas, but you don’t like those.”

I peeked through the kitchen door. Meryl looked comfortable, and tired. She sat unfocused, and at that angle I saw a shadow of her past, she must have been a real knock-out.

“What was that? You took down some of the pictures,” Our house hadn’t changed in decades, it had just gotten older. I guess she’d been around enough, looking for changes, seeing what isn’t there.

“Yeah, Yoshiru wanted some of the ones with Ama in them, so they can show Hikaru his grandma. And we have tea, pop, and juice.”

“Oh, whatever’s prepared, Takashi,” I winced, I knew she was just tired.

“Takeshi. You know you can call me Dustin if it’s easier.” I had set everything up already, on the tea tray your mother got us when we’d first moved in.

“Oh that won’t do at all... Thank you... It’s not proper for a man to have more than one name. Like having more than one face really. Takeshi, this tea is delicious!”

“Thank you.”

“How long have you gone by Dustin anyway? Was it a nickname Rose... I mean Amaya gave you?”

“Oh no, I had it long before we met... It’s not a very interesting story. Did I miss anything this morning?” The week before, Pastor Johns had to leave early. His son was sick and needed to go to the hospital. Everyone just sat there for a few minutes before leaving in awkward silence.

“Did you ever! Somehow a pigeon got into the church and the Anderson boy and his friends tried to chase it out, but it just kept flying around and around until Pastor Johns got fed up and went on with the service, left the doors wide open. The whole time through you could hear it cooing and wandering around, then right as Pastor Johns was offering communion the thing just up and flew out the doors! How are Yoshiru and his family?”

“Oh they’re doing so well. Ama would be so proud of them, I know I am. Yoshiru put us through a few scares, but he turned out alright. I think we can thank Melissa for that, she keeps him grounded.”

“You know, you never talk about your oldest, Takeshi junior.”

“Takashi.”

“Is there that much of a difference?”

“They mean different things.”

“Between the two of you. The only pictures I see with him are the ones with the whole family.”

“He, he shunned the family. It’s complicated.”

“I’m not in any hurry.”

I wanted to tell her. I wanted to look Meryl in the eyes and tell her that he had moved out of the house, about the company he kept, about why I say he isn’t married, about everything. But I couldn’t do it without sounding backward, old-fashioned, primitive.

“I’ll go warm the tea.”

“Hikaru is what, two now?”

“Almost three. Time does just fly out the door these days, he’s starting in school soon. I bet he’ll be graduating when I wake up tomorrow... Time does fly. The only things that really keeps it from shooting straight out the window these days are my poker game, hearing from the family, and having these visits from you. Most of the time I’m just here alone, remembering... You know, when I was in the camps I was just a little boy, not much older than Hikaru.”

“Camps?”

“The war camps.”

“That must have been awful!”

“It was and it wasn’t. I cried every night, when it was so cold my face would burn, and on summer nights when you’d wake up in a pool of your own sweat. I didn’t know why we were there, but I did know no-one wanted to stay long. There were kind people there though, friends of my parents, other kids. Even made friends with one of the M.P.s.”

“One of the officers?”

“Yeah, he’d sneak me and my brother extra food from the mess hall, and on Christmas he even got us two live chickens. I never saw my father cry except when Sergeant Chuck gave us those two chickens. Me and my brother would run up to him and each sit on a boot, and he’d march his patrol with the two of us on his feet. When he was done he’d slap us on the backs and huge dust clouds would fly off and he’d say ‘Alright Dusty, go on home.’ Every day for what felt like forever we sat on his boots being dragged around the camp. Alright Dusty, go on home, your mama is going to worry for you. One day he stopped coming, I heard they sent him home for being too sympathetic. The camps were shut down later that year. That’s how I met Amaya.”

“I thought you met in college.”

“We did, but my friend Katsuo from the camps, he got transferred in later than my family. He was a terrible prankster, and has some scars to prove it. He told me to look

out for Ama, she was a friend of his sister's. It was a good thing too, people still didn't like Japanese Americans much. He passed a couple years ago, great guy. We gave him a traditional send-off." I decided not to mention his last wishes, concerning the crematory content in the scotch at his post-funeral dinner. Even dead he was a cut-up.

"A funeral, like Ama's?"

"Yeah, like Ama's." I looked into his empty teacup and swirled around the last little bit. "You know, one of these winters you aren't going to be able to drive anymore, and I don't think I could go the rest of my life without these lovely evenings we've been having..."

"That was how I proposed to Meryl. At sixty-eight it seems a little silly, but I guess it would have been sillier to just ask her to move in. The kids took it really well, no end of jokes at my expense. I was really afraid though, I felt like I was... being unfaithful to you. I know. It's silly. I love you."

I open my eyes and let the house fill back in. The shrine is there, where it always had been. It was in the same spot in my house when I was a boy. Meryl never really warmed up to it though, she never really got past the thought that it doesn't matter if it's a rosary or a bowl of rice and a stick of incense.

"Good, you're getting it." She glides over to me, sitting on the couch. She cups my cheek with her thin, delicate hand. "What about about Takashi?"

"Years later my body started acting up, and Takashi came back to us. Yoshiru told me he was coming. He came over with persimmons. It was the same way when he'd told me Kashi was going to Massachusetts to get married, and when he'd come by to give me Kashi's new address. I guess he was trying to sweeten the deal."

It was a hospital room like any other. I never liked them, I guess that's normal.

"It's weird how the things you say and the things you mean are never the same. They might be close, or just good enough, or almost there, but they're never exactly on point. Sometimes they're pretty far off..."

"Yeah, I know." Kashi didn't look up at me, I couldn't blame him. Even young I was never much to look at. Small eyes, small ears, that scar on the side of my neck that told

me it was raining. He looked exactly like his mother, and me... if you took out all the bad parts. "They, they say you're..."

"How have you been?"

"Okay."

"Just okay?"

"What do you want me to do, wrap years of living in a big box and... I mean...So much has happened. I mean you got *married*."

"That I did."

"Who is she? I hear she's nice."

"She is, otherwise I wouldn't have married her."

"It's funny."

"Hm?"

"You, getting remarried at your age."

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

"Oh cut it out... How did you meet?"

"At church."

"*You* went to church?"

"A lot has happened."

"Apparently. The nurses say you've been... difficult." He looked at me with those stony brown eyes. They made me itch. I know we gave them to him.

"They wanted to put a tube up my penis. It's not something I'm giving into easily."

"Um... well... It's for your own good."

"I knew it was, I also knew they were trying to stick a tube up my penis. I'd spent most of the afternoon weighing the pain of admitting defeat against the pain of doing nothing. Kashi and I didn't talk much afterwards. He did bring his partner, Mark, to Christmas dinner that last year though. Everyone was there, smiling and laughing, and talking nervously when they thought I was asleep. I may have been old and weak, but I wasn't stupid!"

"They've all grown up." She passes her lithe arm under mine and gives me a squeeze. It feels magnetic, like a key turning in a lock. "Come on, let's go out. I have so much to show you. You won't believe it."

“Ama, I don’t doubt you in the least. It’s still my first day. You think we can meet Jesus? Or Elvis?”

“Sure, but I think your parents would like to see you first.” She giggles as I wrap a strong, warm arm around her waist.

“Good, that sounds good.”







# Submission Guidelines

## L I T E R A T U R E

All undergraduates enrolled in a city of Pittsburgh college or university, or a University of Pittsburgh branch campus, are eligible to submit to *Three Rivers Review*.

We accept no more than:

5 poems (and/or)

15 pages fiction (and/or)

15 pages creative non-fiction

Please send to **threeriversreview@yahoo.com** OR Three Rivers Review, 3500 Cathedral of Learning, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

All submissions must be typed, single-sided, included as a single attachment in an MS Word document file. Please include a cover sheet with name, address, phone number, university attending, e-mail address and titles of the pieces you are submitting.

All submissions are received anonymously. No simultaneous submissions will be considered for publication and no revisions will be accepted. All writers will be notified as to the status of their work.

## P H O T O G R A P H Y

Every semester *Three Rivers Review* publishes three or four photographs. Please send no more than five previously unpublished photos to above email address as a 300dpi JPEG file. Please include a cover sheet. All submitters will be notified as to the status of their work.