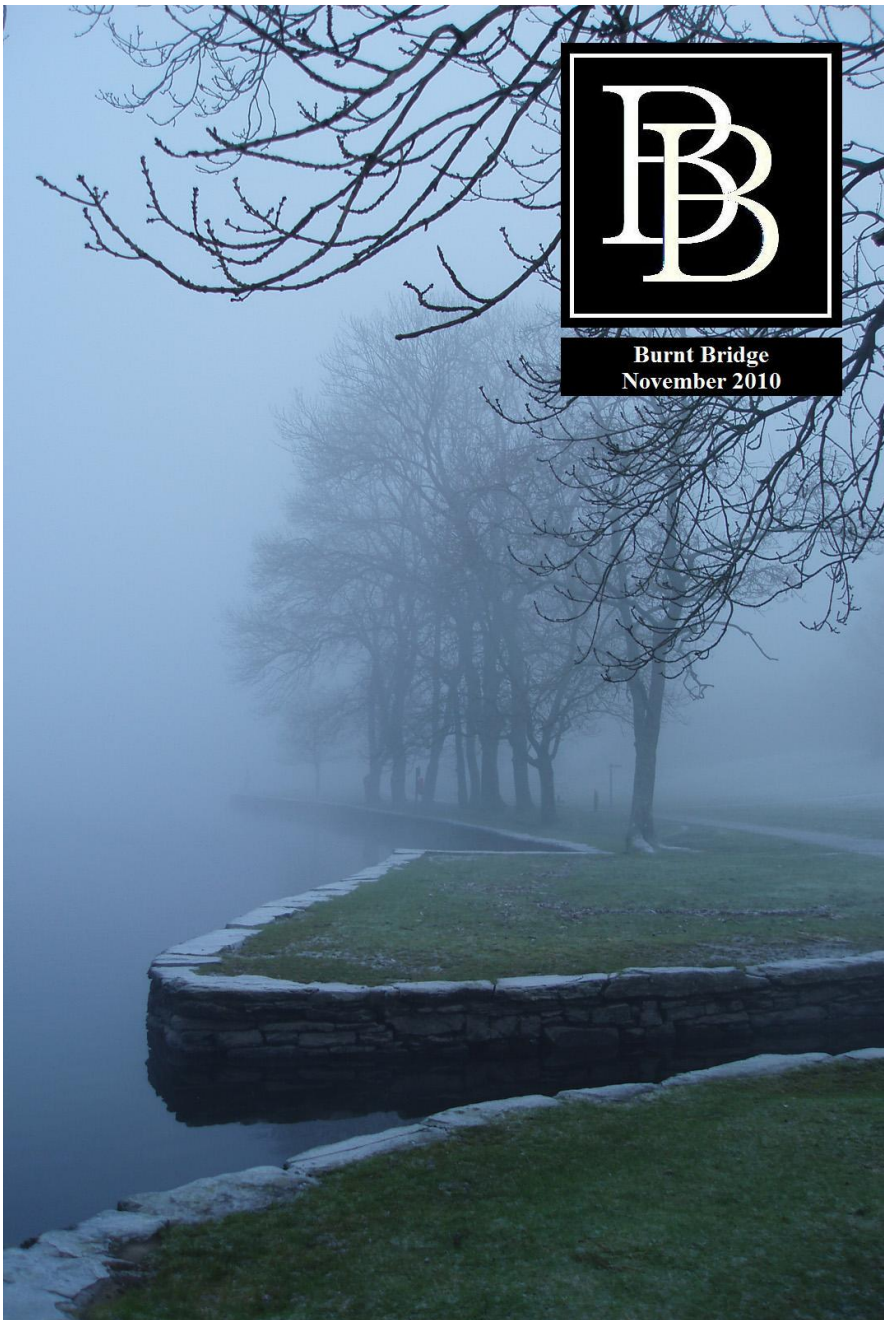


**Burnt Bridge  
November 2010**



# Adam Million

## An Argument Between Lovers

if not trashcans and tympanis and the bottoms  
of buckets, if not the sound a tire makes  
when a bicycle is lifted from the ground,  
spokes and rubber whizzing, a hand  
cranking the pedal turning steel into air

if no sage brush and wind, if no birds  
and shifting rocks, if we are standing  
in medias res, no singing,  
exclaiming, no limbs creaking,  
no exchanging,

if only hands, if only rough  
fingertips, or the backs of hands  
smooth, the height of one's neck,

if always lips and ear lobes, if always soft  
hair found with tongues, when toes  
unfold the taught sheet,

if I cannot hear enough  
of your body, when we end,  
when it comes, I'll try to signal  
four extra beats: our cue  
to bow (in unison)

# Dreaming Nathaniel Hawthorne

Before dinner, this girl I'm dating explains that I should go to the other event, that what I'm doing for my education is important, more than watching liberal-hippie-stoners cannonball, jackknife, and swan-splash in to the freezing waters of Huck Finn Pond, which I'm sure, I tell her, I saw at least ten dogs pissing in, or crapping right next to, one day last summer; but it is winter and all, and the sky will be a blue only possible because of the sun's reflection on so much land, possibly a grey and smoky day when snow refuses to fall with any great degree, a day to see again; so I tell her, that I need to go to the other event, the event about local food and preservation, which I would rather go to, but I don't tell her this, of course, and neither do I mention my dreams about Nathaniel Hawthorne, mining through old documents at the Custom House when his ass should have been working, nor that I am there helping him dig through all these stacks of handwritten stories and claims, and that every time I read one, a little more crumbles, until I finally say, "Hey, Nathaniel," and he explains what is happening, then shows me where I can get some tweezers to touch the documents with instead of my hands, saying "A pure hand needs no glove to cover it," and I nod, because this sounds smart—little do I remember it's appearance in *The Scarlett Letter*. He continues, exclaiming, "Chapter 12," as if I am supposed to have memorized this fact and others about his work, as if he has had other visitors from the future, and he knows all about us, and when we finally gather useful documents, on which the writing is indiscernible, he shows me the Scarlet A, but he implores me not to tell anyone, and of course, I oblige, because I'm pretty sure he still knows more about why I am here, and then he takes me down the street to where a woman is playing a harp, and as I'm about to give this woman my number, because I imagine her playing music

for me in a parlor someday where she would be both a conversation piece and a distraction from having to articulate what I am thinking, I find myself in a cold sweat, nervously reaching for my phone, which won't quit with this harp riff I had chosen as my alarm, and so I jump up to write all of this down, because my dreams get lost in my memory, as I believe most should, and remember a passage in a book on systems and shuffle through to find, "Words and sentences must, by necessity, come only one at a time in linear, logical order. Systems happen all at once. They are connected not just in one direction, but in many directions simultaneously. To discuss them properly, it is necessary somehow to use a language that shares some of the same properties as the phenomena under discussion," which at 6:30 in the morning is blowing my mind, so I decide to draw a picture of the various scenes I remember, setting up my page in four quadrants, kind of like a comic book, but I'm using stick figures, and annotating each picture, so I wouldn't forget what things like the "D" with vertical lines drawn through it represent, and when I'm done, I can "see all the parts of [the] picture at once" running in jagged one-dimensional images, and I grab my computer and google, "one-dimensional," hoping to support my hypothesis that a one-dimensional diagram can in no way work for telling my dream better than words; instead I read the first paragraph about One Dimensional Man on Wikipedia and consider how the statement, "much of the book is a defense of "negative thinking" as a disrupting force against the prevailing positivism," screams of Nathaniel Hawthorne and that fucking "A" he showed me in my dream, which I'm still trying to prod for more details when I see a woman walking her dog, jerking its leash, as if saying, "come along, now; quit sniffing that fucking bush, it's cold out here," and I begin to believe firmly that at least twelve other people have had this same dream, thought this same idea about Hawthorne and Hester Prynne's need to fill an empty place in her life, having met the same harpist and dreamt worse things than I about her, and having tried to tie a knot between the dialogism and delirium of this dream, and when we finish our dinner and she has folded herself into the pillows, and then not, like some sort of illicit peek-a-boo, I want to know if she has ever played a harp, but something keeps

me from blurting this out, the same part of my brain keeping the names of ex-girlfriends, and all the dirty things I had ever heard, from slipping into our situation, which we have devised without the use of pictograms, let alone much discussion because when she tells me she loves me, all I can imagine in the dark through the wind brushing against the windows is a series of images lining up like people in a waiting line where there is no end in sight, where I can't even see the high water mark, and imagining how it recedes is something—something else.

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Adam Million is currently the editor of the *Owen Wister Review* and is attending the MFA program at the University of Wyoming. His work is published or forthcoming in *The South Carolina Review*, *Touchstone*, *The Country Dog Review*, and *Copper Nickel*.

# Gary Carter

## The Relativity of Toast

For her, a well-endowed piece of toast was a thing to be contemplated, then acted upon with single-minded focus. Each properly browned corner, every tiny nook of the bread's surface must be touched by the butter, the knife working like an artist's blade. Then too, the raspberry jam—all natural, of course—must be applied with just the right weight and depth so that the butter was twisted into yellow swirls within it. Only when this was accomplished, examined and deemed perfect, was it possible for her to allow her smallish china-white teeth to ease down slowly and delicately upon it, only the faintest sound acknowledging the contact.

He, on the other hand, could, quite frankly, give a shit about how his toast was browned, buttered, jammed or gnashed. Two good slaps of butter and some Smucker's jelly—none of that bullshit organic natural jam—and his toast was ready to be devoured, usually in no more than three bites. The pleasure for him was in the warmth and the sudden battle between the elements for the attention of his taste buds, which were more attuned than she would ever allow.

And therein, in a single simple and shared act at the counter in the kitchen, was the crux of their bloodied relationship. There was no conversation shared as toast was prepared and dispatched. He slopped coffee into a chipped mug he'd owned since college, its innards so stained that she had long ago declared it a bio-hazard and refused to touch it. Two heaping spoonfuls of real sugar—again, none of that fake chemical crap for him—blow across it three times and take the first big slurp, which never failed to cause a small quiver of pain to crease her forehead. If he sat the mug down, it inevitably left a residual ring that had her reaching for a hand towel

she always kept handy, primarily to wipe away traces of his presence.

He almost couldn't help laughing out loud each time he watched her swipe away the tiny ring of coffee, literally, it seemed before his mug had even fully cleared the surface. It was if she was already poised, had been on guard and couldn't wait to resolve the issue. Too bad they couldn't resolve their other issues as easily, he happened to think one morning as he went about for the thousandth time observing her turn the making of a cup of tea into a multifaceted program that reminded him of a step-by-step high school chemistry experiment. The water brought to a precise boil that she measured by listening carefully to the percolation in the kettle, never, god forbid, allowing the whistle to even chirp a warning. Into a bone cup, perfectly sized she had assured him, went the water onto, he swore, no more than ten particles of fake sugar, followed by the careful dipping and folding of a tea bag that was allowed to swim only long enough to turn the water slightly green. Then, and this also never changed, she would test it by letting a few drops into her spoon and then releasing them onto her tongue. The act of creation was complete, and all was right in her little world.

Normally, at this point, he turned away, pushed his face into the newspaper. But today, for some reason, he found himself examining her as she remained entranced by her toast and tea, and realizing suddenly that he didn't know who she was. He was sitting in his kitchen—at least it looked like the kitchen he remembered as his—with a woman he didn't recognize. He cocked his head and worked to pull her into tighter focus, scanning her face for clues. His wife's hair had been strawberry blonde, more red than yellow. But this woman's was pulled tightly back into a severe bun, and it was definitely more of a silvery tint. His wife's skin had been unlined, silky, but this woman's face bore hard wrinkles around the eyes, which were not the clear blue he remembered. Instead, they appeared dark and menacing, especially when she sensed his examination and glanced over. Her lips pulled tight into a pucker

that implied something distasteful, while he tried to remember the last time he had kissed them.

“Is there something wrong,” the woman asked in a voice he didn’t know, at least two octaves lower than the lightly gracious tone he once had found hypnotic.

He wasn’t sure what to answer, or whether even to try. It was now obvious that his wife was gone, perhaps spirited away and replaced by this alien creature staring at him with a blank scrutiny that implied nothing. He suddenly felt that he was in danger, and, without a word, got up and scrambled out the door to safety.

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Gary Carter’s fiction and poetry have appeared in a number of publications, and he also writes for a variety of magazines and websites on a range of topics. His recent novel, *Eliot’s Tale*, is a reverse coming-of-age road trip dealing with things done and left undone. He lives and works in Asheville, North Carolina.

# Divya Rajan

## Collared shadows with a neat bow in the middle

This is how life began, I remember  
thinking to myself as I tucked further  
in to the cozy shawl. I saw a dark cave.  
Remnants of a castaway lamp shone  
against a lightning strike. Then, it  
was dark again. As in pitch.  
As in an acme of soliloquy.

There were pigeons roosting inside,  
instead of chickens. They fed their little  
ones, put them to sleep on a coffer  
of warm feathers. Spider webs  
hid the sun in the morning, shadows  
swayed against the rum of the moon.

Here, we go again, she said.  
Pigeons're the bohemians you're  
infatuated with. Chickens were missing.  
They're the followers of rules.  
Your hair's an unlacquered mess.  
You prefer serenity. That's in  
your veins. You prefer exhaust fans  
to radio or television.

Spider webs're the torch  
pointing to trivialities of life.  
It's easy to get entangled. They've shades.  
Shadows're the only ones that exist  
for real. Each of them have collars  
with a neat bow in the middle,  
a picket fence and a bowl of bones.

## Colors of the deal

He gently removed the coffee scum.  
She choked on the mosambi juice pulp.  
*embrace the milky candor*  
*grab icicles with your naked palm*  
*might just have an afterlife of a mermaid*

He buzzed with splintered soliloquies, mapping torpid trails of bugs  
and moths.  
She stared at the quartet of gnats squatting on his fractured hairline.  
*electrons on heat*

He surmised the reaches, wavelengths of lepidoptery.  
She chewed on the depths of a Bulgarian ballad.  
*butterflies, i set you free*  
*weave silken threads on moth hearts*  
*mine, included*

Equations of resounding voice (his own) soothed him.  
She lilted in the rhythms of a dying symphony.  
*toothless solitude mocked*

He preferred bookshelves the color of cherry.  
She eyed a newly stretched canvas at the shop next door.  
*off white nothingness hung over Kandinsky's window*  
*stone- carved bees writ names all over limitless hives*

Saturday afternoons double- timed as cobweb- removal hours, he  
mused.  
Pietas, unwashed dishes and spider webs scabbled atop her dock.  
*chaos, thy name is peace*  
*thy shall always prevail*

He said, he'd once painted windows.  
Her smile was the color of propriety.  
*mortal innuendos*  
*portrait of uprightness, Picasso's current muse*

The color of squished ladybug, he nodded.  
Shadows mocked at her smudged mascara.  
*sweat rested in the crease of her elbows*

He shook hands.  
She lipped the seal.  
*a foray?*

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Divya Rajan's work has appeared in *Foundling Review*, *Poetic Chicago anthology*, *Poetry Friends*, *Read This*, *Femina* and *Asian Cha*, as well as others and most recently, *Whale Sound*. She has won several writing awards and received a Pushcart Prize nomination. Originally from Bombay, she now lives in Chicago, where she co-edits poetry at *The Furnace Review*.

# Bobby Sauro

## Athena Barrabas

Tonight, my girlfriend's reeling off my faults in an auctioneer's voice to an imaginary gathering of women, all also displeased with their boyfriends.

"Good evening, ladies. First up, I've got a boy who doesn't share, doesn't like to snuggle, and always argues with me when I'm feeling hurt. I'll start the bidding at five dollars."

I sit quietly as she documents my shortcomings, provides evidence complete with specific places and dates. She orchestrates a reverse auction in which my value plummets from five dollars to two to nothing, before the gavel drops.

She drinks two bottles of sangria, squats behind the couch, and begins a puppet show roast she calls "Boyfriend Bash Theatre" using her impressive array of stuffed animals. She's represented by a fox with red felt lips. I'm represented by a tattered pink bear, the only one that survived her childhood.

"I don't know why Little Girlie Bear doesn't pay enough attention to me, wise Mrs. Owl. I wish I knew. I really do."

No way can I break up with her though. She's perfected the art of the smoky eye, and dresses like she's the leader of the all-girl gang in the 1970's movie *The Warriors*. Those are the only requirements I've ever expressed to her that I have for a girlfriend.

She's clever to boot. When I try to escape into the soothing world of Sade's "Smooth Operator," she flings the CD out our Cleveland Circle apartment window, saying she has no respect for a woman

with such a pathetic knowledge of U.S. geography – “Coast to coast, L.A. to *Chicago*?”

She’s no longer religious but the next morning she gets me up early on Good Friday. She returns from Russomanno’s Bakery wearing tall boots and her Catholic girls’ school skirt. She posts her leg up on the kitchen table and presents me with a box of cannoli.

“They’re the ones from the back,” she says.

This means she intimidated Rocco Russomanno, who is five inches shorter than her even *without* her heels, into handing over the pastry that’s reserved for his family.

She leaves me in the kitchen and retreats to the bathroom to darken her eyes for the Passion of the Christ.

I’m three cannoli in, licking powdered sugar from my mouth, when I hear her in front of the mirror talking to the stuffed fox. It enjoys a special spot on a shelf above her train case of liquid mascaras.

“I’m serious, Foxie. Things are gonna be different for us,” she says.

It’s the first time I’ve heard her talk to the fox out loud.

She puts on Jim Croce’s *I’ve Got A Name* while she finishes her makeup. Jim Croce was her father’s favorite singer. Both men died young in single engine plane crashes. She sings along.

*And I carry it with me like my daddy did,*

*But I’m livin’ the dream that he kept hid*

That makes me feel bad because I know in some ways the fact that she’s not livin’ the dream is an indictment of me. I’m the man she’s counting on now to lay the tracks across the chasm.

She turns off the music and shouts that this was supposed to be her week and she wanted to go to Mass on Palm Sunday but I “was too tired;” she’s sure the old biddies took all the good palms by now and put them under their mattresses, giving them another year of blessings.

Minutes later, we enter a church filled with Brookline Irish Catholics. I spot a wardrobe box in the back corner of the sacristy filled with all the leftover palms. I get so many reeds my beaming girlfriend has to cradle them in front of her breasts, like three dozen roses. She looks even happier during the part of the Good Friday service where the congregation pretends it’s the crowd gathered in the courtyard outside the jail where Jesus is being held. All around the country, Catholics are sleepwalking their way through this scripture in monotone voices.

Father McManus, playing the role of Pontius Pilate, asks whom he should spare from crucifixion and release from prison – Jesus, a man who has done nothing wrong, or Barabbas, a vile thief?

“Barabbas!” my girl shouts with glee.

The priest asks for an affirmation.

This time, I join her hand in mine.

“Barabbas!” We shout in harmony, much louder than everyone else.

Fuck Sade, and the smooth rhythms she rode in on. Each time, I call for “Barabbas” like I’m hawking red hots at Fenway. The parishioners in the rows surrounding us disapprove. Some try to politely shush us but we will not be stunted.

I get in the last word, adlibbing as I yell, “The bandit Barabbas!”

The service ends and we're left alone. My girl, Athena, sits in the confessional and hitches her skirt. I lose her for a few seconds in the light that streaks through the stained glass window. On the other side, I see black tears running — but they don't create any distance from her past. I won't promise her a townhouse on Beacon Hill or weekends at the Cape or anything else I know I can't deliver, but I will be right there with her to sort through the twisted wreckage of her runaway locomotive.

I enter the booth where as a boy I spilled silly sins of commission through an ashen screen and draw the purple curtain closed.

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Bobby Sauro lives in Atlanta. He once worked in a nail polish factory filling the bottles by hand while inhaling an acetone cloud; that may explain some of his stories. "My Body Does Not Float" appeared in the January 2010 issue of *elima*. "Searching For Bruce Springsteen – A Tale of Asbury Park, New Jersey" was in *PLACES Magazine*. It currently resides at [www.sauromotel.com](http://www.sauromotel.com) with "Halle Berry May Have Gotten Her Oscar But I'm Still Afraid Of Tidal Waves" and other stories regularly performed by The Max Fischer Players.

# Ricky Garni

## ONION RINGS

Today King Abdullah II of Jordan went to The Lake View Restaurant in Oroville, California and ordered a plate of onion rings.

I love this sentence. It has ten nouns in it.

The original sentence had twelve nouns.

For the King of Jordan also ordered nachos and a grilled turkey sandwich with his onion rings.

Before the original sentence, a customer noticed that King Abdullah II came to the restaurant on his Harley Davidson Motorcycle.

If the reporters who love to write about royalty had known this, they would have actually written a sentence that had 13 nouns in it.

Imagine!

King Abdullah II of Jordan went to The Lake View Restaurant in Oroville, California on his Harley Davidson motorcycle and ordered a plate of onion rings, a grilled turkey sandwich, and nachos.

The next sentence is very beautiful but it has only a few nouns but they are choice.

King Jordan smiled at his onion rings.

Yes he did. And then he looked out the window. Yes he did.

After that, the story just talks about motorcycles and the feeling of the wind in your hair when you are a king and how it is something.

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Ricky Garni is a graphic designer and father of two, living in Carrboro, NC. His most recent work can be found in *Mad Swirl*, *Evergreen Review*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*. The biographies he loves best and confuse him the most always end with this kind of a sentence: “At which point he quit work and decided to devote his life entirely to poetry.”