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# The Flexible Persona



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## Herbie

by Jane Hertenstein

### “Isn’t that the guy who tried to pee in our closet?”

My husband and I were sitting outside Wrigley Field waiting for Bruce Springsteen to take the stage.

“Who?” I asked. Herbie had been dead for a decade—or at least I thought.

At the time, we had been married maybe a month and were living in an old house divided up into six apartments—some with shared bath. It was the early 80s in Chicago in a neighborhood coming back from blight. Ruin was everywhere. In the vacant lots, in the abandoned cars, in the boarded-up buildings. At night the sky lit up with fires set by landlords burning down those old buildings, the buildings subdivided, with bathrooms down the hall.

Every morning I awoke to some new crisis, the ashes of the night before.

We were in Chicago doing the abstract work of community development, which sometimes just came down to shoveling the sidewalks, grilling out with belligerent neighbors, or calling

the police or firehouse when trouble broke out. We invited kids to play inside our yard because the playlots were scary, filled with teens huffing tally, swinging on swings and then knotting them by wrapping them over the top bar.

After being raised in the suburbs, the inner city of Chicago sometimes felt medieval. My husband and I lived outside the castle walls.

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“Herbie” read by Jane Hertenstein

That newlywed summer our bedroom window was wide open. If we lay perfectly still we might feel a breeze cooling the damp rags pressed against our foreheads. The only hope was in a tomorrow less hot.

While waiting for the heat to break, we fell asleep.

I thought he had locked

the door, and he thought I had locked the door. Apparently neither of us had because sometime in the middle of the night, dense with the sound of whirring fans, Herbie sneaked in. To be fair—he didn’t know where he was.

I awoke to a rustling. As I lay still I figured it was a mouse, then I speculated something bigger, perhaps a cat had gotten in through the open window—about nine feet off the ground. The sound was intermittent. Right when I thought I’d imagined the whole thing, it would come again. I got up to investigate.

As a child watching “The Mummy” or classic “Dracula” or some other Saturday afternoon black- and white-TV movie I’d always chide the naïve woman for opening her bedroom door or descending the castle steps in search of who knew what. NO! I’d scream. Get back inside! Years later as a die-hard feminist, I’d still scream—Go get a guy!

Yet there I was, checking the screen in the window, prodding the corners of our studio apartment. There weren’t

too many places for the sound to be coming from. So I returned to bed. A half hour later I heard it again: a distinct groan.

This time I woke my husband up. “I’m hearing something.”

“A mouse?”

“No, bigger than that.”

“A rat?”

I pushed him out of the bed. “Go see.”

He did something I’d avoided doing; he turned on a small desk lamp. There was a shuffling from the direction of the closet. I stayed in the middle of the bed as if it were a life raft, in case a flood of Pied Piper rats, cats, or mice tumbled out. My husband pushed the curtain to the closet aside. He looked up. It’s a man, he stated as a matter of fact.

Oh. My. God. We had no cell phone. (This was before cell phones.) I had no idea of how or where to get help. If I could, I would have run out of the room—except I’d have to cross to the other side to the door, past the closet.

The man, who at first had been sprawled on the closet floor, was now standing upright, but leaning. I dove under a pile of pillows. Visions of pillage and rape seized me. What if the man had a gun? A knife! This was no black- and white-movie, but real life. I had no idea how this story would end.

I heard my husband shout No! Don’t! and peeked. It looked as if the intruder, obviously drunk, was trying to relieve himself in our closet! My husband steered him out of the tight space, which in the dark

might have appeared to be the bathroom, and guided him to the door of our apartment, and out into the hallway. He pointed the stranger to the bathroom down the hall.

Later we learned his name was Herbie. He’d been visiting one of the other residents and gotten turned around. Much later, the word on the street was that he’d died in a violent fight—probably one of the nightly scuffles that took place in front of our house. Either way, after that terror-filled night, we never saw him again.

Until the night of the Springsteen concert at Wrigley when we thought we saw him stumble drunkenly across the street, going from garbage can to garbage can looking for beer cans to drain.

Not much had seemed to change in his life. For us—we were in fact that evening celebrating 26 years of marriage, and that studio we’d first lived in in the subdivided house had been torn down to make way for a condo development. The whole neighborhood had undergone a make-over. Instead of chain-link fences were landscaped hedges. Gone were the bars on the windows, replaced with flower boxes. Even the playlot kitty-corner from our old house had new play equipment enjoyed by toddlers and their caregivers. The swings now move freely back and forth without the trauma of truant teenagers.

My husband reached for my hand while we sat in lawn chairs, waiting for the lights to

go out and the band to come on, for the sounds of Bruce to float over the walls. My husband leaned toward me and whispered, “Happy anniversary.”

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**J**ane Hertenstein’s current obsession is flash. She is the author of over 50 published stories, a combination of fiction, creative non-fiction, and blurred genre both micro and macro. In addition she has published a YA novel, *Beyond Paradise*, and a non-fiction project, *Orphan Girl: The Memoir of a Chicago Bag Lady*, which garnered national reviews. She is a 2x recipient of a grant from the Illinois Arts Council. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in: *Hunger Mountain*, *Rosebud*, *Word Riot*, *Flashquake*, *Fiction Fix*, *Frostwriting*, and several themed anthologies. She can be found at <http://memoirouswrite.blogspot.com/>. Her latest book is *Freeze Frame: How To Write Flash Memoir*.

tfpo

## One Headlight

by Molly Bonovsky Anderson

Maggie Hawk, a horse-faced stripper with a blunt cinnamon bob, stuck a steak knife in her knee-high boot. The knife came from Kristy's kitchen drawer, and before that—Perkins. That was our thing—I stole ceramic mugs and Kristy stole cutlery. Between us we'd stocked our dorm for a thousand steak and coffee dinners. We slipped them into backpacks that held books before we stopped going to class—and it seemed so benign, until Maggie Hawk, with her black eye-shadow and shit-kickers, turned a simple steak knife into a potential weapon. And worse, I'd asked her if she wanted a mug too.

"For what?" she wanted to know.

I shrugged. "Clock her in the head."  
What had happened to me? I used to be so good.

I didn't really want to go with them, but the mid-nineties had left me cold and apathetic and there was nothing on TV. Kristy and I had been sitting on the floor with her FryDaddy, fat on funnel cake, fries and mayo when Maggie knocked. I'd looked at her through the peephole—the fish-eye lens made her face almost pleasant—and winced. My guts were oily, but that wasn't it.

She wore Drew's letterman jacket. Drew was a skinny kid with a flat-top who drove a black corvette ninety-five miles an hour. He did this one time with Kristy and me in the backseat. After that we avoided Drew, but

Maggie was harder—she was like mono. She hung around, vaguely draining, but I wasn't sure why—and she stole three of my CDs. Greatest hits of the 80s. I didn't miss the volume with Kajagoogoo, but I wanted *In a Big Country* back. Though I couldn't prove she'd done it, she'd talked about using *Tainted Love* in her routine shortly before they disappeared.

"That girl is going to die tonight," she said, knocking the snow off her boots. She went on to describe how some girl had said something about Drew and somehow someone had relayed this something to Maggie—I'd tuned out and was flipping through *Blender*. The Wallflowers had one hit song, and it was all anyone could talk about because the front man was Bob Dylan's son and blah blah blah. What I caught was that Maggie was going to confront this girl—way the hell

out in Nisswa—and we were going to take Kristy's jimmy even though the suspension was shot and we all bounced around in there like Pop Secret every time we hit a bump.

So she took the knife but declined the coffee cup, and I was grateful because I felt shitty for suggesting it. I'd only stolen the cups because they were

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"One Headlight" read by  
Alexander B. Hogan

each imprinted with a buffalo in blue ink on the bottom. Kristy had been promising me a trip to the buffalo farm in Lonsdale for months—I'd been so excited, but when we'd got there, the fence was too tall to see over and too splintered to crawl up, and I'd spent five frigid minutes with one eye pressed against a gap in the slats, watching a solitary beast with its head down and its eyes closed. It pushed a hot breath out into the cold air every few seconds, and I'd watched its ghost dissipate with an elusive ache I couldn't name.

Kristy parked the jimmy where it stopped after spinning out on a patch of black ice, a few yards from the house. Like many homes in the middle of Bumfuck, Egypt, this one sat at the end of what felt like a mile-long driveway. A huge satellite dish flanked the crumbling garage. Frost-gilded prairie grass lay on each side; a forest loomed like a dark cowl at the back of the property. I stayed in the jeep. As Kristy and Maggie walked up to the door, I watched the backs of Maggie's bare knees. Her legs were like matchsticks. Her face resembled an awning-browed statue on Easter Island. It was then I realized that strippers, at least in the Brainerd Lakes area, need only be skinny, and fearless. Not brave—that was something else—but fearless like they didn't mind dying in a corvette or going to jail over assault with a steak-knife. Fearless like they were fine being ugly and naked in front of every drunken lumberjack this side of the Mississippi.

I wasn't fearless.

"This'll be quick," Kristy said, but Maggie stared ahead and didn't confirm. Kristy turned the jeep off and shoved the keys in her jacket pocket.

I put my gloveless hands between my thighs. The corduroy made a *zip*.

They made me go once—to the King's Club. This long, flat building on the highway just outside Benton County.

The neon sign on the façade featured a playing-card king whose mustache twitched with each blink of light. I drank a flat Shirley Temple and tried not to make eye-contact, feeling cold and itchy while Kristy and a few other girls from the dorms giggled and elbowed each other and crowed like jackdaws when Maggie came out—dancing under the name *Kat*—as it was spelled on the LED scroll behind her. I watched that scroll while she danced—it advertised two for one Canadian drafts, hot wings, and distracted no one but me. Only once did I look at Maggie, because she had suddenly dropped to her knees, and lay arched back with her head on the floor behind her. And I saw it—a purple-red scar the length of a melon slice, a few inches below her navel—so fresh looking that it silenced the crowd. And suddenly Maggie was more than naked, her mouth gaped open to the ceiling like a breathless fish, and no one, not even me, could look away. Each one of us was seeing—wondering, constructing a story about how and why and where it was now, and there was nothing she could do. She was caught and penned there by the thoughts of strangers.

After half an hour in the jeep, I began to shiver. The late January moon, a powdered pearl, hung high in a halo of moon-dogs. They could've at least left the radio on. My breath became visible, and I pulled my arms inside the front of my jean-jacket. You can tell

a northerner by her obstinacy toward winter—a refusal to dress for the weather as if the chill already fills her veins and is not an intruder.

With the dark already deepened to the max and no watch on my wrist, I couldn't grasp time anymore. I tried counting along to powwow drums in my head. Kristy had dragged me to one of those last week—a confusing affair where people kept throwing blankets at me. Sometimes they weren't even blankets, but big old scraps of fabric. They lay in a heap in my room—I didn't know what to do with them, but I felt bad tossing them because they came from something that seemed so much holier than me.

After ten drum-circle rounds I was freezing and bored to death, but I didn't dare go inside, lest someone was bleeding and howling in a tangle of hair. I started to sing what I thought sounded like a powwow hymn, thumping my fists on my thighs.

*Hey-how-are-ya, hey-how-are-ya.*

I stopped when I saw Melanie Two-Bears in my head, frowning. Her belly big as a house, leaning against our lockers in middle school. I'd punched her in that belly only months before—when it was empty but still big. She asked for it—but once she was pregnant it was hard to be mad at her. She didn't bully me or anyone else anymore; she just walked around looking

burned down.

I needed a new song, so I tried singing the Wallflowers one. I didn't know the words, and it was low as hell, and even though I was no soprano I couldn't hit it. The only other song I could remember all the lyrics to was the Star-Spangled Banner, so I dove into *O-o say can you see* with aplomb. When I'd sung it through three times and no one had emerged from the house, I lost all hope and began wailing it at the top of my lungs as if I was singing for my life and at tremendous volume. I squinched my eyes up, opened my mouth, and roared the thing until I was hoarse. I sang it like that two more times, and in the middle of the third, with my hands on top of my head in what started as mock despair and ended up damn near the real thing, and my eyes closed and my mouth open wide as the Lincoln tunnel, there came a knock on the fogged-up window. I shut up and sheepishly looked out. Kristy and Maggie stood outside. Kristy motioned for me to wind down the window.

"What are you doing?" she said.

I frowned. "I thought you were going to fight."

Maggie spoke up and said the girl had a baby. Things looked pretty sketchy in there already.

I wondered—if Maggie Hawk had enough empathy not to beat up a mother, would her conscience eventually lead her to slip my CDs one at a

time under my dorm room door, maybe with a sticky note, "borrowed these, taped them, thanks," or did she get to pick and choose what she felt bad about. And what would be the harm in that, really—because didn't I do the same?

I stopped thinking and began blowing on my hands. Kristy settled into the driver's seat and started the jeep.

All day long the clouds had been saving up snow, and as we drove home they opened and dumped. We discovered we were driving a padiddle. It was already so difficult to see things properly in the dark through a curtain of falling snow—with one headlight it was damn near impossible to tell the road from the ditch from the tree line from the sky. Kristy slowed her speed down and down until we were crawling along the highway. Neither state troopers nor tribal police braved the storm to pull us over. The 22 minutes from Nisswa to Brainerd stretched into an hour and a half, and I should have been scared by the poor conditions and lack of light, but at twenty years old I was scared of nothing but fearlessness, and while the warmth crept back into me I dropped off to sleep, watching the shadows on Maggie Hawk's blank face.

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**Molly Bonovsky Anderson** is from central Minnesota. She studied philosophy and art history at Northern Michigan University. Her work has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Passages North*, *Penduline Press*, *Big Fiction*, *Wilde Magazine*, *Breakwater Review*, *Burrow Press Review*, and other print and on-line journals. She lives in Upper Michigan with her husband and son, and is the fiction editor at Pithead Chapel magazine. She is fond of train whistles and lawn ornaments.





## From the Ocean View Motel

by Henry Marchand

You're entitled to surprise. I've won no awards for outstanding achievement in personal correspondence, and I have been especially remiss in regard to you. No cards on holidays or your birthday, no postcards though I'm quite the traveler, certainly no letters. You could count on me for not bothering you with that sort of thing, right?

I'm hoping that your shock buys me time here. While you are reading these words in the kitchen or living room of Apartment 213 with a look of disbelief and suspicion on your face, I hope to say a few things that might interest you and which, perhaps, will help explain why in all the years of your life I have not done as much to help you as perhaps I ought. Or should. You tell me; I never finished high school.

Anyway. I'm in New Jersey, back to the old stomping grounds after a lengthy commercial excursion to the nation's lovely Midwestern heart of darkness. One glance at the snappy Ocean View envelope in your mailbox should have told you I'm on top of the world here, doing just fine. I'm staying

in deluxe accommodations, with my own paper toilet seat cover and everything. I can in fact see the ocean, as advertised, if I stand on tiptoe and turn my head just right. Yeah, there it is. That line of blue above the EconoLodge across the street.

I do wonder how you've been, you know. Last I heard you were all right. School was about done, you were seeing someone, wedding bells were ready to chime. I hope that happened; congratulations if it did. If it didn't, I'm sorry. You should have someone, everybody should.

Me? I got a new car last week. New used, you know. Runs good, looks good. A blue ragtop sedan. Big engine. The price was right, as always. I got it in Illinois, drove it out here to the ocean, as far as I could go without making a splash in the world. No tickets, no law trouble. Proud?

The problem right now is it's hot today. I mean damn hot, stay off the streets if you love your feet hot. It's hard to breathe the air, and the a.c. here in the motel doesn't work and the window

won't open. But that's good for me, really. Lose some weight, sweat it off. Sweat's good for you, makes you strong.

That was my dad. "If you're not sweating, you're not working hard enough." Sweat was big with him. Work was big. He was a bruiser, worked like a damn mule. Stunk like one, too, come to think of it. He used to hit me

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**"From the Ocean View Motel"**  
read by Henry Marchand

if he caught me goofing off on a job. He'd come around the side of a building, there I'd be, kicking back, having a smoke break, shirt off, feet up on the wheelbarrow instead of hauling dirt out of the site. Hoo ha. I don't remember if I ever told you about him.

"I'll break your back for you; you don't want to bend it!" he'd say, and he'd lay into me. I tried to fight back once or twice, but he was tough. Smacked the hell out

of me. So I left. Saved up some money, bought a car (not as nice as the blue dream outside!) and introduced myself to the highway. Love of my life, the highway. She takes me places. Lots of places.

Some of them are good, too. Though some, I have to say, are not. Stay the hell out of Texas for one thing. It wouldn't suit you. And Kentucky. There's some serious stupid in Kentucky that'll take you down and clean your bones. I got out of there fast, wouldn't go back if I could. There's a standing invite, actually, for me to stay a while down there in the Bluegrass State. It'd be on the government dime, room and board. They'd even provide me with clothes to wear. But no thankee, please. It's the Ocean View for me.

The ocean view. Did it ever strike you as strange that New Jersey's on the ocean? I mean growing up you knew, in the abstract, that you were on the coast, but did you feel it? Did you think of it as the kind of place that has an ocean, or was it just buildings and highways and bridges and tunnels, a tight, noisy little place crowded with people, everything the color of the sidewalk, nothing outside the street you're on but a street just like it, then another and another, then another town with the same streets.

All the while it's sitting right here on the ocean, all that blue, that openness.

It's there outside the window. Right at my feet. But stay off the streets.

I wonder if I could be a boat guy, own a boat and live my life on the sea. If I'd been born where I could see it, if the ocean was there in my life every day, how different would growing up like that be? Would it be natural to spend a lot of time out there, maybe sailing far away sometimes, maybe not coming back?

It could be like the highway, right? Only bigger. A boat's like a car, it takes you where you want to go or it can just take you anywhere if you've got no special place in mind. Point the front of it away from shore and press the pedal, or whatever. Throttle back, steam ahead, anchors aweigh! Use the stars instead of street signs. Pick one out, one that sits above where you're headed, and keep the bowsprit tacking toward it.

That's nautical speak, of course. Not my native tongue. I'd need to practice if I got the chance to go, embark, cast off. Across the blue, follow a dream, see Paris.

That's what W.C. Fields says in a movie. They've got a rope around his neck and they ask if he has any last requests. He says, "Only one. I'd like to see Paris before I die."

You used to watch a lot of TV; you probably saw that one at some point. Has all that schooling changed your ways? Could

be you only watch foreign films now. Go out to coffee shops after screenings on campus, discuss themes and motifs, Buñuel and Godard.

Bet you didn't know I could talk that talk. More fool you. It so happens I kept company with an actress for a while. A French actress, in fact. Mon belle du cinema. She was good looking, too. Oh my. "I want to see Paris before I die." Been there, I guess. Done that. My kind of town.

You got the money, I assume. I didn't have time to include a note with it, so I'd wager you put it in a closet or under the bed and you've been wondering what the hell is going on. I like to imagine the look on your face when you got it. That makes me laugh. But listen, it's yours, no strings. It occurred to me you probably don't have much. I haven't seen many ads in the papers looking for liberal arts majors. Not that I'm a devotee of the classifieds, of course. I work steady. I always have.

I happened into that cash in Chicago and thought it might help. Yes, I could have turned your way and headed for the left coast to deliver it personally. But I'm not the Pacific type, and it's best if I keep the customary room between us at the moment. I'd guess you're fine with that.

Maybe by now you're over the initial shock of receiving this and thinking I don't deserve any

*“Stay the hell out of Texas for one thing. It wouldn't suit you.”*

more of your time. Well, I've paid for it, can we agree? You can listen a bit, and if it's really a terrible ordeal, you can go out later and buy something to ease the pain. Buy a house or a car. Buy something nice for your lady. Buy a boat.

Let me say this: I've done a lot that wasn't right in my time, but not everything I did was bad. There was a time when things were pretty good. You were happy. Your mom was. That was a good time, and it means a lot to me. I hope it does to you, too.

So I'm not perfect, that's a given. Not even in contention. But grant me some time for the old days, the bygones, the days of wine and roses. Milk and cookies. The back-in-the-days.

Cue the music, right? Nostalgic tune, with strings. Sinatra.

You know they used to say it was Frank's world, we just lived in it. It was a silly thing, but I knew what it meant. His songs

and his voice, they made something whole. The world was understandable when you listened. If the music didn't always take the hurt away or answer your questions the way you wanted, it was there anyway when you needed it and that counted for a lot. And the man himself, he did what he could do to stick around. Lived a long time. But nobody can be there forever.

Whose world is it now?

I say it's yours. Take it and run. Or don't run, that's not what I mean. Do what you want. Settle in and make something that lasts. Make something whole and real for yourself. Don't screw it up. Forget the boat.

I mentioned it's hot here, correct? Well just now I got the window open, and guess what? Hotter air came in, felt like I stuck my face in an oven. But as I was saying.

I had a rough time a couple months back. Got into a situation I should have known

enough to stay away from. Bad people. Bad places. Bad results.

The girl I was with, the actress, she dropped out on me right quick. I can't say she was wrong to do it. Storm clouds were rising and she wanted to keep out of the wet. Au revoir. But she took something with her that wasn't rightly hers. Probably figured it was payment for services, something like that. The spoils of our wars. But it was a wrong move.

I spent some time looking but I didn't find her. Tried for too long, got stuck in place, and that's never good. To get out I had to do something pretty grim. Yes, even for me. But it got me out, and in some ways I was in better shape than I went in. Though I'm not in very good shape now.

I stopped writing for a bit there. There was a guy at the door, a little pale fat man looking for Mr. Clements.

“Clemons, like lemons?” I said.



“No no,” he tells me. “Clements, with a t.”

Had to say no. No Clements here.

After he left I went out to see if there’s a motel in town with working a.c. Couldn’t find one, it’s the busy season. I got back here all sweaty and disgusted, and the schmuck at the front desk asks if there’s something wrong—if he can help me. Slim chance you can help me, pal, I think, but I tell him anyway. It’s ninety-nine degrees outside, and there’s no room in town with an air conditioner that works.

“Oh, we have one,” he says.

I couldn’t believe it. “Since when?” I asked him.

He tells me it’s been available all day.

I asked him why, if that’s the case, I’ve been sautéing my ass for hours in Room 329.

You ready? Because I didn’t ask for an air conditioned room, he says. There’s a goddamn sign outside the place that says “Air Conditioned” in pink neon letters a foot high, and he tells me I didn’t get a working a.c. because I didn’t “specify” my preference for this feature.

He has no idea how very close he came to being jerked across his little salmon-colored counter and introduced to some very unforgiving asphalt. I’ve been

sweating off some weight today, as you know; I’m in fighting trim.

Which reminds me. Remember the guy in the supermarket lot that day? The one who nearly ran you down as we came out with the groceries? That was a long time ago, but I remember. And I bet he does, too.

But I’m getting off the subject. I’m in a cool room now; the a.c. is happily chugging along. Probably blowing asbestos fibers straight into my lungs, but what the hell. That never stopped my old man, tearing into those old buildings, hauling out all that shit. He knew what it was, too, after a while. They told him, the doctors and everyone else. “If work is going to kill me,” he said, “I guess I’m ready to die.” Then he started coughing up blood and he got scared, but it was too late. I’m glad I got out of there a few years before that came down. Seeing the old man scared can’t be good for anybody.

The actress I mentioned wanted to have a baby. She was really upfront about it, told me almost right away, once we realized there was something good happening between us. So we tried. It seemed like the thing to do; it seemed right. I thought, I had a few good years once, I’d been good for people. This could be a way to finish what I’d started then, a ticket back to the golden days. But it didn’t work.

So we had a great few months, anyway. I’ve only been with one

woman longer, so I’m coming off a bit of a personal high now. Which of course makes it a long way down.

What got me was, I’m a creature of habit. I figured the best way to keep things good was to have some cash, and I am not, when it comes to work, my old man’s son. There’s a city near Chicago called Cicero, and if you know your American history, you know what kind of a place it is. I went there and did what I do, and in this case it didn’t go well. I got back to Chicago a little banged up, and she got scared—went crazy on me. She screamed and threw things and demanded to know what happened, and I told her. I had a fit of honesty and showed her the stuff I’d brought back from the job, too, which turned out to be a mistake.

I didn’t just let her go, as I’ve said. I looked for her, and I stayed too long. People came looking for me, and I knew they’d find me before long and her, too, if we were together. So I stopped trying to find her and I got noble. I took off, after telling a guy I couldn’t trust worth a damn that I still had what I’d taken from Cicero. He made the call, and I almost didn’t make it out of town. I hope she’s far away from Chicago now.

My escape was less than clean, as I’ve said. It was bad. But I left with the money I sent you, added the ragtop for my troubles, and lit out for the territories. Actually, honest to god,

I deliberately headed for the ocean. I wanted to see the open blue. Color me romantic.

And now reality intrudes. The fat insurance salesman looking for Clements has had time to earn his coin and company is expected, so I need to wrap this up. The money is yours to keep; don’t even think of objecting on moral grounds, because this is the most moral thing I have done in my life.

Think about it. The two people I care for in the world now have it in their power to enjoy their lives if they invest wisely and stay good. I’m not sure if that’s the most a man can hope

to achieve in his time, but it’s certainly better than I ever had reason to expect.

I’m going down to the ocean now. I’ll drop this letter at the Post Office I saw down the block when I drove in and take a nice walk on the sand, feel the sun on my face. It’s not long until sunset, and if I’m lucky, I can sit and watch the waves a while—look out over all that blue, all that space, clear into forever.

I hope you’ve enjoyed reading this, or appreciated it, or whatever the appropriate word might be. I want you to know I’m sorry for what I’ve done wrong. I hope

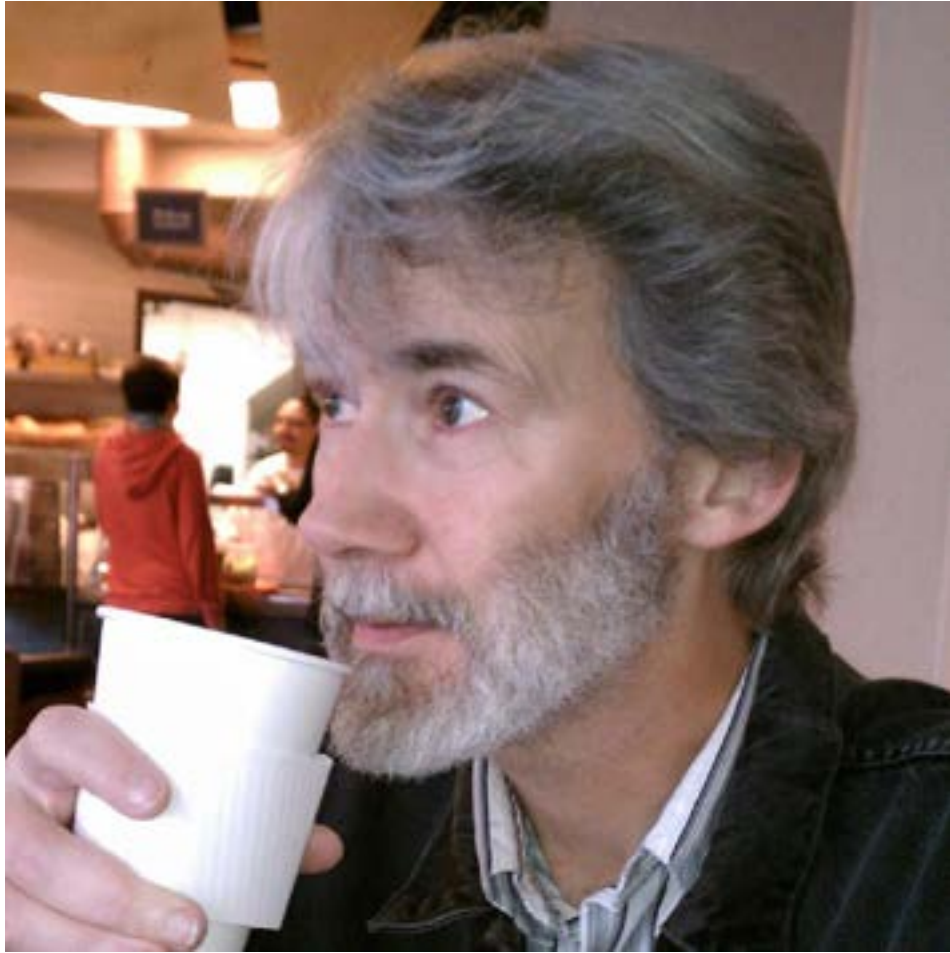
the best for you. And I’ve no regrets, really, that I left you and your mother when I did. Staying would have been worse.

Look out at the Pacific for me sometime. The oceans connect, you know, so you’ll be looking back this way, and you might think about me then. Believe I’ve thought a lot about you.

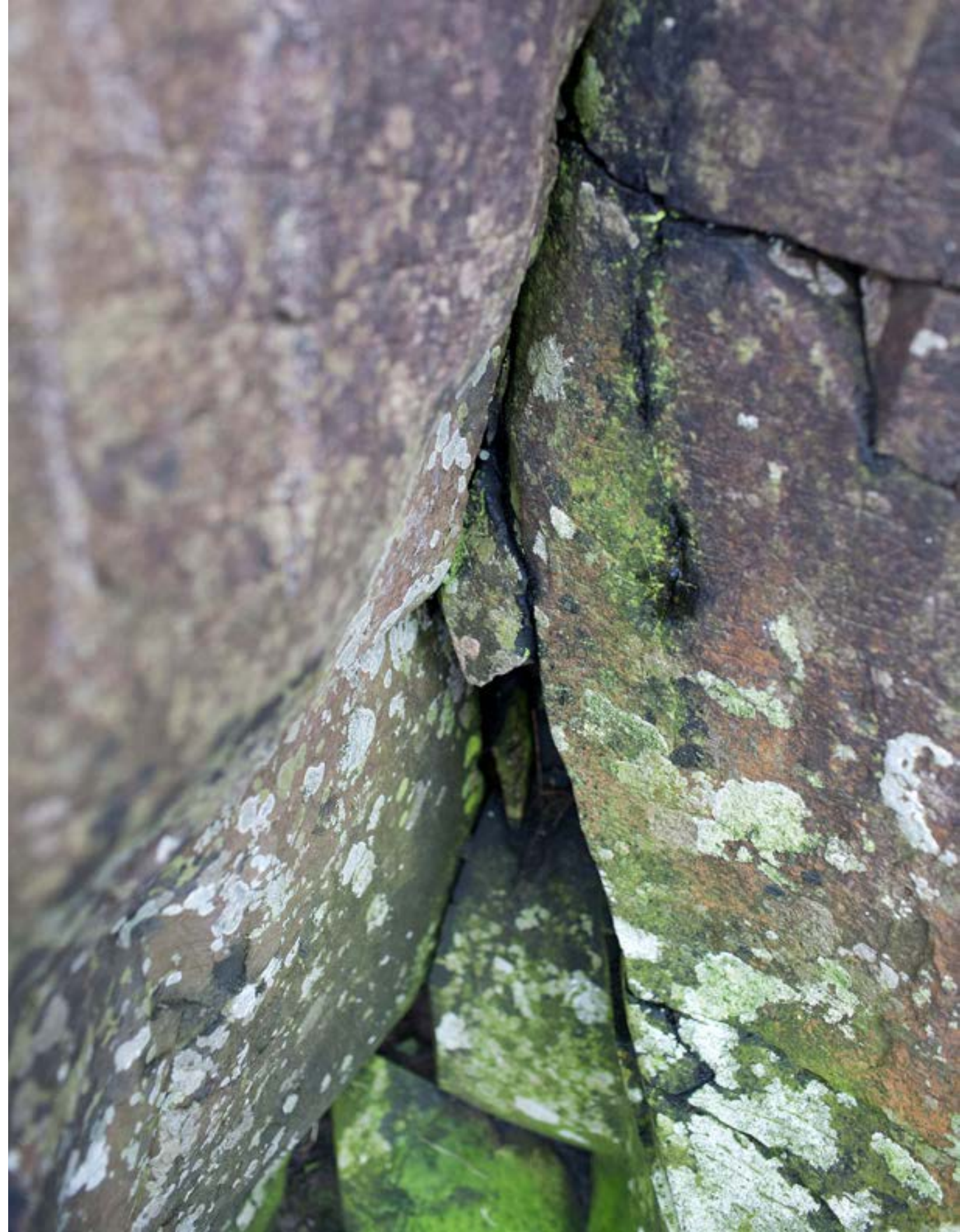
Well. Places to go, people to see. Time and the tides, they say, wait for no man.

Goodbye.

§



**Henry Marchand's** fiction has appeared in *The Laurel Review*, *Rosebud*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *The Seattle Review*, *Penduline Press*, *Review Americana*, and elsewhere. His nonfiction publications include essays, reviews, and commentary in *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Common Dreams News Center*, and *The International Herald-Tribune*, among other newspapers and magazines. A New Jersey native and longtime resident of northeast Ohio, he now lives in northern California with his wife, Lisa, and teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Monterey Peninsula College.



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Jaime Mathis

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FAMILY TREE

CULT OF SHADOWS

LOST SLEEP

# The Flexible Persona

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### Format

- Write your name and contact information in the upper lefthand corner of the first page.
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