SPAWNING SEASON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARITY JULES VALENTINE

BY ERICA PLOUFFE LAZURE

Eavesdropping on the private lives of fish and insects for the past twenty years had convinced Fred Murphy that he was never alone. Every summer, Murphy would lie in a field or boat somewhere with his microphone and headset, collecting data, listening for signs of life and love. He was never disappointed. Some nights he caught the whirring screech of the male cicada. At other times, on the shores of the Pamlico River, he'd hone in on the peculiar boops of the sea trout or the red drum. And in the background, if he listened carefully, he could hear much more than that: the murmured march of ants underground or the frazzled buzz of the mosquito. Sometimes the rush of wind would chafe the surface of the calm estuary, and he would take in that, too. Listening to the chatter through the headset made the world seem full and rich, amplified and isolated, all at once. On occasion, out in a field at dusk, someone would find him. Usually, it was a lone man and his unleashed dog. Other times, a few jar-clutching children on the hunt for fireflies. He was never surprised. Footfalls have a way of interrupting the natural flow and swish of wind, especially in a field, and the microphone could cue him in better than any bloodhound. Something is always there to keep you company, Murphy believed, should you care to listen.

He tried to explain all of this one day to Martina Finch, the Biology Department secretary at Eastern College. Before she delivered the bees to his office, Murphy had never paid her much attention, although he wasn't blind to her charms. Every time he entered the department office for a package or an appointment, her head would turn at a perfect ninety-degree angle, her smile ready, determined to accommodate. When she typed, which was often, her spine straightened and her breasts would somehow angle up, trapped by wooly sweaters, which she wore even in the summer. Her left hand winked bright with jewels; he had heard she was getting married.

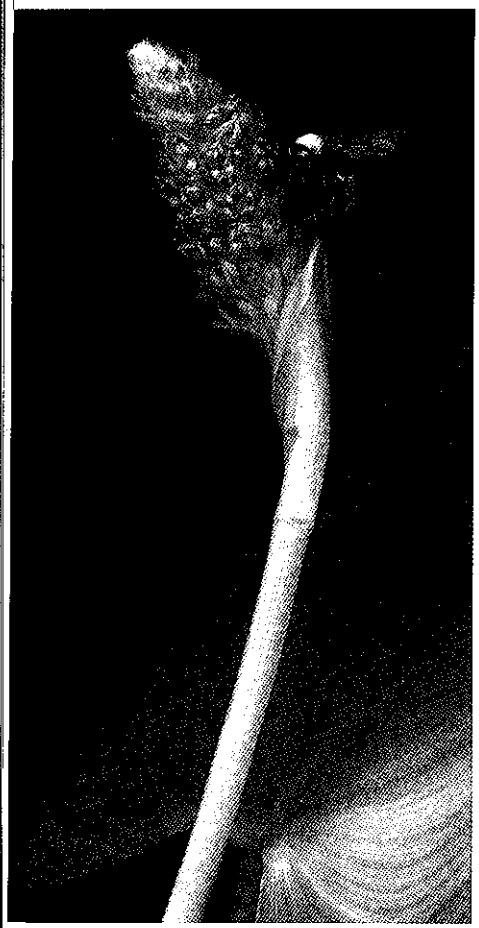
When the last of the students cleared out for the summer, Murphy would stop by the office nearly every day to see if his kitchen bees had arrived. He had never really set out to become a keeper of bees, and how he came to have a hive happened as a kind of a mistake to begin with. After a while, he found that he rather liked the hymenoptera order; he liked their busyness and sense of purpose, even after the swarming debacle back in April. One afternoon, Murphy heard a rhythmic click and buzz in the hallway. It grew louder and stopped in front of the door to his office. There he found Martina Finch in the hall holding a box from the Beeline Apiary in Medina, Ohio.

"Well, aren't you nice, lugging those bees up two flights of stairs for me?" Murphy said. "You must have known how bad I wanted 'em."

Martina didn't look happy. Her lipstick had smudged and her whole face seemed ridged with worry. "You've been on the phone awhile, right?" Martina said. She was out of breath. "I've been calling all day. I just couldn't keep a box of bees in my office any longer. They're so – loud." She smiled in that sad, Southern way. Murphy knew that look. He used to see it in his mother all the time back in Tennessee. All teeth, no eyes. Murphy found his phone under a shuffle of papers, apologized, and put it back on the hook.

"Those bees can buzz, can't they? There's about twenty thousand in there. An entire hive," he said. "With queen. For what's left of my kitchen bees."

She held the buzzing box with the tips of her fingers, as though it might explode.



Desire

"Kitchen – bees?"

"Yeah. There was a mutiny a few months back," he said. "The workers reared up, killed the queen, and swarmed to a tree in my yard. The others who stayed are all outta whack. The hive is a mess. I'll go right now to get these gals in there."

Martina looked skeptical as she wrestled with the box. Her narrow feet shifted in little pink sandals. He wondered how she managed to stand upright with all that height. Is this the source of the clicking noise? Could she run in those things?

"You had a beehive in your kitchen? With real bees?" she asked.

He shook his head, snapping out of the spell of her feet.

"What other kind of beehive is there?" he asked.

Martina looked thoughtful for a moment. "Well, there's the hairstyle," she said, gesturing to the bun atop her head. Intrigued, he raised an eyebrow. He had not guessed her to be so funny. Beehive, indeed.

"But I have never heard of bees in a kitchen," she said.

"Right, right," he said. He supposed it did sound a bit strange. "I was gone from my house for a month or so, and when I got back, my kitchen was just floating with bees. Everywhere. Turns out they had made up a hive in the corner cabinet, above the sink."

"What did you do with the hive?"

"I kept them there for a while and left out a sugar solution. They have to eat, right? But the hive grew and there were a lot – I mean a lot – of bees. Did you know most bees are female? They hardly have use for the males, save for the queen. Boy, they're fun to watch."

Martina shifted the box from one hip to the other.

"Did you call an exterminator?"

"Naw, I wouldn't do that. I didn't want them dead," he said. "When it got warm, I built them a little bee hut, a super. I smoked 'em out and took a scraper to their hive. So when they were good and calm, I brought 'em outside, took the honey, and that was that."

"So you gave secondhand smoke to bees, then took their honey?" she asked.

"Hell, they ate my sugar. I considered it their rent for six months. I'll bring you some."

"Isn't that dangerous? Won't they get cancer, or something? From the smoke?"

"Nope. Smoke calms bees. And most insects got a good instinct about people. They can feel your intentions. Plus, I was wearing a net and some gloves, so – "

Martina shifted the box away from her hip, as though she suddenly remembered what was in it.

"Could you please take this? Now?" That Southern smile again. He glanced at her hand when he took the box. The engagement ring was gone. He was going to say something, but when he looked up at her, Martina was looking around, taking in the particulars of his office. Her head turned in that precise angle, one degree at a time, like the second hand on a clock.

Murphy knew he didn't keep the cleanest office, but in his defense, he had been at Eastern College for twenty years. He liked to collect things. That's what he did. He considered most of the insects he kept, piled in old pickle and jam jars, to be research. He studied all kinds of species. One day, it's cicadas, the next day fish. Murphy could see her take in all his anthropology stuff, the endless search for significance in the Kula ring and the potlatch, the human skeleton and fish bones and Maori shells. In the corner was the log-shaped didgeridoo that his ex-girlfriend Shelley had given him before he left Santa Cruz for North Carolina.

Martina's survey of his office stopped when her eyes fell upon his ponytail collection, just above his desk, amid the cardboard jewelry boxes and glass jars. They hung in various lengths and girths, the evolution of their shine and shade marking the past twenty-eight years. Every seven years, ever since his dad died, Murphy had cut his hair. He didn't mean any symbolism or anything when he first did it, but his mother insisted that he look presentable for the funeral in Memphis. Those were different times. Shelley was still around, for one thing. She studied warm climate eels. Murphy had just started his post-doc in Santa Cruz, so he chopped off his ponytail at the office before he headed out to Memphis and threw the tail in a shoebox. When he came to North Carolina, alone (Shelley couldn't bear to leave her eels), and started to unpack, he came across the first ponytail and tacked it to the shelf above his desk. He counted it out on his fingers and realized it had been seven years since he had cut his hair. When he found the shears in another box, he cut off the second tail, and tacked it up next to the first. Murphy figured it was a little strange, but they felt more like bookmarks, or milestones, rather than long strands of rubber-bound protein.

"There's no real reason for those," Murphy said. "I just thought every seven years, I'd cut my hair." He stroked the ponytail now falling below his shoulders. It had been a healthy seven years, although he was sure this time that there were a few more wiry whites mixed in than in the past. "I think I'll be ready to cut this one in the next few months."

Martina turned to inspect Murphy's ponytail. He obliged her, turning his head and shoulders so she could see it.

"It's like deciphering rings on a tree," Martina said. Her hand reached out to touch one of the tails, but then she stopped herself. "A dog's year, each one."

Murphy did a quick calculation in his head. "Actually, one human year equals seven dog years, so what you see here is um – 196 dog years. That means I am a very old dog." Martina crossed her arms and looked at Murphy. He could tell she did not like to have her analogy messed with. He looked around the room.

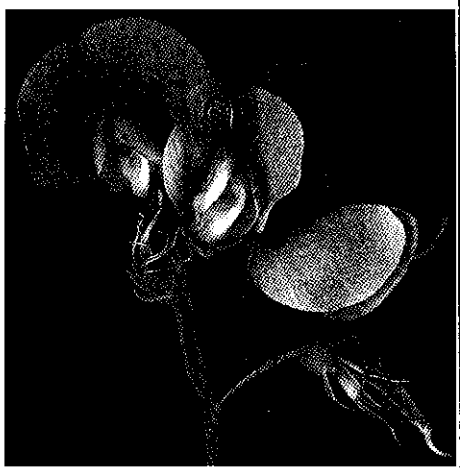
"You ever hear a didgeridoo?" Murphy asked Martina. "I'm a bit rusty, but check it out."

Murphy set down the box of bees and wrangled with the instrument until it stood waist-high between them. He picked it up and started to blow. Instead of producing a deep, creamy echo, Murphy sputtered a hollow groaning noise that filled the room. Martina covered her ears. She shook her head when Murphy motioned for her to try it out.

"Keep practicing, Professor," she said. Murphy felt warm just then and wiped the spit from his lips. He set the didgeridoo down, and in that moment of silence the din of the bees grew louder. Martina waved at him and turned one hundred and eighty degrees, toward the door. Beehive hairdo. A dog's year. Keep practicing. He could hear her sandals echo down the hallway. She was amazing.

"I will," he called after her. "Have a good weekend."

That evening, after he introduced the bees to the wooden super in the backyard and marked the queen with a big white dot, Murphy hitched up the rowboat trailer to his pickup and headed out to the estuary to listen to the spotted sea trout prepare to spawn at Rose Bay Creek, near the mouth of the Pamlico River. Out past Greenville, on the way to Little Washington, the highway shifts from a four-lane freeway to a rinky-dink back road that careens through the crumbling downtowns of Grimesland and Chocowinity. Mixed in with the rundown farmer's mansions and trailer parks were acres of bright-leaf tobacco, about a dozen churches, and the occasional doublewide strip joint. He drove by the Piggly Wiggly Plaza and saw on the marquee "Gwaltney Sausage For Sale." He took in the advice of backlit signs from strip mall churches:



Sweet Pea

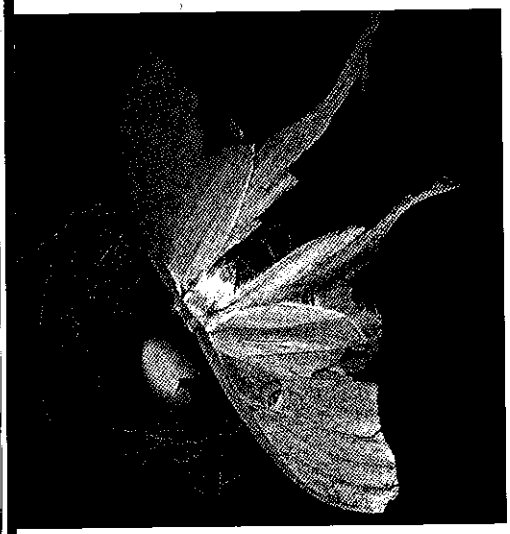
"What's missing in Ch__ch? UR!"

"Evolution is a religion, not a science."

Murphy thought about that last one for a while as he headed east. You have to have faith that change is possible, he thought, that everything out there is guiding your mind toward new opportunities. Whether that kind of evolution was steeped in science or faith was beyond him. And maybe it didn't matter. He accelerated, cruising past the cotton fields just starting to gather their bolls. Soon, the air would be wispy with the haze of loosed cotton. In the fall, it looks like popcorn, sitting on a crisp brown star, an open palm offering a gauzy gift. Some day, Murphy would find the courage to pull over to the side of the road and fill the bed of his truck with fresh cotton. Maybe he would go to the Art Department, get a loom, and weave his own face cloth with it.

After he unloaded the boat, Murphy attached the hydrophone to his digital recorder and rowed out into the sound's calm waters. When he found the right spot, he lay back, tethered by his anchor, pressed "record" and took in the songs of fish. He always found calm, watching the summer sky turn from pale blue to the color of carrots as the sun sank. The fish, under the dark cape of quiet, gathered underwater. Murphy could hear them begin with a few ticks and clicks; he closed his eyes, and soon Martina crept into his thoughts. He recalled her nervousness with the bee box, the peculiar glance at his didgeridoo. Her missing ring. "Keep practicing, Professor," she had said. The way she spun on one heel of her pink sandal and left his office. Murphy drifted off to sleep in his boat as the taps and burps from the sea trout below mingled with the memory of pink lipstick at the corner of Martina's mouth. The kitchen bees and singing fish and Martina's hairstyle and hips blurred into the tones and sounds of the dark night along the Pamlico.

Murphy returned home late from Rose Bay Creek, covered in red bumps from mosquito bites, and discovered in the morning that he had missed out on a good bit of data during his twilight nap. He had initially thought the chorus of spotted sea trout would climax just once, but as he took the recorder out with him on his morning run, he realized that those fish had been up to something more. Round two had happened later in the night, and he had failed to catch it live. Listening to the recording during his jog, he could detect clicking sounds, an occasional sliding burp, and a gentle thump that bellowed like a heartbeat. The burp, produced by the fish's swim bladder, sounded like the low-pitched groan of an opened door. Usually the larger leks happen in the early evening, but this one was out of step, a little later and louder.



The Daughter's Gift

Sometimes when he ran, Murphy wanted to close his eyes and rely on his imagined sonar instinct to keep him from falling off the curb. He tried it once and broke his glasses on a utility pole. Afterwards, he kept his eyes on the ground with one earphone in, the closest thing he could get to running blind without breaking his neck. Because of this, he almost didn't notice Martina – and it would have just killed him if he had run right past her – lugging a bag of trash to her curb. First, he heard clicking sounds, and then spotted the pink sandals, the same ones that had clouded his visions of fish grunts and crackles for the past twelve hours, and had lulled him to sleep during an unprecedented lek. Martina's bun was gone, but her dark hair was tied back. He looked up from the click of her shoes into her Southern smile.

"Hey, Professor," she said.

"Hi, Martina. Um, call me Fred. Everyone else does." He was a little short of breath, and he scratched at the mosquito bites on his shoulder.

"Fred, then. Wow, those must really itch. Did the bees sting you?"

"Naw, they wouldn't do that. It was the skeeters. They sure did make a snack of me," he said. "I was on the boat last night and fell asleep and forgot my spray."

"You should be careful, you know. West Nile and all that," she said. "By the way, I was just looking at my garden. You must know something about bugs. Could you come look at this?"

"Of course," he said. Murphy never would have figured Martina for a gardener – those fine nails, the glittering stones in her ears. She wore pale pants that ended at her calves and a pink sweater top that matched her shoes.

"I found a glassy beetle in my garden. I can't imagine something this beautiful exists."

"Where is it?"

"Out back. I'll show you." Murphy, still itching, followed her into the courtyard of apartments and onto her patio deck. There, in a bucket-sized terra cotta pot, stood a small green tomato plant. An iridescent beetle crawled up its fledgling stalk. Martina stooped low to the pot.

"Look at this. It's so beautiful; is it rare?" She looked up at him, looking for approval of her find. "It just looks like it's covered in dew. Every color out there is trapped in this beetle." It held the shape of a crystal ladybug, reflecting and absorbing light. "I mean, if a beetle like this were common knowledge, more people would know about it. Keep them as pets, right?"

Murphy hated to break her heart. These were the con men of all the garden pests. They weren't worse than aphids, but they would certainly pose a problem to her tomato plant. The beetle's iridescence was the result of a bit of liquid lodged between its chitin cuticles. It turned colors when stressed, and if you decided to keep one, thinking you could preserve its beauty, it would turn black and hollow when it died. Murphy could tell she just loved the thing, and the last thing he would want to do to someone who's just discovered an insect that fascinates her is to tell her it's a bad one and then urge her to kill it. But he couldn't let Martina keep this thing without warning her. It would kill the plant.

"Looks like you got yourself a milkweed tortoise beetle, there. Pretty little pest, huh? You'd think it's the magic fairy cousin to the ladybug, but they're nothing but trouble," he said.

"This thing? It's so gorgeous, how could it harm anything?" Martina plucked it off the stalk, letting it run along the tip of her ring finger. It crawled toward her hand and paused, just as it came to her knuckle. Her smile faded, and he caught the sparkle, and it brought him back to spring semester, the winking diamond that was now gone from her hand. Oh man, Murphy thought. This was one smart bug. Insects waste no time getting to the heart of things. Rattled by the pest going straight for Martina's ring finger, Murphy tried to shift her attention away from it, from what he guessed it was trying to tell them.

"It's just a milkweed tortoise beetle, a Metriana bicolor. No, sorry. It's a Metriona bicolor – triona. They're common around here, like houseflies or slugs, only prettier," he said. "And just as pesky, too. They'll tear your tomatoes apart."

"This is my first garden, so I wouldn't know," Martina said, murmuring at the beetle. The halves of its shell parted, and in an instant, it was gone, floating like a soap bubble, back toward Martina's one-plant garden. It looked like she was about to cry. Her nostrils expanded, and her face went deep red. Murphy didn't know what to do except to keep talking about plants and pests.

"Well, if you keep these things hanging around, it'll probably be your last," he said. "Just spray the plants with soapy water, but only when you come home after work. You do it midday, or even in the morning, the soap'll get the leaves singed by the sun."

"And what does the soap do?" Martina's redness subsided. She looked a little better. Interested, at least, in the soap idea.

"It gets in their spiracles, their breathing chambers. Insects breathe from their sides," he said, gesturing to his ribcage. "The soap mucks up the works." He looked at her, carefully at first, and then raised an eyebrow. He could tell she was really listening to him; there was an expression on her face that he saw when he was getting through to some of his best biology students. A little fun never hurt anyone, he thought. He looked around the patio, as if he was about to tell her a secret, letting her in on a conspiracy.

"Now, keep in mind, these aren't exactly the kinds of insects you'd want to eat. Butterflies, too, are a problem. All the colorful ones are," he said. "There's too many alkaloids. It's practically poison – an insect's fair warning to stay the hell away."

Martina seemed unfazed by his effort to shock her with the idea of eating insects. Murphy knew them to be some of the most nutritious beings on the planet.

"What about slugs?" Martina asked. "Should slugs be avoided, Professor?"

"It's probably not a good idea to eat slugs, but if you can dig up a few cicadas, well, I've got a stir-fry recipe for you," Murphy said.

Martina smiled. Murphy couldn't tell if she was interested or if she was just humoring him. The cicada stir-fry was actually quite good.

"I'll stop by your office next week to get it," she said. "I'll bring some bug spray for you, too." She noticed his headset. "Say, what are you listening to? A didgeridoo performance?"

"Check it out." He offered her one of the headphones. "Now that there's a lek. Female fish-wooing, basically," he said, listening in to the fish. The second lek of the evening was emerging just then. The clamoring of the sea trout grew louder with boops and clicks.

"A what?"

"A lek. That's when all the male fish get together to bring out the females. If there's just one or two weak ones singing out there, the females might not come out. But if they hear a loud, strong signal, they'll be more interested to see what's going on. For the males, it's just friendly competition, a serenade for the ladies."

"Wait. Fish make noise?" she asked.

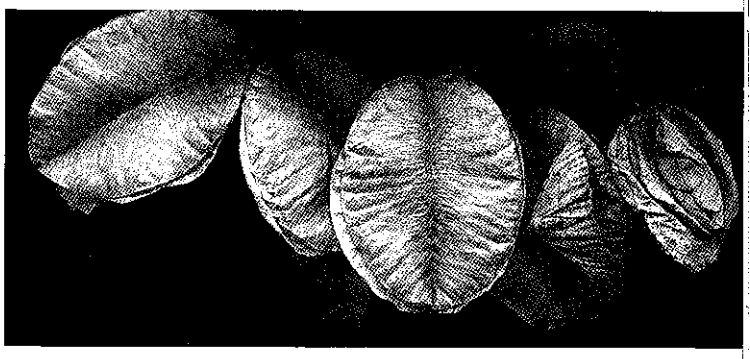
"You bet they do. With their swim bladders. You got your oyster toadfish. Then there's the spotted sea trout, which is what you're listening to now," he said. "I've got recordings of red drum and weakfish, out near Ocracoke. You won't find them in the Pamlico."

Martina adjusted the earphone. For a moment, their noses almost touched. "If scribbles could speak," she said, "this is what they would sound like."

"No, ma'am – it's communication. A fish serenade. They're all chattering down there with their little swim bladders, a chorus just waiting to spawn with the ladies," he said.

"I've never heard of anything like this," she said. "I thought you studied bugs, not fish."

"What I study is mating habits. Sexual dimorphism. This happens with tons of species. You've got your fiddler crab, the Tungara frog, the blue manakin, the hammer-headed bat, all the fish. Have you heard the buzz of a cicada? Only the males chirp like that.



Golden Raintree

They're doing the same thing. Sperm is cheap, my friend. There's plenty to go around. The fellas got to do something to stand out, right?"

"Kind of like the singles scene downtown," Martina said. She handed the headphone back to Murphy. "Do you ever feel alone out there, listening to fish all the time?"

"Lonely? No. Not at all. The entire world is full of life."

Martina shrugged. "I've been feeling alone lately. It seems like you're alone with your work a lot. That's all. I wonder if you like it, or how you cope."

Murphy took a step backwards. "Well, I suppose I am alone out there," he said. He was unable to control the tone in his voice as he took another step away from her. "But it doesn't feel like work, so there's nothing to cope with. Every night, I go out to the field, or the waterfront, and I am surrounded by friends."

Martina looked confused. "I only wanted – "

"I am not lonely. Certainly not." Murphy couldn't stop his legs from trotting down the sidewalk, leaving Martina to contemplate glass beetles and the mating rituals of fish. How could she think he, of all people, was lonely? Why had she said that? He ran back to his house, making better time than usual, and covered himself in netting to check on the bees. As he scraped away the wax to get into their supper, it struck him that he wanted Martina to join him that night in the field. He should have inquired about the engagement ring when he had the chance. He wanted to let her know that he liked her pink shoes and that he wanted her to listen to marine nightlife with him along the Pamlico. He wanted her. But what if it changed everything?

Root for the Hawk, Banish Yellow, Wear a Hat of Goldfinches

A REVIEW BY TOM LOMBARDO

Susan Meyers. *Keep and Give Away: Poems.* Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2006. $14.95 paper

Susan Meyers's poems in *Keep and Give Away* sing with birds and bloom with flowers. Gardens, gardening, and nature pervade her stories about her childhood, about her mother's life and death, and about her marriage to an avid fisherman. Where Meyers's imagination goes, so goes the natural world with her.

Meyers grew up in Albemarle and Greenville, NC, and her keen observation of nature started when she was a preschooler, as related in "Contraries" (3), in her own back yard, "in love / with the little birds, the finches / & sparrows fidgeting from leafy cover" (ll.1-3). She cheered them on "to eat the seed / at the feeders hung just for them – / sunflower, millet, a white sock of thistle" (ll. 5-7). Meyers's sophistication with language shows up in the sounds and rhythms of those lines. She draws the reader into the mind of the little girl sitting on her "front steps" (l.1) who unexpectedly "pull[s] for the hawk" (l. 13), which "lowers its broad / red shoulders and sits, alone, / on the limb of the cherry tree" (ll. 8-10). With such a surprise, Meyers, a past president of the North Carolina Poetry Society, begins her book, letting the readers know that she is going to surprise us in each poem and that she is going to show us the force as well as the beauty of nature.

In the villanelle "Cradle and All" (18), Meyers evokes the sing-song of a nursery rhyme in her repeated lines. The poem is "for Erin," an expectant mother who "[f]or forty weeks . . . learned a cradlesong / she would've sung to her baby all night long" (ll. 18-19). In this poem, an infant dies with the gentleness of "needles falling" in a strong wind (l. 16). Even when Meyers's characters die tragic deaths, she couches the horror in terms of nature, as happened "Late One Friday Afternoon" (9) as the young narrator held the hand of a friend's younger brother who was hit by a car:

> He was five. I was nine. I held his
> hand
> nested like a bird in my palm
>
> and with my other hand brushed
> dirt
> from his knee. Then the bird
> fluttered
> and was gone. Tires screeched.
> I saw pieces of a toy truck
> land in the Lefler's yard. (ll. 4-10)

At the core of *Keep and Give Away* is the story of the poet's mother's decline and death, which the poet tells mainly in the section of poems entitled "Need has nothing to do with it." But the story begins early and echoes later in the book in a way that guides the narrative throughout. In an early poem, "That Year" (6), which is dedicated to her mother, we discover "That Year" was "the year / I banished yellow from my life" (ll. 3-4). The narrator "dug up the lantana [and] didn't plant narcissus and all of the buttery bulbs" (ll. 5-6); instead, she chose whites and blues for her garden and painted her kitchen ecru and tossed out all of her yellow clothing (ll. 7, 10-12) – all "without knowing that I was readying / for two long years of her dying" (ll. 8-9). When her mother died, she loaded her car with "three sacks of bulbs" "that would spring into jonquils, daffodils – bright / coronas of yellow, and yellow, and yellow" (ll.18, 20-21). The narrator plants her grief with "hands working a dirt, a dark loam" (l. 19), planting her anaphora of yellows to come in the spring, a rebirth from grief.

Love for mothers is, of course, a common literary theme. This poet's craft comes into play in how she describes that love. Meyers expresses her love through admiration for the hard work of her mother's 1950s-era

That night, as the lusty chorus of the cicada vibrated through the night, Murphy lay in the grass with his headset and microphone, listening for the click of her footfalls, thinking about his didgeridoo. Maybe he would bring it along next time. As the sky grew dark, the buzz of his inner dialogue replayed their conversations about loneliness and kitchen bees and beehive hairdos and the dating habits of spotted sea trout, eventually drowning out the gorgeous, familiar lull of the world outside.

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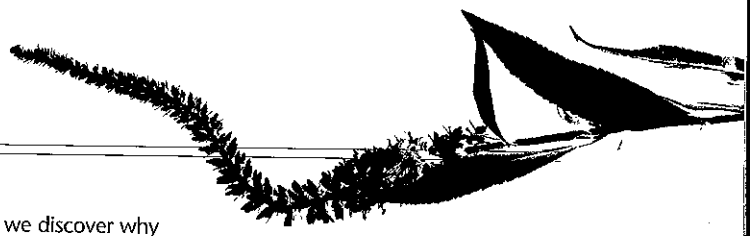
Charity Jules Valentine graduated Cum Laude with a BS in Fine Arts from Colorado State University and will receive her MFA from East Carolina University's School of Art & Design in 2007. She has served as an editor, photographer, and staff writer for the US Air Force and won "Best in the Air Force" in a US Air Force Media Publication Contest in 2003. Her work has appeared in several shows at Emerge Gallery and the Starlight Café in Greenville, as well as in the Burroughs Welcome Gallery at ECU and in ECU's *Rebel* magazine, the student publication begun by Ovid Williams Pierce (see article in the special feature section of this issue). The appearance of her work in this issue of *NCLR* is her first national publication. See other samples of her work elsewhere in the special feature section and in the Creative Writing section of this issue.



Carolina motherhood, "Whenever she worked her rake or broom / or mop, she left a shine" (ll. 11-12), as described in, for example, "Something Green for My Mother" (37). In the sonnet "Mother, Washing Dishes" (22), the poet and her sister plot to "train our children right / and not end up like her, after every meal stuck / with red knuckles, a bleached rag to wipe and wring" (ll. 3-5). Yet later, at the turn of this sonnet, a more mature and discerning view takes hold: "Or did she guard her place / at the window? Not wanting to give up the gloss / of the magnolia, the school traffic humming. / Sunset, finches at the feeder" (ll. 9-12).

We also get another loving view of the poet's mother in "My Mother, Her Mornings" (24):

> She could close her eyes
> to stitch the pieces
>
> if she had to.
> . . . .
> She squats on the floor,
> takes to her knees,
> crawling down yards of yellow.
> . . . .
> From the bobbin she hears
> *Mother daughter, mother*
> *daughter*
> *listen to your mother, daughter.*
> (ll. 3-40)

And just that quietly, we discover why the poet banished yellow from her life during the time of her mother's two long year of dying. I will leave the mother's death, as described in "Breath" (48), to readers to discover for themselves and then wonder whether they've ever read a more beautiful, moving scene of a loved one dying.

Still, there is much more to this book than grieving. Within the sonnets and villanelles, the poet takes her reader along on trips with her husband, canoeing on Lake Santee or fishing on the Edisto River ("Fisher's Luck" 67), where "[a]ll he wants is one fish, / one largemouth he's set his mind to. / I've settled in the back of the boat with a book" (ll.1-3). She turns out to have the luck that day as she closes her book and looks "from blossom to floating white blossom, / mostly open, unfolded and fingering air, // the centers bursting with yellow" (ll. 11-13).

The really lucky ones – the readers – may laugh aloud reading "Hat of Many Goldfinches" (53), which (again unexpectedly) closes out the section of her mother's dying with a flight of fancy as she imagines such a hat, "all that twittering and hopping about" (l. 5):

> Gives you goose bumps
> to feel the beaks tapping against
> your skin.
> Walking down noon's aisle, you
> nod
> and they shift a little.
> More shuffling,
> and the hat is rearranged. Take
> your photo,
> or look in the mirror, and the hat
> you see there
> is another, not the same hat you
> wear now.
>
> Never depend on a hat of gold
> finches
> to bore you. (ll. 15-24)

But readers *can* depend on Meyers's poems to not bore them – and to give them goose bumps.

Tom Lombardo has an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. His poetry has appeared in such literary magazines as the *Oxford American, Southern Poetry Review, New York Quarterly, Pearl, Orbis: Quarterly International Literary Review,* and *Ars Medica.* His criticism has appeared or is forthcoming in *Newsletters* and *South Carolina Review.* See the book review section for his review of three more collections of poetry.

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