

*Lost
Battles*

Ashley Gates



Pseudoscience

"At least seventy percent of the Earth's surface can't even sustain human life," Ida said. "At least. Isn't that strange?" She curled her legs under herself on the couch and refilled her wine glass.

"Yeah. It is," Luke said from the other end of the couch. He picked at a hangnail on his middle finger with his thumb. "Hey--did you ever hear back from that woman about that job?"

"No." She took a gulp of wine. "All this crap about the Earth being ideally situated in the solar system and having the perfect balance of carbon or whatever that allows water to exist. And water's the prerequisite for life--blah, blah, blah--so if water's the prerequisite for life, then why can't we live in the oceans, too?"

"I don't know. I guess we aren't built for it." Luke stood up and took his empty glass into the kitchen.

"I wish I lived in a swimming pool," Ida yelled from the living room, spilling wine on her dress. She examined the peeling skin on her shoulders, which were badly sunburned from a week before. "We can also just stand out in the sun long enough and eventually burn up. Isn't that *completely* screwed up?"

Her words were lost in the sound of running water. She refilled her glass to the brim.

"And then there's living in cities. I think cities kill people, too."

Andrew Williams



Househunting

It's 81 degrees outside and the sky is swollen and low in Hattiesburg it's February. I'm standing on the front porch of the house, floorboards freshly painted white acrid smell of new. Seller is shaking my hand like a cold fish.

I'm belching whisky, hot and peaty refluxes emitting a force field of sweat and Speyburn spilled into an ashtray. *I should have backed off last night but when do I ever?*

Clare is pallid with one too many glasses of wine too *she doesn't like backing off either* but Seller doesn't seem to notice *probably wouldn't care if he did* the house has been on the market 26 months like the one next door and the one across the street.

He asks what do you do, Quentin, I mumble something about being between jobs he doesn't ask what Clare does. Seller takes us through the house, two bedrooms, one and a half baths, floors are heart pine recently refinished, granite countertops in the kitchen the appliances stay. Clare says she hates granite I say me too, Seller looks at us like we're speaking Arabic.

I've checked my watch three times in the last five minutes Seller asks if I have somewhere to be I say no it's just a habit. Seller takes us out back the yard is more dirt than grass and littered with dog turds bleached white by the sun. There's a plywood and two-by-four workshop tucked into the northeast corner of the chain link fence.

We step inside there's a lawnmower and cinder blocks, a table saw and scrap wood and a dry-rotted golf bag stuffed

with clubs Jack Nicklaus signature models. Three-stacks of shelves mounted on aluminum brackets line each wall.

On one shelf there's maybe thirty little figurines dressed up in Confederate regalia and I pick one up. *Maybe it's Stonewall Jackson maybe it's Robert E. Lee I can never remember who has the black beard and who has the white one.* I pick up one with a black beard.

Daddy would know and tap his cane disappointed if I asked.
I think it's Stonewall.

There was a sniper once out back of the Stonewall Jackson motel in Jackson my hometown popping off at cars on I-55 and the towns outside kinda stonewalled Jackson my hometown too, white flight in a quick slip of blond hair and minivans.

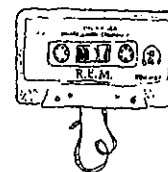
I think maybe I hear Seller fart but I'm not sure.

Clare's rubbing her upper arms and Seller is scratching his armpit.

Clare says I hate this place I say me too. I put Stonewall down. Then we go.



Gorjus



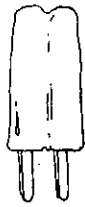
AW*SHUX

Nobody knows that
we sneak off & lissen
to *Chronic Town* &
hold hands. You can't
tell yr sister because she's
a total rat, and my
dad will kill me.

So we split the headphones
& light Kools one
after the other, we
kick at the kudzu and
have our carnival, of sorts, while
the tape squeaks,
even though we really just
hold hands and I'm
not even sure you even
like me.

Years later you
send me a friend request and
say *I always loved your
hair, fussy & black &
curly like an Italian
halo*, simple poetry from a
mother of two that
makes me swoon.

Walter Biggins



At the Greengrocer

"Okay, you see what that guy's doing over there with that scale?" David said.

"Yeah," said Grace.

"I want you to do the same thing—weigh out a pound of snow peas and put them in this plastic bag. You can do it."

"Sure, but—"

"Watch him for a moment. See, he put those onions on the scale and the hand on that clock-looking thing goes—"

"I know how to read a scale."

"Oh. You do. Of course you do."

"But—"

"Then get to it, Grace. I'm gonna get a bell pepper."

"What are snow peas?"

"You don't know what snow peas are," he said. "Okay, they're flat and a little long, about this big, and they're bright green."

"Green?"

"Do you ever eat anything green?"

Grace struck a pose like Rodin's *The Thinker*, knuckles burrowing into her chin while the hum of grocery-list recitations and clik-claks of people's feet floated by.

"Lime popsicles," she said finally. "I eat lime popsicles."

David's face went slack. "Your mother," he said.

"Don't make fun of Mommy."

"It's just that lime popsicles don't qualify as vegetables."

"But they're food."

"Technically, no, probably not."

"And I'm not tall enough to reach the scale, anyway, dummy," she said.

She had him there.



Jack Butler



I Thought My
Father Was Time

I thought my father was time
because he frightened me.

Flight instructor, mechanic, plantation hand,
wild hair and youngest brother,
he'd married that slender redhead you see in all
the forties movies, pure sex and steel
but innocent as a glass of milk: my mother,
who fought his drinking to a standstill and made him change
his Luckies for a pipe. War over,
we lived as tenants on the family land
all those slow undefined years, the middle range
of the century, before the madness set in.

It might have been he beat me, but he didn't, much.
Once after a prank
of pepper up his sleeping nostrils, a stunt
I'd no doubt gotten from a cartoon.
Oh he erupted grandly as any Katzenjammer
uncle, but I had not foreseen
the trickster caught up in his trick like a broken plank
in a whirlwind. Once when I lost his hammer.

Dreaded, those whippings, unpleasant,
but rare, and not unusual then. That wasn't
the reason. But he frightened me, frightened me long
before he ever stood in a thunderous pulpit.

He frightened me before I grew angry
and learned to curse
like a river of boiling music tearing along
full of tree-trunks and houses and bodies, before I knew

separate-but-equal was shit
and the war was wrong
and said so, and said the Baptists were worse,
that he in his fried-chicken preacher fat
just sat in his recliner, sat
and kicked back and let it happen, so we didn't speak
for several years.

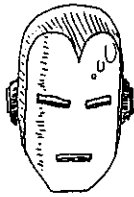
I thought my father was time because he frightened me,
and he frightened me to tears
this summer. Frailer than smoke
on the mountain, an old man gone lean
again, shade of that Air Force captain who took
my mother's heart, he was so glad to see
his prodigal son,
I thought for a moment his mind had gone,
he had forgotten my name,
his own. And in the next moment time
was rolled away,
and there he was at last: My father,
as real as anything.

And so we came together.
I sang for him in church, and he said,
I didn't know you could sing.
I put my hands to either side of his head
and held it, and he said, *Do that again.*

What can I say of the man?
His heart more fragile than a china vase.
His gaunt and stubbled face.
The uncommon grace with which he met his death,
completely unafraid, praising with his last breath
his Maker and the life
that Maker had given: his path, his work, his wife.

I thought my father was time, and never knew
Oh it was time that frightened me wild.

B.W. Costello



Tony Stark in .
Belzoni

So it's day three of our discussion of Randall Kenan's novel *A Visitation of Spirits*—have you read it? You should, it's good—and I see droopy faces and surreptitious texting and I say, so really, is no one going to talk about the fact that this novel about religion and tobacco farming starts off with an epigraph from *Neuromancer*? Or about all the *Star Trek* references, or the *Lord of the Rings* references, or the fact that the main character has a Doctor Strange poster over his bed, or that the book ends with a game of Pac-Man?

And then khakis-and-oxford, who sits in the front and who read half of *Lanterns on the Levee* in a history class and who cites *The Unvanquished* as his favorite novel, not just his favorite Faulkner novel, his favorite *novel*, but at least he talks every class, khakis-and-oxford frowns and says "I thought this was a class on the South."

Come on, man, I want to say but I don't, come on, man, I played high school football in Mississippi at a private academy founded in 1971 in a town of less than 3,000 with an abandoned cotton gin and a mothballed train depot, and our team was the Rebels, just like half the other private academies founded in 1971 were the Rebels, unless they were the Colonels or the Confederates or the Generals or the (wink.wink) Patriots. And I played both sides of the ball which as far as I knew was just how you played when you only had 20 people on your team, but then in *Necessary Roughness* (which I went to see because I was a huge *Quantum Leap* fan) I heard Robert Loggia call it "Iron Man ball," and so I cut out the *Iron Man* logo from issue #220 – the one with Spymaster and the Ghost on the cover, from the Micheline/Layton era, after Rhodey had given up wearing the suit and Tony had

kicked the bottle but before "Armor Wars" really got going—and taped it above my hook in the locker room, and I glued copies of the Marvel Super Hero (Series I and II) Iron Man trading cards to my shoulder pads under my jersey and they fell out sometime during our playoff loss on the road my junior year on an 80-degree night in November and got trampled into the grass that was cut by an assistant coach who also taught U.S. history and had strong, deeply misinformed opinions about the role of tariffs in the South's secession, a few square inches of cardstock with a Ron Lim or Ron Frenz or Barry Smith drawing of Tony Stark with repulsors blazing all decaying into mulch, flecks of gloss drifting into a kudzu tangle.

Come on, man, I say instead, I don't think you have to make the choices that you think you have to make.



Tracy Carr



I Bet You Someday Baby

I have always been a girl who has crushes. My first crush was Tommy Olive from across the street. He had everything considered desirable by Texas 1976 standards: blonde feathered hair and a yellow Camaro. He was 16. I was three.

I was a very realistic three, though, and realized that Tommy was never going to be my boyfriend. Instead, when my father planted a new tree in our backyard, I named it Tommy. After dinner, I would climb to the top of the jungle gym and tell the Tommytree all the things I was too embarrassed to say to the real Tommy, such as, "I really love your hair."

Elementary school brought slightly more realistic crushes. On the first day of Kindergarten, I fell hard for Neil Parker, and remained his faithful, adoring fan until he moved away at the end of 5th grade, taking his polite indifference with him.

I went back to the impossible, tree-like crushes in middle school: there was Demetrius Depositaro, an impossibly good-looking 8th grade football player; random popular boys, like Rowdy Poteet; my science teacher, Mr. Jeter. Sixth and seventh grades were particularly difficult years because I had to spend a lot of time negotiating with the heavy metal girls. Generally the topic was my right to continue to breathe air. They kept trying to make me meet them at the bike racks after school, but they had the poor communication skills typical of hoodlums. If they really wanted me to show up they ought not have told me they planned to beat my face in when I arrived. If they'd said, "Come to the bike racks after school. We're planning on talking about *Sweet Valley High* books and Billy Joel songs," I would've been there every day.

Having much experience at this point, I approached my 8th grade crush like it was my job. I studied my yearbooks in order to select the correct candidate. I utilized a complex algorithm of looks, lack of popularity, and cool hair to determine the focus of my attention. I was proactive; I called him, despite my mother's warnings to never, ever call a boy, and miraculously, due to a shared penchant for K-TEL compilation tapes, we became friends. Not kissing friends, but regular, upright, no-touching friends. This was progress. After all, he was not a tree. Eventually he made out with everyone I knew, except for me. Still: not a tree.

Something else happened that year: someone had a crush on me.

I was alerted to this crush by my friend Lorie's friend Stacy's sister Jenny, who told me that this boy named John liked me. One day, John via Jenny via Stacy via Lorie delivered a damp, heavily erased and rewritten note to my locker. I ripped it open with excitement, only to find a barely legible note that could have been scrawled by a troubled second grader, maybe one whose parents were recently divorced. It said:

Hello
I love you
You look nice today
I love you
You are pretty
I love you
Goodbye
I love you.

How could he think this approach was going to work? Where was the mystery, the intrigue, the romance? I could've taught him a few things about how to have a crush correctly. Such as "lay off the 'I love you's, as this indicates that you are crazy and want to keep my ears in a jar by your bed."

The thing was, John wasn't terrible looking. He was no Demetrius Depositario, but he had soft brown eyes and was cuter than a lot of boys I'd crushed on. But he had one awful, awful mark against him. Forget that his handwriting was depressing, forget that he took woodshop class—the one thing that I couldn't get past was that he was so vocal, so persistent in his admiration.

As a frequent crusher myself, I knew it was fake. You do not LOVE a crush you don't know. You want to love the person, you want to know if they like that Wham! song "Freedom" and if so, how much, like, enough to buy the 45? And if so, can I borrow it? But you do not actually love them. And saying so repeatedly broke the rules of having a crush.

It was worth going back to talking to trees.



Gorjus



City of Rotten Eyes

He was still up there on Highway 51. The trial got moved again and the lawyer said they couldn't get the bond down, *not nowadays, they are all over everybody's ass about meth.* Your momma said that nobody should talk like that around women, especially not in their own living room, and his cheeks got red like they was hot, and he apologized and smoothed back his thick black hair, and you could see how young he really might have been even though he had lines around his eyes and his tummy hung out over his belt.

Bail was fifty thousand. That meant you had to get Moore Bonds five thousand. After you started crying the lady on the phone said they would take thirty five hundred. She said this like it was a favor. You have only seen that much money twice in your life. Once when your daddy bought that yellow Honda you wrecked in high school and once you don't want to talk about anymore.

He is still there and you can go see him anytime between eight and five. The first week you went every morning before classes at Hinds. At first you were scared of the huge lady in the wood-paneled cubicle that you have to go up to so they can get him from the back. She had real long French manicured nails with a fake diamond on the pinky, so long you didn't know how she could type with them. But the cubicle is stuffed with dusty knickknacks like the kind at your aunt's, bright white praying hands and noble crosses and pale pink glass roses, and she has kind brown eyes, and she becomes a comfort, like a nun in an old movie.

So you went every day at first but then you got bigger and the summer drug on and you didn't feel like driving the twenty-five miles up from Byram even though that's not really that

far, and the next thing you know it's one a week at best and sometimes not even that much that time you were sick so bad. Now every time you see him he grins and says that you look bigger than you did the time before. You know he means it in a sweet way because he presses his hand up against the plexiglass and he smears a little heart on it.

But you are getting tired of sitting in that awful room with the wallpaper like a burlap sack, where there's grease stains lining the wall over all the bolted down chairs. Even though the lady in the cubicle is sweet to you deep inside you are ashamed because she knows your name and waves at you when you come in. You were not the type of girl who was brought up to be visiting a goddamned jail to see a man. You are tired of sitting there in those plastic chairs watching the little kids brought in to get their fingerprints done and get Scared Straight and gawk at the big glass case full of all the sharpened up plastic combs and filed down ballpoint pens.

You are sick to death of that sweet round-faced visitation lady with her long nails and that damned fake diamond. Maybe it is a real diamond. She probably makes okay money. She wears a badge that looks real enough even though they don't have guns in there, just Tasers. You can't even look her in the eyes anymore. You can just stare at all the Dollar Tree porcelain she has. You want to tell her, *I am not trash. I do not belong here.*

Now he is still up there on Highway 51 but you go to see him less and less and the chubby boy with the thick black hair will call you sometimes *just to check on you I talked to Jimmy last week you know the trial got pushed back to January, I am thinking maybe that MBN fella won't testify*, and you are sick of sleeping on your side, and you were not raised this way, and he says *are you doing okay, do you need anything*, and don't you deserve a little dignity, don't you deserve a little peace, don't you deserve better than maybe it will get better one day.

Ashley Gates



I Need To Tell
You Something

The man working behind the deli counter pauses before he pours the milk. "I need to tell you something, and I hope it doesn't upset you."

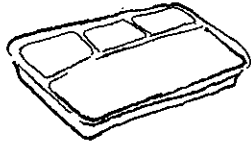
I have just ordered a small coffee. Milk. No sugar. The sun is out. Fall is approaching. I am 28 years old. The words "I need to tell you something" or "I need to talk to you" or "We need to talk" trigger such acute anxiety in my body that my eyes turn to saucers and my surroundings almost lose color. These words uttered by a relative mean that someone is dead. Spoken by a boyfriend, "It's over." From a boss, "You're fired." From a doctor, "Terminal cancer." But from the deli man?

Fight-or-flight at its finest, my body surges with adrenaline, and I am prepared for the end of the world. (There is someone behind me in line—does this person have a gun? The sun is out. Fall is approaching. I am 28 years old.) My peripheral vision eroding, I lean in for the verdict:

"Yeah?"

"I like your eyes," he says.

Tracy Carr



Through the
Looking Glass

Sometimes I just want to eat something warm. I kind of don't care what it is and prefer it to be bland and a little mushy as long as it tastes okay. These are the times I go to Piccadilly.

I like going because I'm the youngest person there, plus there is the bonus that the warm plate of bland, mushy food only costs \$4.99. Sometimes there are salmon croquettes, which attract and repel me at the same time, like about seventy percent of my college boyfriends.

So I was leaving the Piccadilly yesterday and noticed a sweet Grandpa ride with the vanity tag PRA 4US. "Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)" was playing on the radio. I believe it to be the only #1 Billboard Top 100 song to combine sailors, finest silver from the north of Spain, and whiskey.

Shoe-polished on the back window of PRA 4US it said ALWAYS VOTE. You could interpret this as a public service announcement, but this is Jackson, and so I know that the subtext is "ALWAYS VOTE OR ELSE WE WILL GET ANOTHER BLACK PRESIDENT OH GOD."

Ashley Gates ("Psuedoscience" and "I Need to Tell You Something") is a writer from Jackson, Miss., who lives in Brooklyn, NY. She writes at cosmopsis.tumblr.com.

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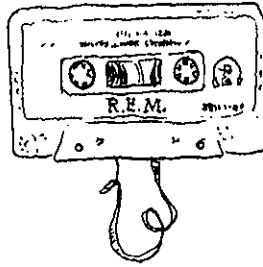
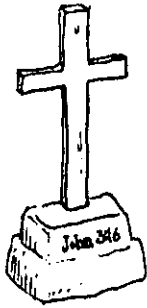
Walter Biggins ("At the Greengrocer") is a writer from Dallas, Texas, who lives in Jackson, Miss. He writes at quietbubble.wordpress.com and has several zines available on subjects including Woody Allen to Japanese animation.

Jack Butler ("I Thought My Father Was Time") is a writer from Alligator, Miss., who lives in Arizona. Regarding his novel *Jujitsu for Christ*, Barry Hannah said, "what wonderful music, what a genius beneath it all. Ranks among the best of all time." His poetry has appeared in the *New Yorker*. He sometimes writes at prettyfakes.com.

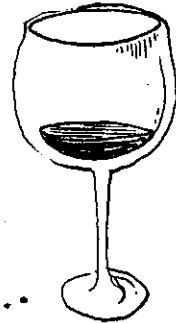
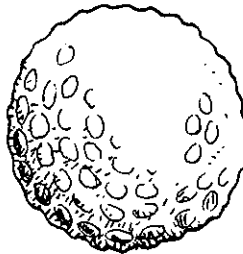
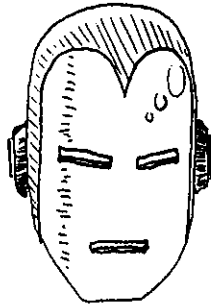
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Patrick Puckett (front cover design and hand-lettering) is an artist from Jackson, Miss., who lives in Austin, Texas. His work is available through GhostHouseDesign.com.



Lost Battles



LOST BATTLES is an artifact from Jackson, Miss.

It is dedicated to Eudora Alice Welty,
an artist from Jackson, Miss.

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The South Is Dead
Long Live the South

MMXI