

# The Word Made Flesh

by Kevin Catalano

And the men came down the mountain, came out the wilderness, cast in furs and skins, the smart of beast and rot and rank on their brown bodies, a fearful mystery in their eyes. Damp early morning, the waiting multitude gasped and backstepped to the lip of the lake crisp at their heels. Women and children and men, they locked arms and shivered not for the cold. From the mountain men charged forth one, fanged and noseless and translucent-eyed, and he spoke, and when he spoke, the creatures of the mount spewed from his mouth. These bobcats these wolves these snakes these squirrels these scorpions these bats these owls these all shrouded the multitude in a deafening cloud. When it was all told, the savage teller reclaimed the creatures into his mouth, and the men retreated back into the wilderness and up the mountain, leaving the lake to lap at the congregation of bones.

# The Actuary

by Robert Swartwood

One day it just showed up on his doorstep. He didn't know where it came from. He thought it was some kind of joke. He was already late for work and stepped over it and hurried to his car. He didn't think about it the rest of the day until he came home and there it still was on his doorstep. He looked up and down the street, then bent and picked it up. What's your name? he asked, and when it didn't move, when it didn't make a sound, he set it back down on the doorstep and went inside. He pushed all thoughts of it from his mind until the next morning, when

he opened his door expecting it to still be there. But it wasn't, and he was sad, and he spent the rest of his day at work playing Minesweeper on the computer.

# Follow

by Lauren Becker

The girl has true pale yellow hair and a smile that makes boys think of light blue Tiffany's boxes. This girl is *the* girl. The line leader, the team leader, the cheerleader, the one who will lead always, we hope, to the very best place we can be.

And when we are with this girl, our teeth are whiter, our legs longer, our voices sweeter. She allows us to be near her without knowing we need permission.

We speak of her. She is television for us to watch. She is so very watchable.

Her eyes are sad and lovely. We practice her melancholy in mirrors. We fail, as we know we will.

We accept our failure. There can only be one. She is the girl

# Problems Pretty Girls With Pretty Faces Face

by Roxane Gay

When I am 27, I see a therapist for the first time. His name is Rafe. He doesn't sit behind a desk. He sits in a chair across from the couch where I sit, staring at me until we are both uncomfortable. I clear my throat, look at my fingernails, prepare lies so I can tell him what he wants to hear. He says, "A girl like you is too

damn pretty to have any problems." He leans back, his chair creaking beneath his weight. He laces his fingers behind his head, pleased with himself. He is pleased with himself. I uncross my legs, pull my skirt up a few inches. I have great legs. I hate him. Because I hate him, I will fuck him and defeat the purpose of being here. Rafe uncrosses his legs, smiles, moves next to me. He is not subtle. He twists his head to the right and drags one finger from the tip of my chin to the small expanse of skin where my blouse falls open. I think about my husband, who is dead, who has left me in this position. He is, he was, he is a lean, hard man—a long distance runner. He ran and ran and ran. All he loved was me and running, and then one day, he ran too far and his heart gave out. "Yes," he says. "You're definitely too pretty for therapy." I look down and see him, already stiff in his pressed khakis. I know how to play my part. I lay back, one arm draped over my head. I kick off my shoes and drag my foot up Rafe's leg and between his thighs. He groans, climbing on top of me. He says things I don't need to remember. I let him fuck me and I stare at the clock, listening to it tick and tock as he breathes heavily and crushes me, covering me with vile airs. My husband would hate this fat man. The therapist comes quickly and I push him off. He falls to the floor and laughs, staying on the shag carpet. He laces his fingers behind his head again. He is pleased with himself.

# Lily

by Joseph Young

The snake tasted the air. Among the cold shale, high desert night, were spots of heat, a rat, a small bird. The snake smelled them, alone, not alone, the bandaged feet of birth.