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## *Texas 5 x 5, Twenty-Five Stories by Five Texas Writers*

### **The way the Stories Open**

#### **Fingers** by Andrew Geyer

When Rooster Folds and Rex Marshall both showed up for the big spring roundup at the Jubak ranch, there was going to be blood. Even Beau Mulebach knew that, and he was eight years old. The only question was whether there would be a killing.

#### **What I Want You to Know** by Terry Dalrymple

If this is about them boys a couple towns south of here what I want you to know is they deserved what they got and a whole lot worse for what they done to my friend Solo Johnson. And you should know I don't like hurting nobody, never hurt a single soul that didn't hurt me first.

#### **Stone Salvation Barn** by Jerry Craven

In the East Texas backwoods where three people could rightly be accused of being a crowd, Jack Tenner counted four buggies, five horses, and a mule, all standing close to the porch, and judging from the dust cloud up the road, there were more folk coming. Churchly folk, Jack reckoned, followers of that tent revival man who had set up his operation over in Woodville to pluck sinners right out of the deep woods and save them, sinners who liked the preacher man's brand of rant.

#### **Gentrification** by Jan Seale

Jordan and Diane have bought a home in the heart of San Antonio. It's a 1910 red-brick Chicago style on a corner just a block off Broadway. At one time all agreed that it was obviously one of the finer homes in north San Antonio, and why not, since it was said to have been built by George Brackenridge, the prominent banker and philanthropist. Its former elegance is attested to by the claw-foot bathtub, the butler's pantry, the massive tall windows, the creaking oak floors, the full basement.

#### **The Weight of Grief** by Kristin vanNamen

The part that bothers me the most is that I don't know if my father blew off the right side of his face or the left. Not knowing makes it hard to imagine.

#### **Trust Jesus** by Andrew Geyer

The son of a bitch, she thought as the connection was broken at the other end of the line. You'd think he could've made another half block.

#### **Murdering an Angel** by Jerry Craven

Darla's mother claimed that during a dry season in Venezuela she had killed a witch doctor. She also said the man was an angel, an idea that worried Darla for years.

# The Sexual Exploits and Eventual Disappearance of Cole Walker, Brilliant Bio-technologist

by Terry Dalrymple

Hopelessly romantic as a boy, Cole Walker was nonetheless destined by his family of scientific geniuses to become an accomplished bio-technologist. "I want to write novels," he once told his father, an inventor of twenty-three automated gadgets, seven of them Ronco's top sellers.

"Nonsense," his father replied while studying his intricate drawings of an automated banana slicer.

## Just a Man by Jan Seale

It certainly was not the alligator that was making Cresencio feel the way he was feeling. Actually, he could say, at this juncture in his life, that he was proud to be the alligator's keeper, even though it didn't belong to him but to the Anglo owners he worked for.

## Winter Ice and The Mexican by Kristin vanNamen

Margaret Thompson tells her boyfriend Bill he needs a costume for Thanksgiving. "It's a family tradition." She slides off his bed and limps naked toward the window. She pulls back a corner of the heavy drapery and pokes her fingers between the blinds to look out.

## Second Coming by Andrew Geyer

The norther blew in dry, blasting across the plains and kicking up the dustcloud Clara Nell had watched out her windows since noon, the sky hazy brown in the north and the sunset angry red, an omen. Dust hissed into the mesquites with the early November dark, whispering of change, the wind in the eaves howling that winter had come early. Clara Nell shut her windows tight and turned up the TV.

## Brenda Without Skin by Jerry Craven

Kent Day first noticed Noland Fritch in the Dallas International airport while boarding a flight to Denver. And in Denver, he saw Noland get on the same plane he did for Seattle. It wasn't hard to notice Noland because of his height, exaggerated by a white Stetson, and what Kent regarded as his almost comical western dress.

## Brenda with Skin by Terry Dalrymple

When summer began between my junior and senior year in high school, my life felt complicated. Then Mrs. Grogan stripped naked in front of me and complicated it even more.

## Searching the Scriptures by Jan Seale

Inside the bus station, Elizabeth tucked back a wisp of light brown hair and adjusted the baby in his sling on her chest. She checked the zipper on her purse and counted the boy and girl. It had been quite a walk from the motel. Someone had said three or four blocks. She counted seven.

## No Amount of Shame by Kristin vanNamen

I wanted to be an alcoholic.

I tell my husband this as he steps toward me and pours coffee into my mug. When I don't say anything else, he looks at me. He's waiting for the rest of it, the funny part—the part that will amuse him.

## Circus by Terry Dalrymple

Folks in Phlattsland, Texas, referred to the Macks as "that queer bunch out on the county line." Some said their life was a circus. Like that youngest boy, Millard, they said, born on the kitchen table while the family ate supper.

## **Spider Lilies** by Jan Seale

She closed the door to Brother Dale's office and cooled her cheeks with her palms. Brother Dale had smiled his sweet smile and said yes it was all right for widows to remarry. He had leaned back in his desk chair, cleaning his fingernails with a letter opener, and studied the question a minute after Hattie Mae had asked it.

## **Sorrow Causes Crazy** by Kristin vanNamen

They said it was my chicken. A sorry-looking thing, orange and brown, with a row of rust colored feathers that didn't lay right, that crisscrossed and stuck out at the top of its head and along the arch of its back. The thing looked half-pecked.

A baby chick would have been okay. Baby chicks are a warm sunshine yellow, soft and new. But this pecked-at looking thing in my backyard was not okay.

## **Things Roman** by Andrew Geyer

It's often difficult for parents-to-be to decide whether they would rather have a boy or a girl. But for Cecil Jubak, the answer was clear: have boys, not girls.

## **Canoeing the Hill Country** by Jerry Craven

Leaning Bear read the sign on the bridge, "Colorado River," and he thought about a saying his father liked to repeat: "names determine destiny."

"So," Leaning Bear turned to the passenger side of the pickup as if his father were sitting there, "the river will be red because of its name, right?"

## **The Boy** by Terry Dalrymple

The woman fills the television screen: uncombed, stringy hair to her shoulders, tiny dark eyes peering from her bloated face, folds of fat drooping down her thick neck. "My poor dog," she says, "lying there dead and bloody and the boy's stepdaddy the same, and that boy just put that gun right to his own temple and shot his own self dead. He'd of proly shot me too if I hadn't went to the Sonic for them fries and Dr. Pepper."

## **Mineral Spirits** by Andrew Geyer

The house smells of death.

Not decay. The body was kept at the funeral home where they pumped it full of formaldehyde or whatever they pump bodies full of once the life goes out. No, it's the smell of food that reminds Erin of death and dying.

## **Burying Juliana** by Jerry Craven

Not long after I had covered the coffin, I stood near the cemetery gate watching Uncle Starkey dig up his daughter.

## **The Birdhouse** by Jan Seale

The first afternoon Leland began work on the purple martin house, Agnes came home from her shopping thirty minutes early. She rolled in the driveway and rolled up the garage door with her automatic opener and rolled in with her Buick and would have rolled right over Leland standing there at his workbench if he hadn't held up his hand and shouted at the last minute.

## **Birth** by Kristin vanNamen

I do not know how to describe my father's heart. I do not know the words to describe it. It is a limitation. Of words.