

Adam's Hat Trick
Story excerpt from
CHLORA'S LITTLE GOODY BOOK OF THE MONTH: *September*
Texts and sculptures copyright 2010 Ginger Henry Geyer
Photography by Rice R. Jackson, III

** indicates links in the online version, to be released soon on
www.gingergeyer.com)*

.....Chlora's at her Grandmother's house on a rainy Sunday afternoon...

Chlora wiped off the window pane with the hem
of the burgundy velvet drapes.

In the reflection, she practiced her best poker face,
then noticed a curious overlay of images.

The bookshelves behind her appeared on the glass,
superimposed on the view outside—it was lush
with the greens and blues of afternoon.

The montage of books and nature broke up the space
into flat planes, like the Cezanne landscape paintings in her book. *

When you're looking for something, it pops up everywhere.
She glanced at her book again.

It was the one on "French Impressionism: A New Way of Seeing" *
that she had checked out last month. It had practically popped off
the shelf and into her hands, it was so striking. But Stogie
chewed up the corner of it, which meant Chlora had to empty her piggybank
to pay for the damage. But then the nice librarian gave her the book.
The slobbery teeth marks certainly didn't deter Chlora
from flipping through the pages.



On the last page it showed the same picture
that was on Granddaddy's wall right here.

Figure the odds on that!

How do you beat the odds?

Mr. and Mrs. Odd, who are you?

Just what is luck anyhow? Do lucky charms help?

Are there any coincidences in the big scheme of things?

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The picture on the wall was just an old poster, curled up at the bottom,
of Cézanne's "Card Players". They seemed quite at home
here in the silent smokin' room.

Granddaddy and his old geezer friends used to play
the holy game of poker in here on Saturday nights.

They told Grandmother they were just playing bridge.

She had seen too many Sin City movies and TV westerns

and thought poker was all gambling and no skill

and caused best friends to cheat and

shoot each other in the face, as if they were duck hunting or something.

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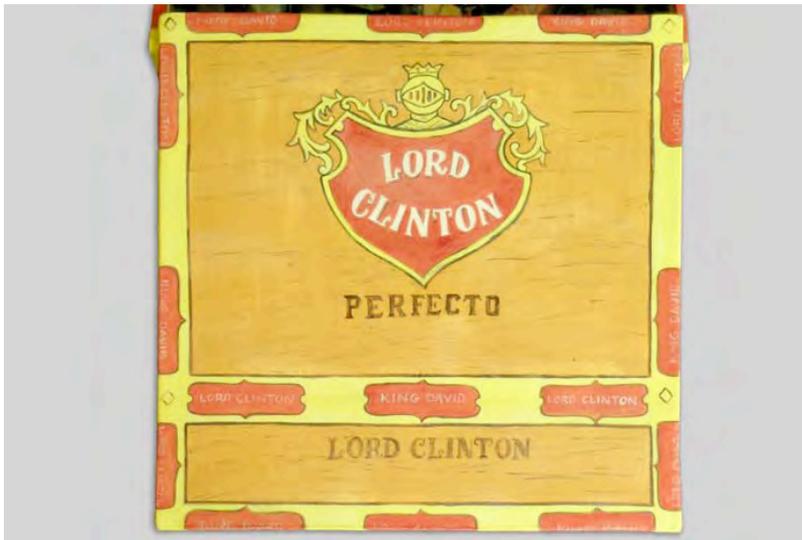
*Ginger Henry Geyer, "Vice", 2006, glazed porcelain with gold
and graphite on 5" x 7" card*

Chlora couldn't tell what the big deal was.
Watching them play poker was like watching paint dry.
It was no more chancy than playing the stock market
or practicing superstitions.
Just being alive is risky, but this was not high stakes poker.
It was something like playing 52 Pick Up or winning a door prize. *
Chlora won a raffle once herself, and got a year's supply
of rabbit feed. And another time she walked in a new store
and was the one-hundredth customer. For that, she won
a ladies' dress that was five times too big.
So Granddaddy called her his lucky trump card.

Granddaddy and his friends never talked much,
just concentrated on their cards and drank wine.
They would shuffle their feet like slowly shuffled cards
and try to maintain a straight face,
But as Granddaddy said, it all leaks out of the eyes.
Chlora recalled the sound of their poker chips chattering
as they fiddled with stacks of them.
It sounded like the lazy chatter of squirrels.
They chuckled about smoker poker
while they puffed on their cigars and pipes
until the room swelled with a sweet haze of cherry tobacco.
That fragrance still lingered here,
blended with the musty smell of old books,
and embedded in the mahogany walls and drapes.
The room was a small cathedral coated with centuries of incense
that carried the prayers of the people into every nook and cranny
that God stuck his nose into.

He had been playing hooky nookie instead of waging war.
Which was worse?

*



(detail of back of cigar box, from "In the Spring when the Kings Go to War")

This cigar box was not anything like the sedate Old Masters
posing for their group portrait.
Bathsheba most certainly did not look like a brazen hussy here.
She was staring into the dark and she had a sad look on her face
which said it all: sleeping with King David would be no bed of roses,
and it would set off the butterfly effect.
Chlora had heard about those butterflies in
South American that could launch
a tornado in Kansas, sort of like a lie that gets bigger
as it travels the world.
The smokescreen just swells until everybody chokes.

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Rembrandt van Rijn, "Bathsheba",

Chlora took a big puff of a cigar once
and the smoke came out her nose,
her mouth, *and* her ears, which was enough
for her to swear off of smoking for life.
She wanted to use that cigar box to store her jokers, but it
was still full of cigars. She could use the nearby bowl
that held fruit, but it looked too pretty to disturb.



*Ginger Henry Geyer, "In the Spring When the Kings Go to War", 2003
Glazed porcelain with gold, 9" x 9" x 8"
Private collection, Santa Fe*

Instead she found an old ball cap to put her cards in.
It was the one Granddaddy wore when he mowed the lawn.
He let her ride in a small trailer behind the tractor mower.
Sometimes he looked asleep at the wheel,
and he taught her to whistle while you work, like the Seven Dwarfs.
Who besides traffic cops and lifeguards get to whistle while they work?

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Ginger Henry Geyer, "Adam's Hat Trick" (Trinity University cap with cards), 2007. Hat 3 3/4" x 10 1/2" x 5 1/2"

.....after figuring out five ways to whistle, Chlora comes up with five ways to see.....

Fifth, Chlora could see things differently by simply altering her eyeballs. Squinting sharpened her focus as did pulling back her eyelids. And, by jiggling the Jell-O inside her eyeballs,

*

Chlora could also focus on different depths of field.
If you look at the surface of a bush you see its leaves,
farther in, you see its branches,
and beyond that you see what's behind it all.

*

The book explained that Cezanne did the same thing with his landscapes.

*

Chlora decided to see what she could do with her collection of joker cards,
flat as the red rooftops in Cezanne's paintings.

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Most of the jokers looked like court jesters
who performed for kings and queens.

*

If their humor got too truthful, they could get booted out of the kingdom
or get their heads chopped off like John the Baptist.

*

She shuffled the wild cards and told them
they'd be better off by seeking the kingdom within.

*

Those wild cards shouldn't be domesticated,
but if they were to act like a true deck,
they needed a more uniform look on their backsides.

Chlora removed the thumbtacks from the poster of The Card Players.

She found a ruler, pencil, scissors and glue in the drawer.

She drew a grid on the poster and cut it into card size rectangles.

Then she carefully stuck them to the backs of the jokers.



The picture, now fragmented like a bad case of Postmodernism,
was more puzzling than ever. She couldn't make head or tails of it.
She brought over her book and discovered
that you had to look closer than ever,
because there was not just one picture of those Card Players, but five.

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The first painting had five people, then four people,
and the last three paintings got down to the final table of two.
The paintings were like triplets who weren't quite identical twins.

*

Those card players eliminated the element of time.
One might be a blue chip player with an
ace up his sleeve, but there didn't seem to be any
cheating hearts telling on them.

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Barnes Collection



Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City



Courtauld Museum, London



Embiricos Collection, Lausanne, Switzerland



Musee d'Orsay, Paris

Rather, it was like time lapse photography where two or three had gathered together. It felt like something was in the midst of them,

*

a Third Thing—and yes, there it was, a wine bottle, smack in the center of the picture where a third man had sat before.

*

The card players' hands didn't quite touch,
but they got closer with each picture,
and the wine bottle seemed to bridge the gap.
The table seemed to be on fire, like a Presence seen.
The two old friends weren't looking at the table or at each other,
but at their cards, and they were down to just a few.
They had put their cards on the table and were calmly
searching them. You gotta get to know the hand you have been dealt.

Chlora decided that the man on the left
had become ordained in the process,
as his shirt had evolved into a priest's collar.
This might happen to her Granddaddy's shirts still in his closet;
she would go check on them later.
The whole scene had the solemnity of holy communion,
even if it was just a game.
Something was unseen, yet you know it when it's there.

Cezanne challenged Chlora to come up with a sixth way of seeing.
Cezanne apparently had eyes in the back of his head,
like her mother did. He could paint oranges and apples
with their backside and front side showing all at once.
Chlora attempted to curve her eyes around things
but it made her go cross-eyed.
She wished she was an owl, and could turn her entire head around,
but then it might pop off, so seeing sideways would have to suffice.

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Perhaps the sixth type of vision
was seeing nothing and becoming invisible,
like love overtaking a body and floating it away,
as when Jesus ascended.
Matter and energy take turns transforming all the time,
so she should try it. This would require the intensity
of X-ray vision in reverse.
Darkness would help and silence was crucial.

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Chlora found two wine corks in the ashtray and plugged her ears.
She crawled under the heavy oak table.
She covered her eyes with her cupped hands.
She opened her eyes and couldn't see a darn thing.

She could hear nothing, no-thing.
She concentrated, held her breath, and felt herself
becoming part of the table, and part of the floor,
and disappearing into the dark.
She pinched herself to be sure she hadn't evaporated.
Then she attempted a faint bird call for morning doves.
In the waiting, a tingly, pale whistle replied in her right ear.
The nothing shown brightly and Chlora was quite sure that *she*
was being seen, searched, and known.
It must either God or Granddaddy since the moon wasn't out yet.
She rose up.
The light was as thick as sherry, no talk needed.

This sixth way, stop-look-and listen,
set off a challenge that now must be matched
with a sixth way of whistling.
On the shelf there was an empty wine bottle.
Wine was off-limits, but it just sat there, being itself,
gathering in the light. She knew how to blow
into a pop bottle, but this bottle was bigger than life.
She filled up her lungs, summoned all of her powers,
raised the bottle to her lips and blew
downward into it with all her heart, soul, and strength.
The green glass resounded with a low, rich moan like the
color of the draperies. The sound smelled like the fruit of the spirit. *

OLD DOG

This was a clue that next she must work on her sense of smell.
Maybe Granddaddy's old bloodhound, Howard, could show her the way.
If love is blind, then love deserves to have a good seeing-eye dog. *
A good dog like Howard could help you see your own blind spots.
She figured the low pitch of the bottle was just right for Howard, so
she did it again and hollered:

*"Howard-be-thy-name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven."* *

Howard came bounding down the hall, his toenails clicking
on the wood floors. He was such a doggy dog,
and he smelled like a wet dog, which he was.
Howard had three tennis balls in his mouth.

It looked like his stretched out rubbery mouth
was full of huge yellow teeth.
He dropped them at once: LOVE, PLAY, and SERVE
bobbled over the floor.

*



Love, Play, Serve
Glazed porcelain

No doubt about it, Howard was top dog, the hound of heaven.
Once when he was lame, he'd been taken to
The Blessing of the Animals,
and the priest goofed up and baptized him
instead of just blessing him. And he quit limping.
Since then they all knew Howard was a miracle dog.
Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks?
But like Granddaddy, Howard too would die some day
and go to dog heaven where he could chase squirrels
and tennis balls all day long.

*

*

Howard and Chlora together would discover six ways
to sniff out a sacrament.
Later they could work on touching and tasting till kingdom come.
Chlora shook paws with Howard and hummed
"I Wanna Hold Your Hand" and segued
into "O Taste and See, How Gracious the Lord Is".

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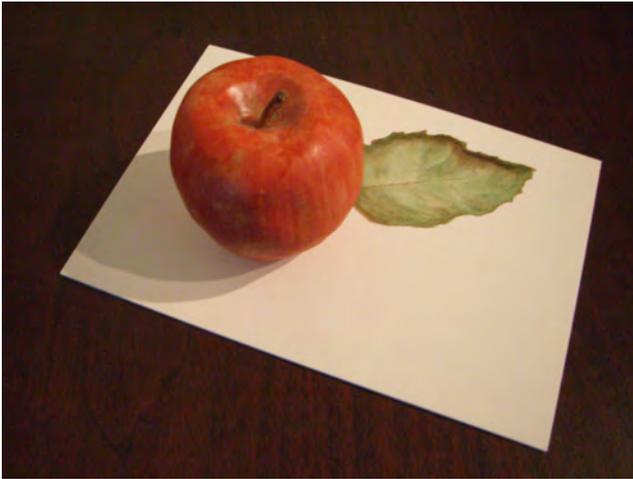
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APPLE

Howard whined and to prevent him from upsetting the apple cart,

she tossed him a tennis ball.
She decided to treat herself to an apple to keep the doctor away.
Apples had been much maligned by the Adam and Eve story,
but Chlora had read somewhere that apples didn't even grow
in the Middle East back then.

*
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Apple and Leave

She selected a perfect red apple from
the fruit bowl on the shelf.
It was like a still life, or life still, still born,
asking questions down to the core.
Granddaddy would eat the whole thing, seeds and all,
wink at her and say you are the apple of my eye.
Chlora turned it around and felt the apple's shape change in her hands.
It smelled even better than an apple should, and she took a decisive,
toothsome bite, listening for the drippy,
nameless sound that only apples make.
Like that poem in her book, Cezanne was right, apples have it all.

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*Cezanne, grave man,
pondered the scene
and saw it with passion
as orange and green,
and weighted his strokes
with days of decision,
and founded on apples
theologies of vision.*

(John Updike, excerpt from "Les Saints Nouveaux" from *Telephone Poles*,
Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963.)



She stuffed the jokers into Granddaddy's hat.
They were all in this together.
Who knows? Maybe there is a sixth sense too.
It's all in the cards.