



# LAURIE STONE

## *Canal*

**128 words**

At seven or eight, I would walk from our house to buy cigarettes for my mother. We lived in the canal section of Long Beach, where twice a day low tide bit the air, and I would skip along the six blocks to a little row of shops, careful not to land on cracks. One day, as I crossed a bridge, I saw an army of horseshoe crabs camped on the muddy sand with their ancient helmet bodies and pointed stingers. One crab was on its back like a giant beetle, its little legs wriggling, and I hated it. But as the other crabs scuttled toward the water, leaving it behind, I entered the abandoned crab and forgot myself, and I was startled by the feeling of peace.

## **Jaguar**

**75 words**

I knew a man who drove a Jaguar. I wouldn't let him pay for me. He wouldn't eat where I could afford. I was fascinated by his having so much. He was confounded by my settling for so little. He said, "I know what you like in bed," and I became aroused, although you wouldn't think so to look at him. He tore the strap of my dress in his car. Otherwise he was uninteresting.



## **Confusion**

**111 words**

I told Beth her mother had died, returning knowledge that belonged to her. Her mother had been dead for nine years, but Beth had forgotten, and she grieved as if for the first time. I thought, “Nothing Beth did or did not do caused a tree to fall on her head.” Her brain bled, and air seeped in. This is a story without meaning, yet meaning has been attached to it. Beth’s confusion is like an obscure piece of narrative carved on a rock. The words of people with brain damage are like petroglyphs. They mean something or they mean nothing, but they seem significant because they are mysterious and beautiful.

## **Young Man**

**175 words**

I was a young man in an asylum, intense and nervous, and my name was on a list of those who would die. I circulated among the more mobile patients, one a dark-haired man, shorter than me and muscular, a real man, and I depended on him because he seemed to know about the outside world and how ordinary people behaved. I was shivering on a road, and rain was dripping down my neck. I needed clothes, and we went to a shop on St Mark’s Place, where the clerks began to whisper about us. We ran. We ran to the suburbs and threw ourselves backwards into a field of snow. It was our only escape, and we held our breath under the cold whiteness that was almost like death. The snow became a sea, and we swam for our lives to an island. If I stayed there long enough, everyone from my past would show up. There wasn’t a person, living or dead, tender or wounding, I would have minded catching a glimpse of.