



California writer Amanda Yskamp’s “The Sentry” is the second in a series of broadsheets leading into celebration of THE2NDHAND’s 10+ years’ publishing. The accidentally murderous pit bull in “Sentry” stands guard in a robust section of new work that will lead a book we’re asking readers to help fund via a [Kickstarter.com](#) campaign to raise \$2,000+ to cover printing costs. Gifts for donors are multi-tiered according to donation level, starting at \$14, the cover price of the book itself, and running on up to \$100 levels. We hope you’ll pick up a copy. Visit [Kickstarter.com](#), search “THE2NDHAND” prior to Feb. 16. Yskamp lives in and writes from the 10-year floodplain of California’s Russian River. Her work has been featured in, among others, *Threepenny Review*, *Hayden Review*, *Caketrain*, *Redivider*, and the *Georgia Review*.

****BACK ISSUES** are available as pdf downloads at [THE2NDHAND.com](#) or for \$2 (or three stamps) per issue to editor/publisher Todd Dills at the Nashville address below. If you like surprises, a sampler package of 5 issues is available for \$4, and lifetime subscriptions for donations of \$30 or more. We shall survive either fire, flood or earthquake, be assured (in the event of nuclear holocaust, all bets are off). Consider it (paypal todd@the2ndhand.com or send check by mail; info: THE2NDHAND.com). **RSS:** the2ndhand.com/rss/the2ndhand.xml.

****WRITERS:** send prose submissions (2,500 words or less Web, 5,000 print) to THE2NDHAND, c/o Todd Dills, 1430 Roberts Ave., Nashville, TN 37206 (todd@the2ndhand.com) or C.T. Ballentine (email only: ctballentine@gmail.com). THE2NDHAND is editors Todd Dills, C.T. Ballentine, Jacob Knabb, **FAQ editor** Mickey Hess, and **janitor** R. Beady, when Harold Ray’s on another of his benders.



I CAN’T SLEEP, THINK-
ing about everything, hearing the wind
groaning like it’s got food poisoning or
something. Cars passing on the road cast their
searchlights around the corners of our room,
bringing first the bureau, then the chair, heaped
with clothes, out of the shadows. The mirror
frames the light and flashes back. It’s like the
headlights are going through people’s houses
looking for something, someone.

Does any of it bother him? Not a bit. He
sleeps stretched beside me, his broad ribs rising
and falling, his flank showing a line of hard, lean
muscle. He breathes with his whole body. I run a
hand over his side, feeling how solid and warm he
is, lie against him, my leg thrown over his hip,
bringing my nose in to his neck where he smells
like corn chips. He’s there to make me feel safe,
but do I? I don’t know. I love having him here,
but in a world where anything can break, nothing
is ever really safe, is it?

He moves under my weight, stretches a paw
out against the headboard, which is loose and hits
the wall with a dull whack. He opens an eye for an
instant, rates the danger at zero, then closes it
again. He returns to sleep with a low grumbling
growl.

Ray bought X for me right after he took grave-
yard at the plant. You’ll need somebody here to
look after you, he said, though I told him I could
look after myself and the kids. It wasn’t like I was
helpless or anything. But he insisted, you know.
Soon as folks realize you’re here by yourself,
there’s no telling who will come around, he said,
which I figured was the real reason all along. Ray
is jealous to a fault.

It had to be a pit bull, of course, something
fierce, Ray kept saying, though truth be told, X is
a sweetheart unless you get between him and his
food. But he sure does look like he means busi-
ness, especially wearing that spiked collar Ray
bought him. His head is like a brick with teeth,
and his body is totally muscled. Kind of sexy, real-
ly. I remember when Ray looked like that. Not an
ounce of fat. Sometimes X gets a little nippy with
the kids, but they provoke him. I tell them not to,
but they do, teasing him, taking his bunny.

Actually, there are times when I feel like giving
those two of mine a bite, the way they act and all.

Ray Jr.—we call him *Raymond* to tell him and
big Ray apart—well, he’s a real boy-boy. He’s five
years old but already he can swear like a grownup,
which I think makes him sound trashy, but Ray
and his buddies just laugh, call him “little man,”
and all that, give him sips of beer, blow pot smoke
in his face. It pisses me off, but what can I do?

We also have a daughter, Vondra. She’ll be ten
next month. I’m glad to have a daughter I can
dress up and go to the mall with and things like
that, but really Vondra’s a daddy’s girl at heart, a
real princess right down to her white fur muff and
her canopy bed. I think she sees me as a rival or
like some kind of unpleasant but necessary fact in
her life. Sometimes I think she looks right through
me, you know? Whatever. They’re my kids and I
love them to death. But still, sometimes I just look
at them and wonder who they are and how they
happened to be here. It’s weird. I’m a pretty young
mom, 28 years old, so they’re almost more like a
younger brother and sister than my kids, you know.
Ray’s 41, so he’s the one to draw the line. He’s the
one who usually disciplines them.

How’d Ray and me get together? I guess you
can say Ray saved me from my family. At least
that’s what I thought at the time. I was one of
seven kids, close to the end, only Mary after me,
so when my Ma called out for me to get inside or
whatever, she got to me only after a bunch of my
brothers’ and sisters’ names had been tried and
discarded.

But Ray, Ray made me feel special. I thought
he saw me like nobody else could.

The day we met, I was working the front regis-
ter at the Clam Bake, wearing my turquoise and
blue polyester tunic thing, the visor we all wore,
when he leaned forward to read my badge and
said, Lola, L.O.L.A Lola, his eyes shooting blue
sparks (his eyes are Ray’s best feature and he
knows it), I’m in the mood for
the Seafarer tonight. That was
fried clams, fried oysters,
breaded fried Pollock, slaw
and fries for \$8.99.

Yes sir, coming right up.
And he came back
Wednesday, Friday, and
Sunday, and that’s when he
asked me if I’d like to join
him after my shift to walk
along the dock.

Like I said, he was older
than me by 13 years. I didn’t
know the exact number of

the sentry + + +

by Amanda Yskamp

years then, of course, but I knew
the guy was older and, I don’t
know, I just thought he was really
sophisticated. His beard and his
kind of Chinese eyes—he was
really handsome and different
looking. The first night, we
walked out together and he gave
me his cap to wear because the
wind was raging and my hair was
blowing around my face, the ends
hitting my cheeks like sharp little
pebbles. He didn’t touch me, but
I could feel he wanted to. Once
he reached out like he wanted to
brush the hair out of my eyes,
but he pulled his hand back.
Instead he lit a cigarette, cupping
his hand around the flame and
hunching forward like some cowboy in a
Marlboro ad. Then he handed it to me. I’d never
smoked before, except for a puff here and there
off my brothers’ smokes, but I took the cigarette
from him. I’m up to two packs a day now. Thanks
a lot, Ray.

Lola, he said on our third night out, you’re like
a lighthouse casting your beacon on the water.
You can imagine what that sounded like to a girl
of 17. I was pregnant before I even got my learn-
er’s permit. Life falls into its ditches, places you
never knew existed until you’re in them and
there’s no choice out. Later on, you can some-



il by **Andrew Davis**, cre-
ator of the long-running
Hideous Bounty series at
THE2NDHAND.com—
see below for deets on
his contribution to our
10th-anniversary book,
upcoming later in 2011

times trace things back to a certain seesaw second.
Put your weight on one end, it goes one way. Put
it on the other, and well, you’re going down
another way.

His penis—I get to use that word! I’m his
wife—it was the first I’d ever known, and I guess I
thought its rise to full hardness was my own magic.
The lightest touch and there it was, like what do
they call it? An ingot. An ingot with a pure value
in its hardness, its own direction. It wasn’t only
that, of course. I’m not a sex maniac or anything.
We had our own world back then. We were always
going crazy, but more than that, it was like we had
continued next page > > >

COMING 2011 ALL HANDS ON celebrating THE2NDHAND’s first decade

Preorder the book (\$14) and contribute to
the project via [Kickstarter.com](#), search “All
Hands On”, by mid-day Feb. 16. The 300-plus-
page tome, collecting previously unpublished sto-
ries by the likes of past contributors **Nadria
Tucker**, **Patrick Somerville** (*The Cradle*) and **Fred
Sasaki** (the force behind the long-running Chicago
Printers Ball) as well as new faces like **Amanda
Yskamp** (featured in this broadsheet), **Ben Stein**
and others. Special sections over the bulk of the
book are occupied in most instances by multiple shorts from our best repeat writ-
ers, from **Joe Meno**, **Tobias Carroll**, Somerville and **Al Burian** to **Heather Palmer**,
Jill Summers, **Kate Duva** and our longtime FAQ editor **Mickey Hess** (*Big Wheel at
the Cracker Factory*). For the full details, visit the2ndhand.com/books.html.

From T2H coeditor C.T. Ballentine’s introduction: “I am a drawing. The me who is the I behind this particular narra-
tive, a lone example of the myriad *Is* and *mes* lurking behind facades of effusive fictions—tales meant to woo or terrify
or fascinate or educate, but mostly to woo—I am not, like most of my peers, wearing corduroy. I do not have irreverent
hair, leather pants or a funny, faded t-shirt which does not fit me. I have neither blog nor temp job. I do not have any
fading dignity that I might attempt to wear well. Mostly I am graphite showered in India ink. That is all. / You will not
see me in this book, at least not in any corporeal sense. There are drawings, to be sure, but I am not among them. I can
not, at this point, advise you to turn to page such and such and admire the flowing intricacies of my crosshatch, which
is a shame, really. I have a well-made crosshatch. / The woman who made my crosshatch is not in this book either,
which should come as no surprise. People are not often found within the pages of books, due largely to limitations of
size. It would be difficult to fit even a baby, which is the smallest of people, inside of a book. Imagine trying to shove
the baby into an unabridged dictionary: it would cry first and foremost. It would teethe on the plastic-coated alphabet
tabs. After a moment it would curl up in the Qs and take a nap, which you would maybe think was the end of your
problems until the baby began to vomit and excrete, which babies are wont to do, and the moisture rendered the ink
illegible. Large parts of the English language would disappear. People would forget about puppies. People would forget
about pewter. People would forget about people. Parallel and perpendicular would cease to be. Nothing would ever
again be separate or the same. Roads would collide and thousands would die, waiting for paramedics who would never
arrive. My crosshatch would be ruined.”

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invented our own element, some new kind of air only we could breathe. Everything was funny or tragic or drunk on what we talked about and what we did together. I never for a minute doubted that Ray was “it” for me.

Then, of course, Ray beat up my dad and how romantic is that? I’m not kidding. My dad caught us doing it beyond the garage where the wildflowers and weeds grew high enough, we thought, to hide us. Wrong. Dad grabbed Ray by the shoulders and hauled him off me. Hit him before he knew what hit him, hit him while Ray still had that fuck-look on his face, close-focused, not aware of anything else. Of course I was going crazy, scrambling for my clothes and screaming, quit it, Daddy, quit it! But what my dad didn’t count on was Ray would fight back totally butt naked and strong enough to decide things once and for all. Both of them swinging and grunting, Ray with 10 years of youth over my dad, and pissed to be pulled away from what he always loved best. I’ll never forget that picture of him, his knees capped in dirt, his chest flexing with each punch, his balls swinging. My dad got it pretty bad. He still has a scar along his lip from where Ray split it with that silver skull he wears on his middle finger. I had to move out after that, of course. But you know, my dad got over it by the time Ray and me went down to the courthouse. Now he and Ray are tight. Go figure.

I DON’T KNOW WHAT time it is now—the clock’s battery’s been dead for weeks—but that doesn’t matter because I haven’t really been sleeping lately. From the look of it, it’s close to dawn. The sky’s darkness is kind of loosening, coming apart. Ray will be back soon. He usually gets in just as the kids are getting up. He’s climbing into bed right when they’re eating their cereal. No wonder we’re all turned inside out. X is twitching in his sleep now, running, going hunh! hunh! from deep in his barrel chest. I have to move to the other side of the bed or get raked by one of his claws.

He’s a good dog, X is. Well, mostly. He loves Ray, that’s for sure, has from the very start. We had to drive all the way to Walpole to get him from a place that breeds the best pit bulls, that’s *best* according to Ray and his buddy Flip, who’s got two pits, Schlitz and Labatt. *Best* meaning that they’re not inbred, they get fed twice a day, they’re not five to a cage, that kind of thing. We brought Raymond and Vondra, of course. The kids were so psyched about getting a puppy, but Ray kept telling them, this wouldn’t be just a pet, it would be an alarm system, a sentry. A what? they wanted to know. A sentry, Ray said, someone watching for something to happen. Like you, Vondra said, because Ray’s a security guard over at Pilgrim Nuclear. That’s right, sweetheart, like me, he said and lifted her up over his head, though she must be 75 pounds now and her skirt all flying up to show her panties.

When we drove up the dirt road leading to Neighborhood Bullies, all those caged dogs sent up an ungodly chorus of barking and howling. See. See, Ray said. They let you know somebody’s coming up on you. Almost since Ray started on graveyard, he’s been getting more and more paranoid. He thinks people are tapping our phones and he speaks in a kind of code when he’s talking to the guys and sometimes when he’s talking to me. From pretty early on, he’s gone through my pockets and stuff, looking I guess for signs I was cheating on him, which I never did but that once. Once is all it takes, though, right? It was Duane I went with, one single night after my shift at Wilkinson’s Steak House. Call it curiosity, wanting to know what men were, apart from my man. Or you could say I felt flattered.

Once isn’t half bad for nearly ten years of marriage. But Ray hit the roof. He didn’t rough me up or anything; he would never do that. But what he did was maybe worse. He made me feel as though I could never be trusted again. That’s what he said, that I’d killed off the Lola he used to know. I felt terrible that I hurt him so bad. I did everything to win him back. He did come back to me, back to our bed, but he said, you know, girl, your sexiness is a kind of weapon. I don’t mind dying, in fact I crave it, but you turn your sights on anyone else again... Didn’t have to finish his sentence. I told him I never would. It was him I wanted.

Another thing about that one time: Ray wouldn’t let me work after that. He took the late shift so he could make time and a half and I could stay home to work on my home business. A while ago I told him an idea about customizing purses for ladies. You know, making the right-size pockets for their cell phones and their cigarettes, or whatever they carry with them. The idea just occurred to me one day, but to Ray it was what I was going to do. Truth be told, most days I stayed home reading books I got from the library, never even laying one finger on my sewing machine, but I know he’s happy thinking I’m doing the groundwork for my “home business.” Anyway, to stay up on his shift at Pilgrim,

Ray’s recently been popping Black Beauties, which god knows can fry your sense of what’s what, not to mention what it does to his stomach. That guy is bound for an ulcer, if he doesn’t watch out. He comes home most mornings tweaked and tired and more than a little crazed, talking about nuclear secrets, though he’s not exactly Full Access, being only a security guard. There was a time he talked about going back to college to get his degree in nuclear engineering—he’s always had a knack for science—but time’s passing.

Back to the Bullies: when I laid eyes on X, I guess it was love at first sight. He’s a merle, which means he’s kind of spotted with really pale blue eyes. Ugly in a cute way. And the way he stood there, four-square, you know, low to the ground, like a beer keg or something, and completely alive, I was hooked. The kids ran up to him and he jumped up and put his paws on Raymond’s shoulders; damn near knocked him down. Raymond was only four then. Clearly X wasn’t a puppy at all. Actually, he wasn’t really for sale—they said he was for breeding, being so rare—but Ray worked it out. Ray could make things happen, when nobody else could. And that’s how we got X, named after the old punk band Ray loved. You should hear me and Ray go at it with our voices all high and baby-talky, loving up our dog. It’s kind of sick, I know, but we just can’t help ourselves.

In a way, he’s like our third child. We take him everywhere with us, and usually he’s a gentleman, but there was that one time at Lou’s house when he forgot his manners in a major way. Lou, that’s Louise, is my big sister, second in the lineup, and she lives just the next town over in Bourne. Every summer she throws a big bash and everyone’s there—all the brothers and sisters and their families and friends from high school show up. Lou had a hysterectomy when she was 14 years old, so she likes to have a lot of kids around her. And all the kids love her house too with the creek out back and those good climbing trees. And this time Lou had even gotten a few of her friends from the bar to play.

I have to admit, we all were pretty loaded. It was one of those sweltering summer nights we get on the South Shore, and we were out on the back lawn, under the stars, lots of little colorful Tiki lanterns all around. A lot of the girls were dancing with their shirts off, me included, that is until Ray’s buddy Frank took to spinning me around, and almost got his jaw busted for his interest. My shirt went back on toot sweet, let me tell you. But anyway, we all were dancing like crazy and the kids were all off somewhere getting dirty and wet and poison-ivied and mosquito-bitten, par for the course at these kinds of parties, when suddenly we hear this horrendous sound of snarling and screaming and barking.

X had gotten hold of Regina, Lou’s Siamese, and was in the process of opening up her side to the tune of 16 stitches and five hundred dollars out of Ray’s pocket, and he hates to spend money like you wouldn’t believe. If that damn cat hadn’t antagonized him, he said. To which Lou screamed, Your dog’s a fucking menace! On and on, so they didn’t talk for months. They’re like that anyway, the two of them. Sometimes I think Lou’s just jealous. She’d like to have a man like Ray, like to have some kids, which she can’t of course, unless she adopts. She really dotes on both the kids, gives them big noisy presents for birthdays and Christmas, lets them stay up all hours when they’re at her house, eating junk food, watching movies that give them nightmares later, I tell her, but does she listen?

That night I remember coming back, basically pouring the kids into their beds all filthy and full of burrs, and then Ray and me going at it like we hardly ever got to anymore since we had kids. We didn’t even make it upstairs to our bedroom. He grabbed me by the ankles and took me down right there on the stairs. He had me unzipped and my ass tilted up to take him before I could even gasp. Some people get turned on by jealousy. I’m not one of those people. It just makes me feel sick and angry and kind of lost. But Ray, he’s another story. He just has to think I’m looking at some guy or the guy is looking at me (which he’s sure happens almost any public place we go), and it gets him hot. He wants to drag me

home and fuck me. Of course, with the kids around, he has to control himself, and then he might just sneak a hand up my skirt and finger me for a second, or reach into my bra and pinch my breast. I guess there are worse things than having a jealous husband.

I FLIP MY PILLOW to the cool side and lay back down. I don’t know, it’s like all the speed Ray’s taking is having some kind of effect on me. He can’t sleep, so neither can I. He gets the Beauties off of Flip, his friend from his J.D. days. I don’t much like him, but he’s kind of like a brother to Ray, with Ray estranged from his family, so I try not to bitch too much. Fridays, one of Ray’s two days off, Flip and Warren and Ray and sometimes Ned, if his wife lets him out, all of them station themselves in our breakfast nook from afternoon until first man down, and play poker and smoke and drink. That little room fills up like a fishbowl with smoke and swears and the funk of those guys. It’s too much.

I try to arrange play dates for the kids on Friday, to keep them out of the way. It can’t be good for them to hear all that cussing and nonsense, not to mention the secondhand smoke. One Friday though, Vondra was supposed to be at a sleepover at Arleen’s house, but they had a fight—typical best-friend stuff—and she came home early. As much as I tried to get her to stay in the TV room, she wouldn’t listen to me, of course. Why listen to your mother when your daddy darling is entertaining guests in the breakfast nook, right? Vondra takes herself as an undiscovered rock star, so she got herself up in some little powder blue halter top and tight jean skirt and was howling to the guys, holding a wooden spoon, dancing around the table. Everyone thought that was real cute, but I don’t think those kinds of jokes are appropriate for a girl of 9, you know? I didn’t want to interfere. Fridays are Ray’s one day and all. Usually I just make snacks and hand out cold beers, hang out in the kitchen reading or what have you.

Ray grabbed the spoon out of Vondra’s hand and started singing her an X song he likes to sing to me—*Now if you love me, please don’t tease. If I can hold well then let me squeeze, my heart goes round & round, my love comes tumblin down. You leave me... abbbb, breathless.* He’s got a pretty decent voice, especially when he’s had a few. Then he had her jump up on the table so that she was dancing on the cards and those guys were hooting and stuff, especially Flip. He’s a real pig. I hate to be that way, but I had to get in there and grab her down. I sent her to her room for the rest of the night and you know what she had the nerve to do? I mean besides telling me she hated me? Nothing too new to that. She took a black Sharpie and wrote BREATHLESS on her wall, in letters three inches high right over her bureau where I know she had to climb up on it to write. And those damn Sharpies are permanent.

X’S EAR TWITCHES before I even hear anything. Then at once his body goes rigid and his eyes open, glowing blue in the half-light. What is it, X, I whisper. I don’t think it’s anything to worry about, despite all the things Ray says. He thinks people might want to break into our house to get at his “secrets,” but that’s just more of his crazy talk. When he insisted on setting up wires and booby traps around our yard, it completely freaked me out. I told him there was more a chance that one of the kids would trip them than some intruder, right? But he wouldn’t listen. So now I can’t let the kids play in the yard. If they want to go outside, they have to go down to the park.

Now X is up and crouched, growling, and I think I hear something too. Sounds like someone’s down under our window, moving the bushes around. Then I hear the bell on Raymond’s bike sound, bing, like it’s been knocked over and has hit the cement walk. That gets me out of bed, clutching my nightgown around me. X is barking like crazy now, his rubbery lips pulled back on his teeth, and I hear what sounds like someone climbing up the side of our house, the drain pipe clanking against the siding. I start looking around for some kind of weapon, I

swear, because I’m not going to just stand there and let it happen. But what I’m thinking isn’t what happens. Something else does, and all at once.

Vondra’s in the doorway asking, What’s going on, right when Ray appears at the window, climbing in over the sill, right when X lunges. He’s got his teeth in Ray’s shoulder before he even knows it’s his beloved master he’s attacking. So when Vondra runs over to Ray, screaming, Daddy, X turns on her and I know it’s bad by the revved voltage of X’s growls and the helplessness of Vondra’s screams. It takes both me and Ray pulling on him to get X off Vondra, and by then she’s totally messed up. You can hardly see her face for all the blood. And X looks like some kind of prehistoric monster, his jaws all slathered in red, still jacked on whatever that instinct is, still snapping until Ray pounds his fist down on his head. Then X drops to the floor cowering and whining.

I run and get a towel while Ray locks X in the laundry room. We bundle Vondra up, get Raymond who god-knows-how has slept through the whole thing, and speed to the hospital where we find that X has bit Vondra’s ear half off, the left one, as well as given her a gash on the side of her head. She’s going to need plastic surgery for sure.

They give her a shot of anesthesia in her cheek and she cries like I haven’t seen her since she was much younger. Now I won’t be beautiful, she’s crying, now I won’t be beautiful. But even crying like that and chewed up and scared, even at the moment when she’s looking around her to see who’s with her, she is beautiful. And more separate from me than ever before. I realize right then that what happens to her is hers, not mine. She looks so fragile, but strong, too. She’s got the face of a whole future of scarred beauty.

It’s all too much for Ray, so we have to go out to the waiting room until the doctor’s done stitching her up. You don’t want to leave, but there are others who know better how to put your girl back together. At this hour, there’s nobody in the waiting room but us. Raymond’s asleep in my arms, heavy, his hair damp against my shoulder. I swear that kid can sleep through anything. He won’t remember any of this in a few years, just wait. We’re sitting there silent, just the hum of the fluorescent lights. Inside, I’m all buzzing with fear and anger and seven other feelings rolling around. I want to scream at Ray, ask him what the hell he thinks he was doing, breaking into his own house, but one look at him and I know I better not. His eyes are raw in his head. He looks ten times older than he already is. He’s just sitting there, staring straight ahead of him, shaking his head back and forth. His shirt is torn at the shoulder where X bit him, and I can see his skin, tooth marks on the body I love so much. What, I ask, but he just shakes his head. After a moment he says, Oh my god, poor Vondra. Did you see her? Did you see her? My darling baby, my gorgeous girl, oh and that face. My god, it’s bad. But it could have been worse. First thing when I get home, I got to put up more wire.

I’m thinking when we get out of here, I’ll bring Vondra over to Lou’s house to stay for a while, at least until things settle down at home. That will solve a lot of problems. She’ll feel better there. Yeah, that’s what I’ll do. We can bring Vondra’s clothes and stuff over later. It’ll be better for everybody. X is probably as freaked as we are, especially now being locked up in the laundry room for hours. Vondra can heal up and Lou would be thrilled to pieces to have her. She’s always wanted a little girl of her own. Right, that’s what we’ll do. I’ll tell Ray in a minute, but for now I just take his head onto my other shoulder, say to him nice and soothing, Come here, darling, you must be a wreck.

END

il by **Martin Cadieux**, Nashville wood-block printmaker, whose custom-printed envelopes are housing special collections of our broadsheets on offer as part of the All Hands On Kickstarter.com campaign, live through Feb. 16

