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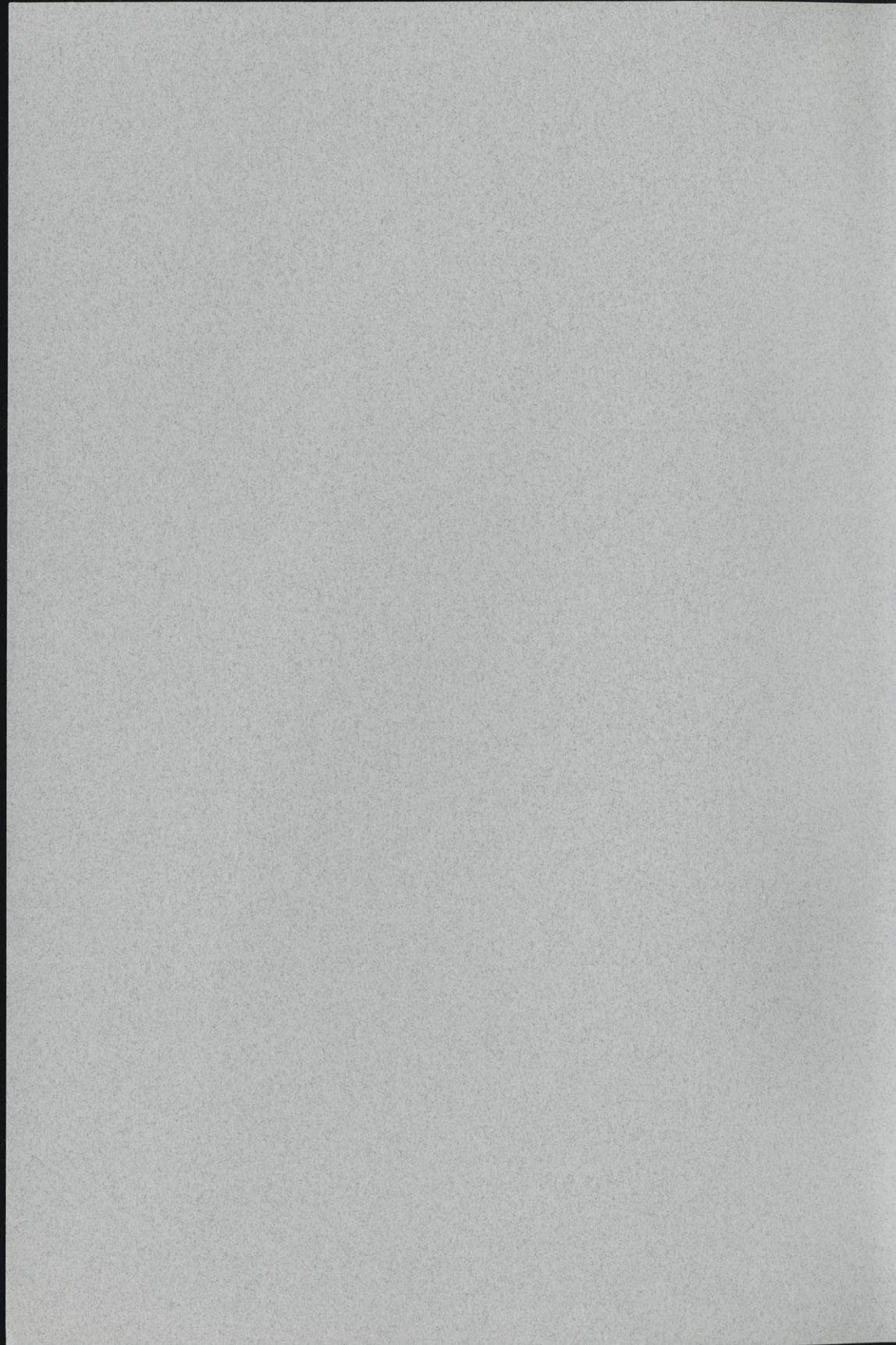
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WINDYHILL REVIEW 2006





A New Life

Nicole Quint

The floating snowflake,
Swiftly soaring through the air,
Landed a raindrop.

The Windy Hill Review

28th Edition
2006



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If you would like to contribute to future editions of this publication
please send your poetry, short stories, or art to **waklit@uwc.edu**

Fortuitous Passings

L.Q. MacDonald

I was through with loving when I first met her. I was done trying to be witty and charming. I gave up on picking out of the crowd the beauty I would most like to meet and spend my life with. I let go of the eternal human deceit that is love. I gave up, that is, until I met her.

She was attainable grace that danced her sophisticated rhythm through my life on dangerously high heels. Easy on the eyes and heavy on my heart. A burden of perfection that only lasted as long as it remained distant. I would sit on the park bench that I took to calling home and watch her as she passed everyday. She was always headed to a job that I imagined fulfilled her and completed her life.

I always sat on the same bench and always looked up from the same tattered notebook. She was a great and productive example of fine American work ethic, and I was a sitter, a writer. The park bench was my perch and my office. My calming, mountain-top view of the world as it gingerly sped by me.

She casually clutched her pricey, black purse as she moved, swaying from side to side like some charmed snake. It was easy for me to lose myself in the gentle waves of the late autumn-colored hair that beckoned me with each step. Although I never got close enough to see an eye color, I could only imagine that they were green, as the bloom of her youthful allure started in those eyes, working its way outward, on towards the cheeks rosyng them slightly, before moving on to the lips, filling them so that they bulged perfectly.

I am not sure if anyone else ever saw her as I did, beautiful and matchless. I would occasionally look around after she passed to see if others did indeed notice her. I was dismayed to find that the dogs were still barking and growling at their own tails. Some ran aimlessly around the large, stubborn oak trees that blossomed with spring's new birth. Others chased Frisbees that were being tossed between careless adolescents. Their owners waited near them expectantly to clean up the presents their dogs would leave, but they never seemed to watch the woman as I did. I suppose they had already found beauty and love and were simply content cleaning up dog shit. There were children who were still too young and much too lucky to have endured the debilitating draw of love, laughing and running as children always do, ignorant and happier for it. The deep green grass of the park providing the cushion for what falls may come.

But I was enamored with the woman and not a day would pass where I would not be sitting on that park bench waiting for her to pass. And where at first they were fortuitous passings for me, they became much more as time wore on. They became daily affirmations of my love for her. I came to expect her passing and look forward to it.

Worry often creased my brow as I began to curse myself for falling in love with this woman, this stranger. Once again love had sucked me in and it would spit me out, broken and battered and I would swear off it again as I had a million times before.

It was early spring and the lingering smell of freshly cut grass hung heavily in the air. Trees were starting their budding and flowers that were stationed strategically around the winding paths in the park, were beginning to peek ever so shyly from their stems. Red, green, blue, yellow. All decidedly glorious and inviting.

I sat on my park bench and waited for the woman to pass. I watched as people went about their business, walking children and dogs in their expensive strollers and collars, pushing or pulling them to no place in particular. Joggers running faithfully to nowhere. I saw her out of the corner of my eye as she approached.

I had decided that I would speak to her today. That I would declare my unbridled love for this perfect stranger and brace myself for the mighty emotional slap that would follow my declaration. As she got close, I began to stand, and I met eyes with her, green as I expected, and I prepared my speech in my head. As I opened my mouth, she smiled at me. That was the first time I ever saw her smile. The soft breeze that mingled with her hair, tossing it like a falling leaf, carried to my nose the sweet, engaging smell of her perfume. Flowers bloomed, envying such a vibrant bouquet. I begged for words to spill from my mouth and captivate her as she captivated me. My eyes pleaded with her; they implored with all their might and soulfulness, that she might let me enter her world. Tell me what to say. Tell me what you want to hear, so that you will fall into my arms in a swoon born of love and passion. I struggled against the smothering bonds of first impressions and longed for the insight and expression I wanted to voice.

"Wonderful weather we are having," I said, so cool and casual, my heart pounding loudly against my rib-cage, thankfully buried under my shirt. A bluebird danced excitedly on a branch above us.

She nodded with a smile, her swanlike neck bending back to glance at the sky. "It is very beautiful."

I was feeling quite rakish and invincible, the words falling perfectly as I placed them in my head. "My name is James by the way." I produced a hand so that I might shake hers. And indeed she gave me her hand.

"Katherine." A dog barked a steady intrusive rhythm.

I nodded, feigning an adequate amount of disinterest. Staring over at a dark brown Labrador that had gotten his owner tangled around a tree, I breeched the question. "I was wondering if you might like to get a cup of coffee, Katherine."

The abruptness did not seem to surprise her and she offered me another elegant smile. "I would love to, James."

I as well was not surprised at the speed and ease to which she agreed. It was obvious to me that this was destiny and the normal rules of courtship need not apply. She pushed her arm up through my own and we began to walk towards the café, and our future together...

I stood silently as she continued on, my mouth still open in expectation. The words I had prepared forgotten, replaced by my own content, knowing smile. I sat back on the perch and shook my head. I almost ruined it.

I almost ruined the perfection. I realized at that moment that the love that I had found sitting there on that park bench was the love I had always looked for. It was a quiet, flawless love that would have been toppled had I opened my mouth. I would have spoiled the perfection by talking or knowing. You see she never tripped as she passed. She never had a stitch out of place or a smudge on her heels. She never once ceased to complete purity, and had I stopped her to entertain my infatuation, I would have found all of those faults eventually.

I never approached the woman. As I still sit here, years later, on the same bench and watch her pass in the same seductive and tempting way. I never scared away the timid and delicate beast by going to it and expecting it to drink from my hand. I never tried to tame it. And for that, to this very day, that woman who saunters through my life as I sit, remains my love and my transcendence even though she does not know. I have never spoken to her, and to be honest I have ceased wanting to.

Yet still without a name, without hobbies, without favorite blah, blah, blahs, she is my love and she holds my heart...distantly.

Listen and Write

Caleb Widmer

In the dim glow of a light
bulb through a dense shade
I sit and listen to my mind.

The walls of my skull teach
reverberating with notes of truth,
fiction, love and hate.

Listening to these lectures
I grace each blue-lined page
with black ink and honesty.

My attention held still in
the steam of this mug, I take
my pen and lose my face.

The Bird at the Edge of the Garden

Paul Ceretto

White sheets drape a clothes line
under a blue breeze of eleven thirty
like rhythm and harmony
cottons drum compliments winds flute.

Father stands in his garden
surrounded in the array of colors
red tomatoes, green cucumbers, yellow peppers
a sprouting salad in a bowl of dirt.
Much to tend to in his holy place
to reap a fresh yield
and look to see if scoundrels
plunked his Eden in their bellies.

My feet press down on hot grass
a power green freshly cut aroma
a meld of senses in a boy's mind
a jazz trio in three four time.
Child's yearn bridges the distance
crescendo for father's attention
questions approached timidly
answers are petulant and curt.
Skinny legs carry a sad head
walk to the edge of the garden
where water glazed eyes discover
a blackbird suffer helpless.

Its body pressed flat and twitch
under the fry of the yellow sun
my yelp grabs father's attention
his curiosity gripped in the talons of the bird.
With veggies my father walks over to help me
we will save the bird together
I watch my dad pick up a stick
to help him carry the bird.
With two fast merciless strikes
he crushes the bird's skull
I look bewildered at my father
walk away with his fresh vegetables.

Fort Knox's Gold

Alex Grenlie

This poem is my note to you. Romania, we went there for our anniversary. We saw the fireworks. It was beautiful. Those tall trees that look like pines. Reminds me of a Times article.

We didn't see the whores and ghettos. We didn't see the hostages and the mass graves. I saw my

reflection in your eyes as we united. God, I loved you!

I see them from far away. Walking. Laughing. Don't they know their crimes? I saw it happen and I am ashamed to say to you that I was excited. I stood stock still like meat in a locker,

watching them. I had to tell myself to breathe. All the while I wanted to join in. Put on a mask

hear you whimper, cry and bleed by my own loving hand. God, what am I saying?! I hear the bass between

my ears and I couldn't tell them to stop. I was in another world. I've not slept since then. I've

attempted to take my own life. I've distanced myself from everyone. I've bought a gun.

Maybe you deserved it. What am I saying?! I am boiling with hate. For them, for me, for you, for everyone. I have forgotten their faces but I wonder if I see them everyday. Bikers on their

humming machines, punks in the park dealing dope, jerks in the strip bars. I hate them all because it was

a horrible act; I hate myself for not stopping it; for instigating it, for getting off on it. And I hate

you most, for I loved you once!

God, if I killed you would it all end? Walk in the hospital and pull the plugs? I think so.

But how

would I forget us? We cannot ever be killed. We are immortal. This note is written in blood. It only has

one word.

Colorless Car
Heidi Hildeman

Color bleeds me to my knees
in sorry blue and red pretend.
Red wine is more of a burgundy,
swirls line
forgets the next rhyme.

In busy black night you found me waiting
for wandering white night lights to shine.
In your clean and colorless car we drive
to that hazard gray place of mine.
Without glasses, color drifts from line
but you smile straight at me just right.

I close my eyes. You kiss the green inside.
In the dark I imagine you're mine.
In platonic yellow bright we were doing just fine,
but color still exists when you're blind.

Locust
Peter Quinn

Everything hurt as I awoke. My brain was flooded with blood that pumped furiously through my head, thundering in my ears and behind my eyes. I could taste the copper sting of blood and sick bile as I swallowed a bit to clear my dry throat. I gagged and spit half heartedly into the base of a fake tree beside me. *What the hell happened...?*

I sat up on the stained patch of carpet in my apartment where I had awoken. A mostly empty bottle of vodka lay tipped over on the floor, and an oversized bottle of sleeping pills sat on the coffee table, still open. *Did I really try that? Can't remember... Think...*

But I couldn't think. All I could do was feel my brain throb in my skull and bite down on my tongue to stand the waves of pain that shot through my chest and itchy throat. *What did I do last night... did I want to kill myself... maybe...Jesus, I'm never drinking again...*

I propped myself up against the wall next to the tree and waited for the throbbing to subside enough so I could stand up. The sun that streamed through the cracks of the blinds danced lazily on the cream carpet, illuminating particles of dust as they drifted through the stuffy air of the apartment. Just looking at the bright streaks of light hurt my eyes. *What day is it? Sunday...maybe Saturday? Damn it. stupid...what was I thinking...or why wasn't I thinking. Stupid...*

I chided myself like I was a child. And I was. I sat propped against the wall, drooling and watching the dust dance through golden sheets of light for what seemed like hours. Maybe it was only minutes. It didn't matter to me. Piecing together what happened was a fruitless endeavor at that point. All I could remember was coming home from work and watching some movie and drinking. How I ended up on the floor full of vodka and pills and searing pain was beyond me. *Why would I do that? did I? I must have. stupid...*

The drunken rhythms of the dancing dust lulled me into a trance I couldn't seem to recover from. I didn't want to die. Why would I? There must have been some reason last night. I sifted my thoughts for something that would give me answers as sleep fell over me like a cold, wet blanket. *Why... I don't want to... when did I start feeling so... powerless?*

It was a dire summer in my youth. Blankets of thick, dead air drowned the drone of insects in the shadows of lilac bushes and boiled the rays of the harsh sun until they bounced and waved on the horizon. Once every few nights, the torpid air would breed storms that would bloom furiously as the hours grew dark. Some shouted their chaotic commands with peeling thunder that shook the windows and bolts of lightning so bright I saw their shadows burned into my eyes for minutes after they struck the clouds. Others dejectedly groaned with muted thunder and sheets of warm rain which fell relentlessly upon the drowning ground. On these angry nights, I welcomed the storm's harsh breath on my face as I stared through an open window at the murky sky, for in their fury there was a spirit and resolve that the stuffy, swimming days that followed lacked.

I was younger then, but despite my naivety, I could still feel the pressure of the afternoon as the sun rose above my head and boiled the air, feel the oppression of heat seep into my soul and leave me unwilling to do anything but try to get cool. So I would

play in the musky basement, in shadows of box elder trees, and sleep silent and wet from humidity and sweat on the couch when I tired of games. The singing insects and birds flowed from every tree and blade of grass, muted by hot breeze and drowning each individual sound out until together they made a cacophonous rumble. There was something comforting about their tuneless music, like the rumble of an engine under you or the purring of a cat, which amplified the drowsiness brought on by those summer afternoons.

I couldn't tell if I was awake or asleep that day. I suppose it doesn't matter. The sky leered enviously at the ground, silent and still, casting its viridian glaze over everything I saw. The air was cool and still, but despite its stillness it was saturated with energy, so it seemed as if a breeze was frozen in time in the air. The house was empty as far as I could tell. I peered out the same window where I watched the storms and saw my family standing in the yard, looking at the horizon. I went out to join them. They did not speak, and I did not provoke them to as we stood facing a dark cloud low in the sky.

There was no familiar singing of insects and birds, only the quiet rustle of a silent wind through the lilac bushes and maple trees, and a foreign drone which came from far away. The dark cloud moved towards us with unnatural speed, boiling and rolling over itself as it sped through the sky.

The drone grew louder, a monotone canon of buzzing wings which emanated from the cloud. It bloomed before us, and I could see it was not a cloud, but a swarm. The drone roared, and the crest of the wave of locust swept over us before we could run. No one dared to move as the tide of insects washed over us. I could hear their wings thunder in my ears as they sped past me, heard the paper crush of their exoskeletons as they bumped into one another. The swarm never stopped to feast on the lush grass and wildflowers beneath our feet, and the vast farmers' fields which they had passed over as they rushed through the sky as a dark cloud were left untouched by their hunger. Soon the tide had passed, and I turned to see the cloud reform above us and speed off into the distance, leaving rich silence in the stead of their monstrous drone.

No one remembers the locust but me. Maybe it never happened. Maybe I'm just the only one who wanted to remember.

I drifted back into consciousness at the sound of a passing car furiously honking its horn. My mouth was cotton and the front of my shirt soaked with saliva. I wiped my chin and stood up. My head rang with echoes, echoes of beating paper wings rushing past me as I stood motionless under the envious sky. The pain was gone, but it had not left alone. There was hollowness in my chest, shallowness in my breathing that had not been there before.

I thought of the locust often that day as I grudgingly cleaned the carpet and swept the tiny shards of broken glass from unidentified bottles strewn about the floor. *Why didn't they stop? Weren't they hungry?* I thought of the fear as they engulfed us. *They could have destroyed everything...why didn't they stop?* I thought of the power they had in their swarm of thousands strong. I thought about what I would do if there were thousands of me. *Sit around and stare at myself wondering how to get rid of the rest...* I wondered if they had chosen not to destroy.

I envied them.



Photo by Theresa Wilson

Birth of a Myth

Melissa Flynn

Watching him die was like watching a god become mortal.
As I looked upon him in that pristine box,
I was struck by how regular he looked.

Then again, I had always looked at him
through the eyes of childhood.
Oh, how mighty he was from that view.

He was strong and tall, with tales of old.
His beard was long and winding,
like the stories that he wove.

Fairies had spun that beard, he said.
So strong, I could pull on it
to climb the mountain of his lap.

He taught me of the little people,
how even those so small could be magical.
But I have grown and he has vanished,
just like the rainbow that hid his pot of gold.

Yet his voice still whispers to me.
He lives within me,
for his mark is branded on my body.
His name is stamped upon me.

His tales shall be passed on.
His story shall grow;
His myth will become legend.
In the end, a mortal has been reborn a god.

A Poem to be Reckoned With

Melissa Flynn

My poem craved twisted steel
washed down with motor oil.
I gave it what it wanted.

It had smoke-filled eyes.
Rage emoted from its glance.
I looked away from that stare.

My poem moved with clomping
footsteps, across chipped asphalt.
I shuddered at the sound.

My poem was still ravenous with hunger,
boiling over from lack of sustenance.
I gave it my car.

My poem was the driver
that I avoided on the street.
Fear Me, it said.

My poem cruises the earth.
If you see my poem,
don't tell it where I am.

Lilly's Mind

Jennifer Stevens

Lilly sat motionless in her hard wooden rocking chair. She hated this chair. It was too hard on her spine and there were little splinters under the seat that pocked her legs. It was probably as old as she was. Day after day the nurse with the thin blonde hair would escort Lilly to that chair in the nursing home sitting room. "Come sit in your favorite chair, Lilly," she'd squeal cheerfully everyday, as if there was something to be happy about around here. The nurse wasn't aware that Lilly didn't like the chair, and if she knew, she probably wouldn't even care. Lilly just sat in it anyway, observing the same old ladies slouched in their seats like vegetables, many sleeping the day away. Lilly stayed awake. She watched the tiny dust particles reflected in the sunlight coming through the window fall gently to the hardwood floor. An old jazz record crackled away in the corner of the room, proving a soundtrack for the absent-minded residents who didn't even notice it. Lilly stopped the blonde haired nurse as she walked by her chair.

"When's lunch?" Lilly asked.

"We just had lunch, Lilly, honey," the nurse responded sweetly, speaking to Lilly as if she were eighty years younger. Lilly just nodded in agreement, frustrated with herself for not remembering that. She went back to watching the dust, occasionally pushing her white, curly hair out of her eyes. She was trying to remember what they had for lunch. Salisbury steak? No. Meatloaf? Maybe. Lilly finally gave up. Her attention was suddenly drawn to a familiar tune coming from the old record spinning in the corner. "*My mama done tol' me...when I was in pig tails...*" the song went. Lilly closed her eyes and tried to focus on the sounds of the horns and bass and those lyrics she knew so well. She slowly opened her eyes again and glanced out the window. Down below was a bustling city street, much like the one where she spent her younger days. But to Lilly, the street looked different...

...In Lilly's mind, the road was no longer peppered in multi colored vehicles, but lined instead with black cars with large tires, all in uniform style. Women in long, heavy dresses and men in neat sport coats and matching hats roamed around. Jazz music steamed out of an old abandoned warehouse. "*...When I was in pigtails, my mama done tol' me...a man's gonna sweet talk...*," Lilly sang into the silver microphone, her honey colored curls falling in her face.

"Stop!" screamed Lilly's sister, Margie. "Jimmy you're playing that horn way too loud. We can barely hear Lilly," she protested, like an impatient child. Lilly rolled her eyes at her sister's bossiness.

"It was fine," Lilly argued through gritted teeth. "Just play your piano, and don't worry about everyone else."

"Well, let's take a break anyway," Margie continued. "The new drummer should be stopping by today. I think Tom was his name? Or was it Ted? No, I'm pretty sure it was Tom." The other drummer had quit the band because he couldn't put up with Margie anymore. Lilly didn't blame him for leaving. As, if on cue, the new drummer, who turned out to be Tom, walked in; he was a ravishing tall man with a chocolate brown, perfectly parted haircut. Lilly was immediately drawn to his eyes, which were a sharp, almost piercing blue color. Lilly had never seen anything like them. Tom held out his hand to Lilly and beamed her with a dazzling white smile and she shyly returned the gesture.

"So can you play?" Margie blurted to Tom after the brief introduction.

"Of course I can play," Tom shot back, seating himself behind the drum set. He began gently tapping out a jazz beat, to prove to Margie that he had a talent. After about a minute, he stopped and said, "So what are we playing?"

"Blues in the Night," Margie blurted. "It's a new song. You probably don't even know it."

"Oh, well, I'll figure it out," Tom replied, randomly tossing Lilly another flashy smile. After another two hours of music topped with Margie's complaining, the group decided to wrap up their rehearsal for the day. Tom and Lilly walked out of the dusty warehouse together and into the sunlit street where they strolled along side by side.

"You're really good on the drums," Lilly quickly commented.

"Thanks. You've got quite a voice there," Tom complimented.

"Thanks," Lilly said without taking her eyes off the ground. "So...do you think we're good enough to make a record someday?"

"Gee, I don't know. That'd be real nice, I suppose. That is if that sister of yours doesn't drive everyone insane first." Lilly giggled in agreement. She and Tom sat down on the sidewalk in front of a radio repair shop where they could faintly hear a broadcast of FDR speaking. Lilly and Tom found more important things to talk about, and until the sunset, that's exactly what they did...

..."Lilly, honey," a chipmunk-like voice chimed. "Look who's here!" the blonde nurse exclaimed. Standing next to her was Lilly's granddaughter, Julie, one of the few faces Lilly recognized these days. "Hey grandma, how are ya?" the petite eighteen year old asked as she embraced Lilly in a hug. Lilly just smiled. Julie often visited, especially when her mother was too busy to stop by. Even though it had only been a few days since Julie last visited, it seemed like years to Lilly. She couldn't help but marvel at the beautiful young girl. She looked so much like her mother, especially in the eyes. Those piercing blue eyes...

..."Ah, she has your eyes, Tommy!" Margie cried as she cradled her new niece. Anna was only three days old. She was so tiny, just like a doll. Tom had finally returned from a year's duty in the war. Immediately after he returned, he and Lilly were married, and now they were gazing at their new baby girl.

"Okay, give me my baby back," Lilly demanded with a chuckle. She grabbed her tiny daughter and carefully made her way into the nursery to put the exhausted child to bed. She laid the infant carefully in her bassinet and sat beside her, just watching her sleep.

"Margie just left," Tom quietly said from the doorway. Lilly hadn't even noticed he was there. He walked slowly into the room and sat down next to Lilly. For the next ten minutes, they watched their angelic daughter. Once they got downstairs, Lilly began to head off to bed, but Tom grabbed her arm, stopping her from going further. "Let's dance," he said with a mischievous smile and those crystal blue eyes. Lilly could almost feel those eyes on her face. Tom carefully wandered over to the record player and set the needle down. It began to crackle and a few seconds later, "Blues in the Night" began to play. Tom lit a cigar and embraced his wife, leading her across the living room floor. They swayed to the steady beat. Lilly couldn't help but hum to the melody. She could feel Tom keep the beat with a gentle tap of his fingers that were around her waist.

"I love this song," Lilly whispered in Tom's ear.

"Me too," he said. "Me too..."

..."Hey grandma? Grandma?" Lilly was jolted out of her daydream once more. "Watcha singing?" Julie asked with a smile. Lilly hadn't even realized she was humming.

"Oh," she began nervously. "I don't know. I don't remember." Lilly looked around and realized that she was in her room. The nurse must have wheeled her in there, or had she been there the whole time? No. There were no windows in this room. She sat in silence for a moment, still trying to figure out what was for lunch. Tuna fish? No. "How's your dad?" Lilly randomly asked her granddaughter, who was working on some homework.

"He's great. Guess what? Mom and dad have been talking about finally buying that vacation house in Florida. They'll finally have the money because dad is retiring this spring. Retiring! Can you believe it, Grandma? He's going to be fifty-eight this year! You know, he's lucky he can retire this early. It's a good thing he had such a good paying job that could let him do that..." Julie's voice began to trail off...

...Lilly sat in the front pew gazing at the young bride and groom at the altar. She glanced at her side and stared for a moment at the empty space beside her. She tried to imagine Tom was there, with his head on her knee, but he wasn't. Lilly could see his pale blue eyes, as if they were right in front of her. Tears began to sting her eyes, but she didn't want to be sad, not on Anna's special day. Lilly never thought she'd be so happy to see her daughter marry Danny. She hadn't liked him at first. He was a hooligan, with his dark, velvet black hair and sideburns. He drove too fast and dressed too messy, and he smoked. Like a chimney. And not those sweet smelling cigars Tom used to smoke, but horrible cigarettes. Lilly hated cigarettes. She much more preferred men who smoked cigars. She could still smell Tom's cigars, but shook the thought when she remembered it had been the cigars that killed him. She focused now on Danny, who looked less like a hooligan today. He had just returned from Vietnam and was dressed neatly in a Marine uniform. He was very handsome.

At the reception, Lilly sat alone at her table, watching Anna and Danny dance. They were having a great time. After the song, Lilly saw Anna walk to the stage where the four man band was situated. She whispered something in the lead singer's ear. He nodded and to Lilly's surprise, "Blues in the Night" began playing. Danny wandered over to Lilly's table, smiled brightly, and held out his hand.

"Let's dance," he said.

"No... I-I can't." Lilly blushed.

"C'mon," Danny insisted, pulling Lilly up from her seat. He led her unto the large dance floor, and they glided to the uplifting music. "*...A man's gonna sweet talk, and give ya the big eye...*"

"I love this song," she whispered to her new son-in-law.

"I do too," Danny responded.

... "I just realized," Julie gasped. "When dad retires, he's going to be home all the time. Mom's going to be so sick of him!" After a fairly long pause, Lilly mumbled, "How's your dad?" Julie smile softly, sighed and said, "Great, Grandma, he's great."

"That's good," she replied blankly. Julie continued to work on her homework and carried her conversation on with Lilly as though she could comprehend what was being said. She wasn't listening, though. Was it lasagna? No. Julie was still telling Lilly about her day, but was interrupted by the blonde haired nurse.

"Look what I've got, Lilly!" she screeched. In her hands were two identical cups of butter pecan ice-cream. "Your favorite ice cream!" The nurse was actually right this time. Butter pecan was her favorite ice cream.

"Thank you. Can I get some coffee too?" Lilly asked, forgetting they couldn't have coffee at the nursing home.

"Sure," the nurse lied. "I'll just bring her some juice, in Lilly's mind, they're the same thing," Lilly heard the nurse tell Julie, as if she were invisible.

"God, I love this stuff," Julie said with a mouthful of ice cream. "Grandma, do you remember when we used to eat gallons of this at a time?" Lilly nodded as her shaky hand held the spoon. As Lilly tasted each spoonful of the sweet, crunchy ice cream treat, the memories became stronger...

..."Put on your coat," Lilly told her granddaughter. It was a hot small apartment, but the autumn wind was a bit sharp. Julie was spending yet another weekend at Lilly's apartment. Today, they were getting ready to go take a walk in the park. "Okay, let's go," Lilly told Julie.

"Hey grandma?" the six year old whined with those sky blue eyes gazing up at her. "Can we get some butter pecan ice cream when we get back?" Lilly smiled.

"Absolutely, honey."

"Good, I love that stuff." Julie took her grandma's thin hand and they proceeded out the apartment door. The hallway was filled with the aroma of cooked cabbage, a smell which always lingered from the apartment across the hall. Lilly and Julie carefully made their way down the red and black carpeted stairs out the door. In front of the pale yellow apartment building was a bustling highway, loud with the sound of traffic. The back of the building was much more peaceful. Colorful autumn trees towered over them as they headed for the park hand in hand.

"Grandma, sing me that song. You know that one about Blue or something."

Lilly began to sing, "*...but when the sweet talkin's done, a man is a two face. A worrisome thing, who'll leave ya to sing the blues in the night.*"

"Why do men have two faces?"

"It's just an expression, sweetheart. It means some men...well, aren't always what they seem, so...you should be careful."

"Did Grandpa have two faces?"

"No," Lilly answered with a quiet laugh. After they made their way to the park, and Julia slid down the long metal slide a few times, they headed back. About halfway to the apartment Lilly stopped. Suddenly the street seemed curvier than it did before, and nothing looked familiar anymore. Lilly felt dizzy.

"What's the matter, Grandma?"

"Nothing. I-I'm fine," Lilly responded with a dazed look on her face. She didn't even know the way home. What was wrong with her? "I'm not exactly sure where we are. Maybe I should call Tommy," she said, wringing her hands nervously...

...And that was the start of it all. The first time her mind ran away. It only got worse as the years went on. Her mind still ran away now, but it usually found its way back. The

doctors told her that her mind was “deteriorating” and would never be the same. Lilly still couldn't remember how to get to that apartment from the park. “What are you thinking about, Grandma?”

“Nothing,” Lilly said, staring into her empty ice cream cup. “Nothing at all. Did the nurse bring me my coffee?”

“Yup,” Julie pointed to a glass of dark grape juice on the nightstand. Lilly turned away from it. Julie began gathering her things. She rose from her seat and walked to the door. “I'd better get going,” Julie said. She bent over Lilly and gave her a kiss on the cheek, turned and walked out the door. “I'll see you later, Okay?” Lilly watched Julie leave, feeling a bit saddened that the girl wasn't there anymore.

Slowly and shakily, Lilly sat down on her bed. She was tired and her head was heavy. She laid down on the painfully solid pillow, closed her eyes and remembered that song. “...*the evenin' breeze will start the trees to cryin' and the moon will hide its light, when you get the blues in the night...*” Piece by piece the melody felt louder. That nurse's screechy voice in the hallway was getting softer as well and Lilly could hear the beat of the drums, the way Tom played them. She could feel those piercing blue eyes on her face once more.

The stale nursing home stench seemed to be getting weaker. Instead Lilly sensed the odors of cooked cabbage and musty warehouses that lived in her mind. She liked those smells better. Lilly was at ease in her bed, alone with her small collection of memories. She was proud of herself for recalling such moments. Lilly stayed in her bed for the rest of the day, just thinking. That's it---it was roast beef they had for lunch.

Loss

Noelle Lane

I loathe this idea haunting,
the jungle of my mind.
Floating in, ticking like a
bomb, a capsule of time.

I don't miss it,
when it hides.
Tick, tock.
Its message so loud, yet it defies.

I yearn for oxygen: daises, an iris.
A sampling of sweet maple.
Even a desert of nothing.
But this groping of ivy that
creeps like a virus,
choking and churning.
I lose my footing.

Sucked into this quicksand bouquet,
Do I drown in this trap?
Or gag on the provoking ivy?
Reaching out from your foyer.

I resent these options,
Ivy leaves surrounding me like
little demon hands,
as imperceptibly as Grief.

I should seclude myself, find the
poet in me like Emily Dickinson used to,
But my idea is loss.
I don't know what to do.

The Beast
Nicole Quint

If I come as a steam engine,
so full of rage I could explode,
If I come as cold as the night sky,
it can be assumed I have seen her at her worst.

Like a rabid dog tearing at a piece of meat,
she eats at me taking all my happiness with her,
Like a snake killing its prey,
she squeezes out of me the last little bit of hope I have left for a happy existence.

She is like a deadly plague,
infecting everyone she comes in contact with.
Like a night owl on the prowl,
even at the darkest hour she will find you and there will be no chance for escape.

So if I come to you as a raging lunatic,
ready to lose every sane thought I ever possessed,
It can be concluded she has got to me again,
charging at me like a determined bull seeking a red handkerchief.



Collage by Jerod Freitag

Mary Ann Jacobson
Jesse Schomisch

Mary Ann Jacobson awoke at five forty-five every morning without even using an alarm. She'd say, "If the sun gets out of bed before you do, the day is just wasted," She would then make herself breakfast. Breakfast usually consisted of dry wheat toast and, occasionally, a poached egg. After breakfast and a cup of coffee she'd step out on the porch of the four bedroom, four and a half bathroom suburban home she shared with her husband and smoke her single cigarette of the day. On this day she smoked a second.

After smoking, Mary Ann would shower and blow-dry her artificial-looking red hair. She would then walk to her bedroom to dress and allow the steam to escape the bathroom. Upon returning to the bathroom, Mary Ann would apply makeup to her face concentrating, disproportionately, on the areas with the most wrinkles. She would spray on a little perfume, undetectable from more than ten inches, and leave the bathroom to begin the housework.

When it came to cleaning the house Mary Ann Jacobson liked to start from the bottom and work her way up. Her schedule was organized so that everyday she cleaned a different section of the house. Mary Ann's schedule excluded the basement, however, which she never went into unless to retrieve holiday decorations.

On this particular day, the schedule said that the living room and kitchen were to be cleaned and dusted. In rubber gloves and protective eyewear, Mary Ann scrubbed every surface, wiped the oven and microwave, and scoured the sink. Then she vacuumed the living room and dusted the furniture, making sure to lift up all the lamps, vases, and pictures.

In the midst of her cleaning, Mary Ann received a telephone call from her husband. He told her he'd be running late and not to hold dinner for him.

Mary Ann knew better. She had suspicions that her husband had been sleeping with someone else for quite awhile. She wasn't sure who it was, but she had found the evidence. For example, one day while doing laundry, Mary Ann found a ticket stub in her husband's pocket from the theater. Her husband hated going to the theater, and had only taken her one time, and that was before they were married. Another time she found a receipt for some expensive perfume that wasn't her brand. Plus, they hadn't had sex in nearly a year. Adding to her suspicions, her husband had been working late four days a week, at least.

Mary Ann decided the rest of the cleaning could wait. She uncorked an expensive bottle of red wine, poured herself a glass, and went into the living room to watch TV. However, Mary Ann was so agitated that she couldn't concentrate on any of the programs. After finishing her first glass of wine, she walked back to the kitchen and poured herself another. She sat down at the breakfast bar and drank in silence.

Mary Ann knew her husband thought she was stupid. She couldn't figure out why else he would leave all those clues lying about. Or maybe he thought she was helpless without him and no matter what he did she'd never leave. Worst of all, Mary Ann thought he may be right. Her face burned at the thought. It may have also been the wine taking effect. She poured another glass and stared at it.

Maybe he wanted her to find the clues and leave him. Maybe he just wasn't man enough to tell her that he had fallen for someone else. The thought made her laugh out loud in the empty house. After all, her husband was a lawyer. He was telling people things they didn't want to hear all the time.

As the afternoon dragged on, Mary Ann just sat, fixed to the spot, stewing in the thoughts of her husband's affair. What angered her more than anything was the thought that her husband could be so arrogant.

It was around this time that she decided to take action and show her husband how she felt. After all he was the one who was always saying, since the beginning of their relationship nearly twenty years ago, that actions speak louder than words. She finished her glass of wine, set it down on the kitchen counter and half stumbled out to the two-car garage.

Mary Ann knew exactly where to find everything that she needed. First, she dragged her husband's ten foot step ladder through the house and into the foyer. The foyer had a vaulted ceiling with a crystal chandelier hanging from it. The stairway hugged the wall on one side and had a balcony at the top overlooking the room. Mary Ann set up the ladder and positioned it below the chandelier, just off to the side.

Next, she walked back to the garage and found a tow rope that her husband had bought, but never used. As a matter of fact, most of the tools that Mary Ann's husband kept in the garage were never used.

Mary Ann walked, with the tow rope in hand, back to the foyer. There, she climbed the ladder, but not without nearly falling. She couldn't have this looking like an accident, she thought. This had to be perfect. Her actions had to speak loudly and clearly.

She tied one end of the rope to the chandelier and tugged on it to see if it would hold. She knew it would. The men who installed this chandelier, after removing the smaller, less gaudy one that came with the house, said that the hook for the new chandelier would probably hold up to five-hundred pounds.

Mary Ann then tied a makeshift noose at the other end of the rope. She knew how to tie a slipknot. She wondered if her husband, the counterfeiter Mr. Fix-it, knew how. Again, she laughed out loud. Mary Ann lofted the knotted end of the rope over the railing of the balcony, nearly fell while doing so, and climbed down the ladder. She then returned the ladder back to the garage and walked back to the kitchen. She downed the glass of wine she had left on the counter and poured what remained in the bottle into her glass. Once again she stared blankly into the glass.

Would her husband even care? She wondered this to herself and quickly decided it didn't matter. It was over. She had made up her mind.

Mary Ann walked to the foyer and up the stairs still holding the glass of wine. She stood at the railing of the balcony and looked down. She sipped her wine and held the half-full glass at arms length in front of her. Mary Ann opened her hand and let it drop. She watched as it fell, the blood-red liquid remaining in the glass for its entire journey to the tile floor below. The glass shattered on impact, spraying wine and shattered glass across the floor of the foyer.

Mary Ann lifted one leg, then the other over the railing and stood, teetering on the narrow ledge. She looped the rope over her head. It slid easily past her red hair down to her shoulders. It felt heavy and rough against her well-moisturized skin. She pulled the rope snug around her neck and looked down, trying to think. The sound of her heart beating in her temples consumed her. She stared at the tile floor and at the wine, already beginning to dry. She lifted one foot off the ledge. Mary Ann could feel the sweat on the bottom of her foot as it evaporated. She closed her eyes and leaned out towards the nothingness of the foyer. The world reeled around her. The rope seemed to pull her

down. Her heartbeat sounded like Godzilla's footprints in her head, echoing until the echoes overlapped and melted in to a crescendo of white noise.

Just then she caught the railing with her hands.

Mary Ann quickly pulled the noose over and off of her head and heaved her body over the railing back unto the balcony. She collapsed to the floor and lay there crying.

Later, when she was able to stand again, Mary Ann walked down the stairs and cleaned up. She mopped up the wine, and removed the rope and returned it to the garage. She threw the empty wine bottle in the garbage, tied up the bag, and took it outside. By dark everything looked as it had that morning.

Mary Ann showered and went to bed early. She didn't sleep. At some point, late in the night, her husband came home. He smelled like perfume.

Poetry Can Be Spoken

Carol Deprez

With a brush

And pigments

Or hands

Shaping clay

With a tap of keys—

Black and white

Or a puff of breath

Into brass or wood

With organic sound—

Vocal chords

Or the rhythmic grace

Of limbs in motion

With optics

And film or pixels

And highlight, shadow

Midtones, color

With a spade and hoe

And patience—

The sowing

And tending of seeds

There are as many ways

To voice a poem

As there are ways

To listen.

Summer Segue

Carol Deprez

Crisp winds swim

Through spruce in sonorous sighs

Like the rush and crush of surf on sand

Leaves wing

From boughs to earth

Like gulls swooping down to bob on waves

Russets and ochers

Float brightly

Across swales of browning grass

A sleepy sun

Settles itself in western realms

As a luminous harvest moon might

The perpetual tide

Shifts as

Autumn laps at summer's shores

Forgotten

September Olson

Closed within the shadows of these walls
Confined within the darkness of these halls
Are ghosts of those long since past
Whose life remembered shall not last
Forced to remain hidden in the night
Whose secret truths will not shine light
Upon the world their echoes call
Hushed within the silent hall.

Mother Love
Theresa Kelliher

The ringing of our old yellow phone startled me. I'd been in the basement, finally finishing up the last of the laundry I had let go all week long. Spencer, my husband, had been gone on business since Wednesday and I wanted to get done before I picked him up at the airport tomorrow morning.

It took me a second to understand what I was hearing; I never answered the phone down here, so its ring was unfamiliar. I picked up the receiver, and as I opened my mouth to say hello, I realized someone was already speaking.

It was my son Alex, at 19, the oldest of our three children. A rock-climbing outdoorsman, the kid we were always so proud of, both because of his fierce determination and his organic good nature. By today's standards, he was what girls his age considered a "hottie," the cowlick in the middle of his forehead making him look unintentionally fashionable.

I recognized his voice, although it was not the voice I was used to hearing. There was something off, something just not right. It sounded like he was trying to talk through gritted teeth, as if he were forcing all the air from his lungs.

Because of the reception on the old phone, I couldn't quite make out what he was saying. We had only kept this particular phone as a backup, so we would have a landline just in case we lost power. It was such an old phone it still had a rotary dial, and because it was rarely used, we never bothered to get it repaired. As a result, it would crackle when you used it. The kids referred to it as the "70s phone." They always got a big laugh out of the 16 foot phone cord and the way it took five minutes to dial a number.

The next voice I heard surprised me. It was Kaitlin Reese, the girl he had been seeing for the last two years. She'd been his first serious girlfriend, something we hadn't been too happy about.

It's not that we didn't like her; she just wasn't the kind of girl we expected Alex to fall for. She was beautiful, and you could tell she knew it. She had hair the color of wildflower honey and eyes so blue you swore they were cut from a piece of sapphire. Being in the room with her always made me realize how old I really was.

I don't think she was conceited about the way she looked; it was just that she let it get in the way of so many things. She couldn't play football because it might mess up her hair, she couldn't help with the dishes because she might chip her nail polish, and she rarely, if ever, went down to the beach for fear of ruining her makeup. She reminded me more of a china doll on a shelf than a real person.

She and Alex met at the Pix Theater in downtown Eagan the summer he turned 17. Soon after, they became almost inseparable. His life revolved around her. If they weren't together, they were on the phone. He spent so much time over at her house we often teased him about paying them room and board. We tried talking to him several times about not getting so serious at such a young age, but we might as well have been talking to the dog. Strangely enough, even though they were together for all that time, we hardly ever saw her.

Then, out of nowhere a few weeks ago, things seemed to cool off between them. There were fewer phone calls, and often he'd lie and tell her he was too busy to talk. We didn't ask, but we had heard through the other kids that he might have taken interest in another girl he'd met since starting college in August. I'd be lying if I didn't say we were a little relieved.

I wiggled the cord where it was attached to the bottom of the phone and the crackling stopped. I thought of how ridiculous I must have looked, standing there, eavesdropping on my 19 year old son in a private conversation with his soon to be ex-girlfriend. My better judgment told me to hang up the phone and mind my own business, but my curiosity got the best of me, so wrapping my hand around the mouthpiece tighter, I continued to listen.

"Are you sure?" I heard my son say. I could hear her crying. "Of course I'm sure, do you really think I would tell you something if I wasn't sure?" Alex let out a long breath, his voice rising. "I thought you said this couldn't happen, Kaitlin. You said we didn't need to worry. What the hell are you trying to do to me?" "Trying to do to you?!! What do you mean, trying to do to you? Do you really think I'd do something like this on purpose?" She was shrieking now. "You were there too Alex, I didn't do this all by myself. God you're such an asshole, I can't believe you! The last thing I wanted was a BABY!!!"

At the word "Baby" I was acutely aware of every nerve in my body. Each one was suddenly humming with life; it felt as though I'd been electrocuted. It took a minute to register what I had just heard. A Baby? I closed my eyes and fell back against the wall, the phone going cold against my face, my fingers prickling with heat as the adrenaline raced through me.

"Are you there Alex?" Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm pregnant Alex, I'm pregnant, Oh, God, what are we going to do?!! Alex? Say something!!!!"

She went on like that. I wasn't sure if she even wanted to hear him say anything too or just listen to herself screaming. Her voice was shrill, like the sound of metal on metal.

I couldn't make myself believe what I was hearing. My whole body started to shake, the phone rattling against my jawbone. I had inadvertently bitten my tongue and I could taste the blood on my lips. My heart was beating so hard I could feel it in my temples; I thought it might slam out of my skull, I was certain they could hear it too.

Again I heard Alex's voice, but this time it was so cold and hard that for a moment I wasn't really sure it was him. I had never heard him talk like this before.

"There is no "we" in this Kaitlin, we're done! There's no way I'm having a kid. Do you get that? We are over, you stupid bitch, I already told you, WE ARE OVER! Get rid of it! I'm not doing this Kaitlin, you're just gonna have to get rid of it." There was a silence for a second, and then as calmly as if he were talking about the weather he said, "How do you know it's mine anyway?"

Kaitlin, at barely a whisper, said, "Fuck You, Alex," and she was gone. I waited until Alex hung up and put the phone back in its cradle. I stood there looking around the room trying to figure out where I was; nothing looked familiar to me. There was some writing on the wall behind the phone; numbers, names, and a bunch of scribbling. I wondered how long it had been there and how I could have missed it. I could see where we'd gotten blue paint on the trim during our last redecorating project. Across the room I could see a crack in the corner that I had never noticed, a place where the drywall looked like it couldn't bear the weight anymore and began to sag in the struggle to hold itself together.

I stood there, wringing my hands together trying to bring my mind back into focus. Instinct told me to go up and confront Alex about what he said, but I couldn't

move. His words were burning themselves into my brain. "Get rid of it" is what I heard over and over again.

I looked over at the plastic clock above the pool table. It was creepy, in the shape of a cat, black and white, with a tail and eyes that would twitch in rhythm to the time. What ever possessed me to buy such an ugly thing? It was ticking so loud; I couldn't concentrate on anything else.

Could this really have been my son? The one with the chubby cheeks who I rocked to sleep every night because I just couldn't stop looking at him? The one who cried for two days because I accidentally crushed the caterpillar he was waiting to watch turn into a butterfly? Was he really so cold and heartless that he would kill his own baby, as if he were just throwing out an old shirt he didn't have a use for any longer?

I felt sick. I could smell the sweat starting under my arms, and I could feel the tag of my shirt cutting into the skin on my neck. I thought that I might throw up right there on the floor. There were so many thoughts flying through my head about the impossibility of this whole situation, it made me dizzy. How could Alex support a baby, he was just a baby himself. Where would he live? What would he do for money? And what about his future? He had dreamed of becoming a cop since he was twelve years old, and he had only just started the program in the fall. Having a baby now would certainly put an end to any plans he had of finishing school.

I sat down on the arm of our old couch, the musty smell rising up to my nostrils, it's fabric so badly worn I could feel the ancient wooden framework below.

Thoughts continued to spill into my head. What would people say when they heard about this? I had always had such a high opinion of my family and myself. When the fifteen-year-old neighbor girl got pregnant last year, we wondered out loud at the dinner table how she could have been so stupid. Where were her parents? I remember telling my kids that these kind of people didn't know how to communicate with their children, because if they had, then things like that wouldn't happen.

Now what? When word of this got out I'd end up looking like a fool. I'd be just like one of those yuppie mothers I knew so well, always too concerned about themselves to really give their kids the attention they needed. I had always judged them so harshly in the past, and now I was one. Truthfully, I don't know which of these things bothered me more.

I went into the bathroom and rinsed my face in the sink. I looked in the mirror, and although I didn't look too much different, there had been a definite shift. As I stood there looking at myself, I was suddenly seeing a stranger. My skin looked old and pale, like sour bread dough. My eyes had sunk back into their sockets, and dark circles made their way around them. Things were out of place and my former life was already becoming a memory. In the space of only three or four minutes my whole world had gone into reverse.

I don't know how long I waited down there for Alex, but still, he never showed. That psychotic cat kept flicking its tail, back and forth, back and forth. I hated the way it stared at me, as if it were trying to force me into a decision. I climbed up on the pool table and ripped it off the wall. I put it in the closet and closed the door, but even then, I could still hear it.

I felt like I needed to do something to keep myself from a full-blown anxiety attack. My blood pressure was rising, and I could tell I was beginning to hyperventilate. I figured if I did something normal, like making dinner, I wouldn't need Valium. The thought of cooking bordered on insanity, but I went upstairs anyway.

Once in the kitchen I took the chicken out of the fridge. I laid it on the counter and looked at the bumpy white skin pulled away from the pink meat underneath. I stood there, watching a sickly pool of juices form around it, a thin stream of liquid running down the cupboard onto the floor. I lifted up the whole works and dumped it in the garbage can. As I opened the freezer door to grab a pizza, Alex appeared.

"What's for supper?" he asked, as if it were just another lazy Saturday afternoon. I looked at him, "What do you mean what's for supper are you blind?" I turned and slammed the pizza on the counter.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" he said. He stood there, as if he was waiting for me to give him some kind of answer. I could not believe he was just going to pretend as if nothing were wrong. I looked into his eyes, hoping to see something, a sign that he might feel remorse, regret, even shock. I needed to know that the boy I thought I raised was in there somewhere and he had just stepped out for a minute. Instead, he smiled. "Relax Mom, I was just asking," and he walked away.

I stared down the hallway after him, and at that moment I knew the person I had always thought of as my son was gone and not coming back. I could feel tears running down the back of my throat. I tried to swallow them away. I had no idea what to do now. Should I call Spence? What would I tell him? That I had eavesdropped on my son like some old busybody with nothing better to do? He'd be furious; he and Alex hadn't been getting along that well lately anyway. I was afraid of what he might do when he found out. What about Kaitlin's parents? In the whole two years the kids dated, we had only met them a handful of times. They lived up on the East side of town, where even the smallest of homes was no less than six thousand square feet. We had virtually nothing in common, and when we had to socialize, I always sensed an undercurrent of animosity from them. The last thing I wanted to be doing was explaining to that bitch that my son got her precious daughter pregnant.

I thought of all the things I should be doing, the things I should be saying, to Alex, to my husband, to her parents, but I just couldn't bring myself to do anything at all. I knew what I was keeping to myself was wrong, but it felt like if I was to say this dirty thing out loud that it would become real, and I just could not face the consequences. I knew that by bringing this information out, I would be starting a chain of events that could have only one outcome, and that outcome was not going to fit into our lives.

I lay down on the couch and curled up into a ball, numb and paralyzed with an overload of emotions. I heard Alex leave later that night, and I wondered where he was going. I thought about how we had gotten to this point. My head was pounding from clenching my jaw all day long; I wished I could sleep so that I could forget about this thing for a while.

When the alarm went off at five the next morning, things only felt worse. Alex had not come home last night, and I had no idea where he was. I had never felt this way about one of my kids before. I thought that if he and Kaitlin were standing on railroad tracks about to be hit by a train and I could only save one of them, I'm not sure which one of them I would push off the tracks. I hated him for doing this to us. I wanted to get a stick and beat him, or choke him with my bare hands.

I was in no mood for going to the airport, but three hours later, there I was, drinking a Jack and Coke in the lounge, trying to settle my nerves. As I caught my reflection in the mirrored glass behind the bar, I thought how pathetic this was. Is this what my life had become?

I didn't know what I was going to say to Spence, but I did know I didn't want to deal with his fury afterward. Maybe, I thought to myself, I'll tell him later on tonight. But the fact is, I had already made up my mind. I had been kidding myself. I wasn't going to tell anybody about what I knew. If Alex wasn't saying anything, then neither was I. After all, I had only heard this conversation by accident anyway, who was I to make it my business? It wasn't my responsibility; Alex was a grown man. So I kept my mouth shut. I just let things be. I didn't tell her parents, I didn't tell Alex what I had heard. Life went on that day, and the next, and the one after that.

On the day that Kaitlin Reese shot herself, I didn't say anything either. I didn't say a word to her mother as she sat crying on our couch, begging for something, anything that might have helped her understand why Kaitlin would do such a thing. I didn't say anything to Spence, who said it was a tragedy, but thank God Alex wasn't involved with her anymore. And I didn't say anything to Alex, who on the day of the funeral made a date with his new girlfriend.

I see Kaitlin a lot now, more than I ever did when she was dating Alex. We've become quite familiar with each other, even though she only visits in the dark. Sometimes I try to comb the hair over the hole in the back of her head, but most of the time she just sits there, staring at me with those big empty blue eyes, waiting for me to open my mouth.

Christmas In July

Theresa Kelliher

Opal Freemont looked at the thick yellow phone book lying open in her lap. As she ran a grubby finger down the page under the words "Child Welfare Services," she was surprised at the extensive list that hung down below it. This call wasn't going to be as easy to make as she first thought. There were headings for "collections" and "enforcement," which she didn't understand, and "neglect," which she did, although it had nothing to do with her problem.

Perusing the list, her hopeful mood began to evaporate as she realized there really wasn't anything on the page that applied to the emergency she and her brothers were facing. Opal's parents were planning their monthly trip to "The People's Meat Market" in Jefferson Wisconsin, something she could hardly bear to think about and was determined to stop them from doing. Letting out a sigh, she closed the book and lay back on her bed, stretched out her long arms, and put them behind her head. Staring at the ceiling she watched a spider as it moved toward an insect that had become trapped in its web, and for just an instant, she thought she saw the spider flash her a sinister smile.

To Opal and her siblings, this trip was at least the equivalent of child abuse, and they were desperate for someone's help preventing it. Opal herself thought it went well past abuse, and bordered on torture. Not torture in the way you might think, like a beating or a broken arm, but instead with something called "pork kidneys." In their family, the budget was tight, so her parents were forced to come up with creative ways to stretch a dollar.

Her father, Bud, believed in two things: saving money and worn out clichés. He was vigilant in making sure they didn't run out of either. The Freemont children dreaded the end of daylight savings time in the fall, because Bud insisted the kitchen lights be left off during dinner to save electricity, forcing them to chase their peas and pearl onions around on their plates in complete darkness. The thermostat was always at a balmy sixty-one degrees, even in the middle of January, when miniature mountains of frost would form around the frames of their doors, no matter how many blankets they laid down in front of them. "Money doesn't grow on trees," Bud would say.

Opal's mother, Violet, reused plastic lunch bags for weeks at a time, causing the peanut butter from one day to mix with the mayonnaise from another, eventually creating an opaque film on the inside of the bag so that by the end of the second week the children could no longer identify what was in the bag by looking at it from the outside.

Somewhere around the time Opal turned ten, they came up with the greatest money-saving idea of all-time. They discovered there was a place where you could buy "pork kidneys" for just twenty-three cents a pound. They were so happy with their discovery that they began to make regular visits after realizing how cheaply they could feed the kids. "A penny saved is a penny earned," Bud said.

Since then, on the third Saturday of every month, they would stuff the children into the back of their 1971 gold-tone Chevy Belair to make the forty-five minute trek to the meat market, otherwise known to Bud as "The answer to my prayers." In Opal's opinion, the ride was more like taking a trip to the penitentiary.

Once there, Bud and the children would follow Violet through the weathered, white front door, its cracked and peeling paint scattered on the dirty concrete stoop below. A door that, at the time, the kids were sure was the portal to Hell.

When they got inside they would have to stand back against the wall with their

father, like a bunch of perps in a line-up, keeping their hands at their sides while Violet stepped up to the counter and placed her order.

"Twenty pounds of pork kidneys please," she'd tell the hairy-chested butcher. After a few mysterious minutes in the back of his shop, he would emerge, flopping her order on the counter, the sacks hitting the formica with a sickening thud, like body bags at a crime scene.

Violet's delight was palpable in the stale air of the meat shop; you would have thought she had just won the St. Paul's church raffle or something.

Opal's siblings would panic and start bargaining, the desperation in their voices echoing in her ears.

"Please Mom, not the kidneys!" her brother would beg, "I'll be a good boy Mom, I promise, a real good boy!"

"Remember, I have allergies!" her sister would lie, "I could die from eating those things!"

Opal, on the other hand, remained quiet. She was old enough to know there was no talking them out of a decision once it was made. She knew those kidneys were her destiny.

During those solemn car rides home, Opal often reflected about her predicament. Earlier that same year, she had learned the purpose of a kidney in Mr. Erdman's 4th hour biology class, information that clearly indicated there was something amiss in the child-rearing abilities of her parents. Why else would they be feeding their children something that had previously contained URINE?! She remembered the diagram that was up on the board that day, showing the little bean shaped kidney with its Interlobar Artery and Renal Pelvis, and Mr. Erdman's explanation of its purpose in the body.

"The kidneys remove metabolic wasters from the blood and excrete them to the outside," he had said.

"What do you mean by excrete?" she had asked him.

"To go to the bathroom," he answered.

At first, Opal thought he was pulling her leg, but as she began to realize he was telling the truth, she started to feel dizzy. The shock of this horrible piece of information was more than she could take, and she asked if she could be excused to the health room. The memory of that day was one Opal would just as soon forget.

On this particular Saturday, Opal stared out the window as their car made its way down the road, Bud singing along as the radio played Johnny Cash's "I walk the Line." Opal thought to herself, Johnny, you don't know the half of it.

She thought back to all the other Saturdays spent swimming in pork kidneys, the hours it took to prepare them for storage. A spot would be set up at the table with cutting boards and two butcher knives Bud had spent most Saturday mornings honing to razor sharpness. The kidneys would be poured out of their bags and onto the table. There they laid, shiny and wet, the color of blood, looking like the leftovers of an appendectomy. Now and then Opal thought she saw them moving on their own. Bud and Violet would then take their seats and commence the slicing, and as the plies began to mount, it would be the children's job to slop them by handfuls into bags for storage downstairs in the old Norge 2100 Frostless Freezer.

Of course, to celebrate their good fortune, some were put aside to have right away that night.

"Christmas in July," said her father.

"A recipe for disaster," said Opal.

To cook them, Violet would first sauté them in a little bacon grease, and then water would be added so that they could be slow-simmered all afternoon. This smelled like a combination of the sweaty feet of a teenage boy and a road-killed skunk. The acrid odor would fill every corner of the Freemont house, spilling outside to creep slowly down the street, so that Opal could not escape it, not even by running away.

When they were sufficiently cooked she would stir in a mixture of cornstarch and water, which would thicken the gravy to a clear, pink slime. This gelatinous mess would be served over boiled potatoes, where it looked like someone had thrown up on the plates. The chalky texture and putrid smell caused Opal to gag just from looking at them.

Many different methods were implemented to get them down. Opal's sister perfected the "I need to go potty" excuse where by she would fill her mouth to capacity and then excuse herself to the bathroom and spit them in the toilet. This worked for a short time, but because all good things must come to an end, her parents caught on and she was severely punished. Another method was to attempt to wash them down with several glasses of milk. This also worked for a while, until their father informed them that they did not own a cow and milk was not cheap.

Finally, with quiet acceptance, they would have to stop fighting and eat them. By this time they would be completely cold, forming a chunky, pink and white coagulated mass, which required Opal to use her fork to chip tiny pieces at a time, while simultaneously holding her eyes shut and dreaming herself anywhere but at that dinner table.

Unfastening her seat belt, Opal forced herself to stop thinking about the past. Arriving just in time for Johnny to finish singing his ode to true love, the Freemont family pulled into the parking lot of the People's Meat Market. Oddly, they were the only ones there.

"Early bird gets the worm," said Bud as he ambled up to the door.

"Not this time Bud," said Violet as she stood next to him, peering in the window, "Looks like we came all this way for nothing. They're not open today."

"What? Not open?" said Bud, "That doesn't make any sense, they're always open on Saturday."

"Well not today," she huffed, "It would have been nice of them to let us know what's going on before we wasted all that gas getting here, they know we always come on the third Saturday of the month."

"Oh well," said Bud, "We might as well go on home."

As he turned to walk down the stairs, he noticed a large orange sticker fastened to the front of the building, just past the doorway. He walked over to see what it was and reading it, let out a gasp.

"Violet, get over here and take a look at this!" he said.

Opal watched her mother's face fall as she read the words on the sticker:

***Condemned ***

**BY ORDER OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

"Oh Bud, what a terrible shame," said Violet as she walked to the parking lot, "I can't understand it, what a horrible thing to happen. Where are we going to get our kidneys now?"

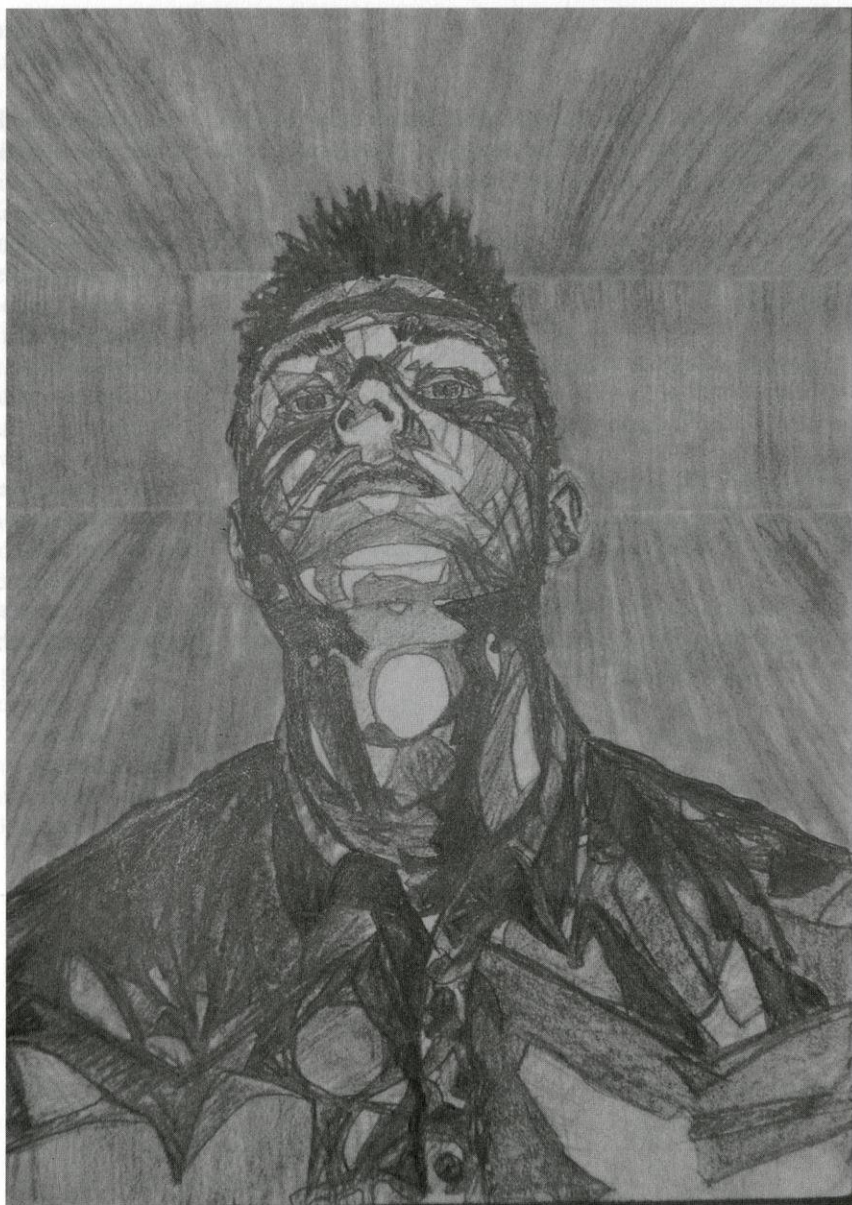
“Probably nowhere,” said Bud “It’s not like they were something regular, like roast beef or hamburger patties. They were a delicacy. We’ll probably never find them again.”

With their heads hanging low, Violet and Bud loaded the kids into the Chevy. As they left the parking lot, the mood inside the car was somber, as if they had just left a funeral.

Opal on the other hand, couldn’t believe her good fortune. It was as if God himself had come down and put that sticker on the building. The children smiled, silently giving each other high fives, but at the same time knowing now was not the time for joyful outbursts regarding the unfortunate demise of the pork kidney capital of the world.

“The end of an era,” said Bud, shaking his head.

“Christmas in July,” said Opal.



Drawing by Jack Kaminski

Thy Darkness

Tim Wojtal

And as I lay on the dirt ground in total bliss, I can't help but smile. It's a wicked, toothful one that spreads from ear to ear. The images of what just took place scatter through my mind as a torn up picture show. And I laugh.

With bodies strewn about, I look around and only see red, covering, soaking everything it touches. The fires still blazing as though they were just set, searing my once long black hair. And I laugh.

Mangled parts of what *was* recognizable lay in an artistic pattern around me. Sitting up, some of the parts still seem to be twitching, though, I soon gather myself and notice it's only the way the fire is dancing upon them. And I laugh.

Getting to my feet, I brush the dirt from my trench coat. Walking among the dead, the images become more vibrant. It was I who caused these atrocities, I who is deranged. I don't feel about it, though, I'm not sure *how* to feel about it. And I laugh.

Looking at the faces, or what's left of them, I know them. This is my family, these are my friends. I killed them, killed them all. This is my hell, this is my punishment. Everywhere I look, everyone is dead. And I cry.

Time
Tim Wojtal

The seconds tick
And fall away
I watch them
Disappear the day
And slowly, tock,
The day is gone
It doesn't seem
To take that long
But, tick, and yet
Another falls
And, tock, it slithers
Down the wall
I stare and wonder
Where they go
And, tick, will no one
Ever know?
I pick it up
And check the clock
To see if it
Does hide the tock
My searching, though,
Goes no where, tick
While all this tocking
Makes me sick

Let Us Go In, the Fog is Rising

Angela Katsaros

Tall, dark, and handsome.
Leaves swaying in the Wind.
You'd shelter me from the Sun.
You never were one to dance in the Day.
No, you were a creature of the Night.
One to waltz under the falling glitter of stars
As the Moonlight tickled your features.
One to dream of such fantastical romanticisms
As would course tremors through me
Every time I peered into your Sleep.
But your voice,
Once as melodious as the rustling of summer leaves,
Has exchanged itself
For the dry creaking of Death's branch.
No longer do you embrace the Evening's glow.
Now you only sit in the arid dirt
That was once your flourishing garden.

Bushido

Jeremy Lewandowski

Kondo bowed and left his father alone to his meditation. He knew he had to hurry to make it to his daily training, but as always he took his time. It wasn't that Kondo lacked discipline, for he was one of the best young warriors of the village, training to become a *Bushi*. He simply grew tired near midday after spending the morning out in the fields. He was at a tough period in his life. Still expected to do manual work like all other women and children, yet he also needed to constantly be prepared for battle.

Kondo also reminded himself that they worked this land for Daimyo Yamushi, who in return provided the village with protection and power. However, the power was all in the hands of the Daimyo, the landowner. Kondo made his way towards training facilities, a large field enclosed by fence, and could see many of his peers shielding their eyes from the sun to watch him join them. Kondo watched two students spar with wooden swords as he moved through the group. He made his way over to his childhood friend Dachi, who was watching one of the masters demonstrate a parrying technique. "Hello Dachi," he said.

"Kondo," Dachi replied patting him on the shoulder. "I figured you were napping by now." Kondo shrugged off the jest and reached for one of the practice weapons. He walked over to Dachi with a wry smile on his face, a gesture that almost always led to a fight.

"Think you have mastered the move?" questioned Kondo.

"Would you like me to show you?" said Dachi.

Dachi, being inherently smaller and less physically impressive than Kondo, was used to the friendly taunts. Never one to back down from a challenge he raised his weapon to meet it. The two went through a series of small exchanges, slowly quickening pace. As the duel progressed many groups of students stopped their training to catch a glimpse of the two at work.

"Give up yet?" asked Kondo between gasps of air.

"Hardly," replied Dachi, similarly out of breath.

The two clashed again, both landing small slaps on each others' side. Dachi came in a quick spin and Kondo reacted by lowering his attack, connecting with Dachi's hand. Dachi winced as his weapon dropped to the ground. The two exchanged a small bow and then a chuckle that relieved the tension that had built up around them. By this time the sun had come down from its peak and was making its way down towards the mountains in the west. The group dispersed as students made their way home for their evening meal.

"I will see you tomorrow then Kondo," said Dachi.

"You will." He said. "Farewell."

Kondo wheeled around and briskly took off for his home. It was on one of the highest hills in the valley that held their village. Kondo's father, Nagado, was the eldest samurai of the village and took the most responsibility. Kondo knew his father had been training him as a replacement, but also knew his father would never admit it to him. An ego can be a devastating thing to a Samurai. As Kondo approached his home, he could smell the wonderful soup brewing, cooked rabbit, rice, and greens. The powerful aroma invaded his nose, making him stumble as he slipped his sandals off and ran up the steps. His mother was laying out bowls for the soup as his father stood up to greet him. Kondo bowed back going slightly lower than his father had for him. Then he saw it, though only

for a moment. He made no outward sounds of distress, but in that split-second his gaze met his father's, he knew. Something was terribly wrong here.

"Sit my son." Nagado said. "You have much to be proud of... I am proud of you."

"Father."

"Please, let me finish," He said, pouring tea for them both. "You've grown into a fine young man and someday you will make an even finer leader. Your sense of duty and courage are to be greatly admired. However, a time will come, sooner than you'd probably like, when your spirit will be tested. Kondo, my son. I feel that I shall not be with you much longer."

"What do you mean?" spat Kondo, rising from the floor. "What's going on here?"

"The situation has been escalating for a while now. I've chosen not to tell you because I never thought it would come to this." Nagado stood up and began to slowly pace back and forth. "As you know civil wars have been going on between rival clans and Daimyo for decades. Recently..."

"Dinner is ready boys." Came a soothing voice from the other room.

Nagado continued hastily, "Recently Daimyo Yamushi began expanding south and the entire scouting expedition was destroyed. He sent a larger group with the same result, and today I got the message from the survivors that Yamushi himself has been killed, his entire estate burned... We've seen their scouts in the past hour; they will be here soon."

"What?" said Kondo, rising to his feet. "We must..."

They both stopped talking and concentrated on the noise their mind told them they heard, at first a light wind or whistle even, but it grew louder. It seemed to come from all directions, growing louder still. The noise peeked with a hiss as streams of arrows ripped through the house. All over Kondo heard wood splintering and the continued hiss. The screams brought him back to reality to see his father with an arrow through his leg, nailing him to the floor.

"Father!"

As Kondo knelt down another volley ripped through the room. He lowered his head on instinct and felt a burning on his left arm. He quickly examined the wound, just a scratch thankfully. Turning back to his father, he saw a second arrow embedded in his back. His father was noticeably trembling and blood was slowly leaking from his mouth. His initial instinct was to run to his father, to try and save him. Nagado knew what was happening and raised his hand to stop Kondo from advancing. Kondo realized the finality of it all; his father was going to die. His mind went blank and everything seemed to stop. Thousands of memories with his father flashed through his head in that moment. A single drop of blood fell from the mouth of Nagado, the slight sound bringing Kondo back to reality.

"Take this son" Nagado gasped, Handing Kondo a sheath containing two swords. "Take it and go."

He bowed solemnly and received the gift: his father's *Daisho*, the long and short sword of a Samurai. Often Kondo had dreamed of one day wielding this fine piece of craftsmanship but certainly not under these conditions.

He heard footsteps. Three men entered the room with swords drawn. Kondo leaped between them and his father, withdrawing the swords as he did so. They came on in three directions, a performed routine. Kondo lunged straight with his left, sidestepping

the others. The lunge hit its mark as the soldier stumbled back. The other two pressed him immediately and their steel sang and danced as the three drifted around the room. Kondo slowly reversed direction, sliced down the back of one with the short sword and took the head off the last in one swift motion. He looked down at his father, Nagoda, hoping for something. His father looked back unblinking, and Kondo knew he was gone.

He took a moment to process what just happened and say good bye to his father before stalking out into the anarchy that had erupted all over. Outside Kondo could see fires leaping up throughout the village, homes scarred with arrows and torn apart similar to his own. He could see and hear battle and rushed out to meet the invaders. Five warriors advanced towards him and he prepared to meet them. They struck with a clash as Kondo dodged and parried as fast as he could. Once he was balanced he chanced an attack that forced one man backwards. Kondo feigned an attack to the left as the the three remaining fell for it. He pivoted and came up, his blades a whirling dance of death. Two fell and the rest regrouped as reinforcements joined them. Kondo wiped sweat from his face, knowing he couldn't possibly keep this up.

The soldiers headed off towards the middle of town where a larger battle had broken out. Kondo strained his eyes and could barely make out the armor of Dachi, leading a charge into the enemy ranks. Without hesitation, Kondo sped off to fight with his friend and hopefully save what was left of his village. As he neared the core of the fighting hi began to hear an ancient battle cry he had learned as a boy. Every male learned it as a boy and for that Kondo was thankful. It gave him the spirit to fight on and eventually meet up with Dachi in the middle of the fray.

"It's good to see you," said Dachi.

"It looked like you could use a little help my friend." Kondo took up the lead and the remaining Bushi formed a V behind him. Kondo was able to guide this wedge through the lines of enemy soldiers. It seemed that the heavily trained men fighting with Kondo had every advantage except numbers. The superior swordsmanship of the Samurai and the leadership of Kondo saved as many innocent lives as enemy lives they had taken. By dawn the invasion had been quelled, and the village could rest once again.

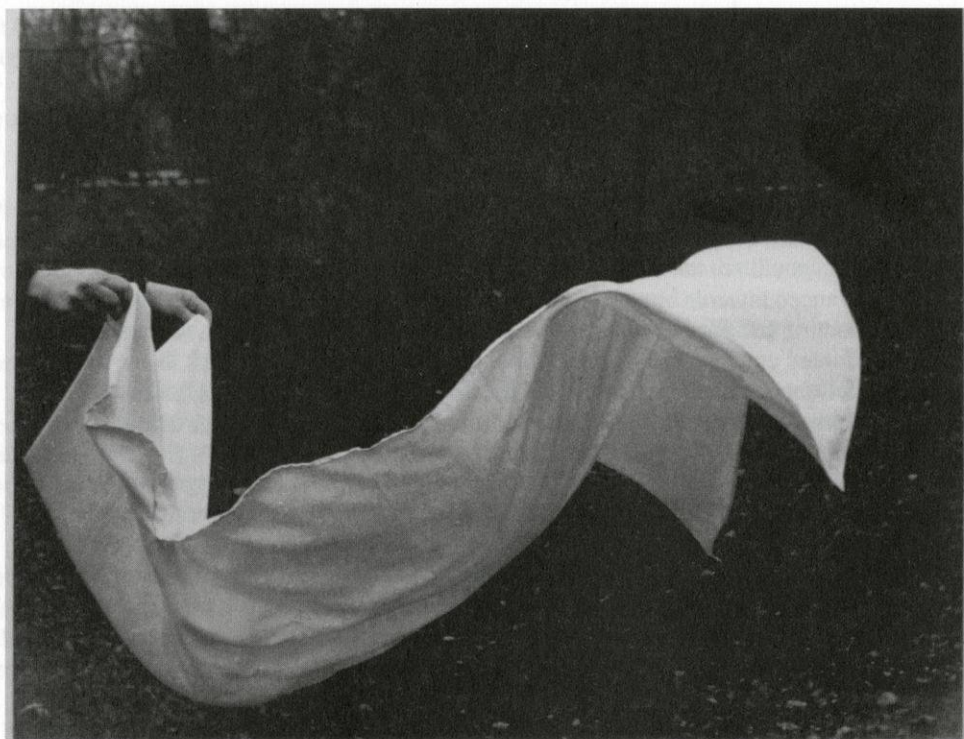


Photo by Kelly Bloedorn

Topeka as I Remember

Robert Kokan

Surrounded by dirt roads and dust
a view ancient with miles
an emerald tries to rise
from the hard part of Kansas.
August dogs pant in the heat
of lawns burnt brittle as needles.
The summer sun somehow closer
to this acre of Earth
browns the arms and faces
of hard working people
burns narrow rings
into the trunks of trees,
the dry days not giving them
much to grow on.
How they are rooted here
these trees and these people
in this impossible soil
that has a will all it's own
ready to relocate at any wrong breath,
how *anything* settles here
other than dust
I don't understand.

My mother sings in the kitchen,
polishes the knick-knacks
grit in her teeth
a grey patina of dust in her hair.

Night as a Warm Blanket Around Us

Robert Kokan

August moon lit for lovers.
Here in the backyard
the little gardens dance in the dark.
In the tall shadow of your house
we kiss not knowing
that the children
are watching from the window
giggling into their hands
from behind the clever curtains,
the ones you made from tatted lace
and your great grandmother's doilies.
I see them as pretty petticoats.
Imagine you in them swaying.
The swish and swirl of cloth
almost invisible on your skin.
You are a happy whirl-wind girl
turning up the white dusts of the day
silver threads that dawn has left behind.
I love how you collect them
turn and twirl,
spin dreams from nothing,
and on evenings like this
when we are almost alone
you dance barefoot
never touching the ground.

Falling Leaves

Kellie Buck

The crisp fall air blew across the colorful leaves on the trees. Circles of wind grabbed the leaves from the ground and swirled them up into the air and around the park. Giggling children scampered over the playground equipment with the warm glow of the sun touching their smiling faces. Over in the corner of the park was a small and aged house, where the sunlight was shaded by the trees, and an elderly man and woman stood. The two were holding rakes in their hands. The elderly man had raked a pile of leaves knee high. The woman stood still next to the man; her head was tilted staring at the children in the distance. Her grasp on her rake was loose, and a big smile appeared across her face.

"I love how the leaves change into the most beautiful colors," she said.

"Ya, I guess. It's actually more of a pain to rake them up." The old man pulled out a big black garbage bag from his breast pocket. The woman started to gather the leaves to place them in the bag.

"No no no, you're doing it wrong. You hold the bag and I'll put them in." The man tossed his wife the bag. Then he changed his mind completely and grabbed the bag back from her to do the job himself. The woman backed away and threw the rake on the ground. She turned away from her husband to kneel down. She rubbed her hands over the crisp foliage and grabbed a bundle to smell them. The man finished raking the leaves from the pile into the garbage bag. The woman took a seat on the big bag of leaves, and threw her handful of leaves into the air. The red, yellow, and brown colors danced around in the chilled air to the grassy floor. The elderly woman watched her leaves fall in excitement.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," the old man said as he walked away to another patch of leaves on the ground. The woman got up from the garbage bag of leaves and frowned, "sorry."

"Grab your rake and let's get back to work."

"OK I'm coming." The woman ran up to her husband and placed her hand on his shoulder and whispered, "We still have a week to think about this, dear."

"I know."

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"I have made up my mind," the man shrugged his shoulder to have his wife's hand fall off. The wind picked up now, and the leaves danced in the trees. Red, yellow, and brown leaves fell to the ground.

"Oh great!" yelled the elderly man. He raised his fist towards the trees and shook it.

"Settle down hun," the woman rubbed his neck.

The man pulled away from her grasp and tightened his grip on the rake. He started to rake fiercely to get all the leaves that had fallen from the harsh wind. "I'm getting so sick of raking up these stupid leaves! I'm so glad we're leaving in a week!"

"Well I'm going to miss this place," she said under her breath.

The man got in front of her. "Miss what?" The woman looked toward the tall trees around her home. She then looked at the children playing across the park.

"Well, one thing I love is giving candy to the kids on Halloween. It's so cute to see their happy painted faces.

"There will be kids in Florida."

The woman looked at her husband's eyes. "But it's not the same, I don't know those kids. I know these kids and their families. We have so many friends here and pleasant neighbors. It's fun for me to talk to my friends about Christmas decorations and have their kids shovel our sidewalk for us. Drinking hot cocoa and watching snow fall and.....I'm going to miss it all. I really do love it here."

"In Florida, there are palm trees! My mind is made up, we are going!" The woman's muscles got tense. "Did you hear me and what I want for once?"

The man just kept raking the colored leaves from his yard. He was almost done, and the woman just looked helpless with her head dropped down. She gave up her argument.

"I'm done. No more raking for me ever again. Next week, I'm picking ripe fruit off the orange trees everyday," he said in excitement.

The woman closed her eyes and walked to the middle of her old yard. The man grabbed both rakes and garbage bags full of leaves and started to walk to the house. A huge gust of wind blew through the trees and the leaves whistled. The woman pulled her scarf up over her head and walked to the house. A leaf fell from the trees above the man as he walked. The leaf danced in anticipation from the breakaway of the tree. It fell right in front of the old man.

"Dammit!" yelled the man. He bent down to grab the leaf. He tried to balance the garbage bags with his rakes. He almost grabbed the leaf as the garbage bags ripped open and spilled out the colored leaves all over his clean lawn.

something bad happened

Kathleen Hayes Phillips

there
along the side of the road
no one erects a cross
amidst weeds and tall grass
to celebrate something
good

no stolen kiss
high-fived event
roadside rescue warrants
such a memorial

this cross
remembers death
headlines from a long-past winter
sleet late night crash
a young man
heading for safe-home
in the dark

today it is sunny
and summer and a woman stands alone
remembering head bowed
one hand lightly touch
the handmade memorial

she tries to soften the harsh outlines
with plastic flowers
an excuse to do something anything
that allows her to cry

an old man watches the bowed woman
the blowing grass
sees only a young face

stays alone in the car
with his grief

a little red

Kathleen Hayes Phillips

you know mothers!
she tried to protect me
wrap me in her cape
bind me with her love
she warned me to be careful
then sent me on my way
I knew she was watching
'til she couldn't see me
anymore

that wolf with the long red tongue
and blood-shot eyes?
he was way too slow for me
saw only my red cape . . . missed
my red shoes
sparkling with glitter
tied with ribbon 'round my ankles
they were dancing slippers
and moved me
way out of those woods

where did they carry me?
that's another story
but when I arrive home
the red cape was in one piece
(much to my mother's delight)
the red shoes?
they were in tatters

now Grandma's ailing again
and Mother's carrying the basket

I'm here with nothing to do
I think I'll paint my toenails

red

1936

Ramon Klitzke

As a kid, I played in a switch yard
Long freight trains came from
everywhere
Men jumped from empty boxcars
like fleas leaving a scratching dog
Rumpled clothes, stubbled faces spoke
of long nights sleeping on bits of straw
over hardwood floors in a moving train.

They hurried across the tracks
Lean young men with hollow eyes
Grizzled old men with bitter faces
reflecting nightmares of hellish
trenches in the damn Great War

Here and there a young boy
followed a father or brother.

They came to the city to work,
any work that got a twenty-five cent
meal
or a couple of dollars to send back
home
to Texas or California or New York
or even the Kansas Dust Bowl.

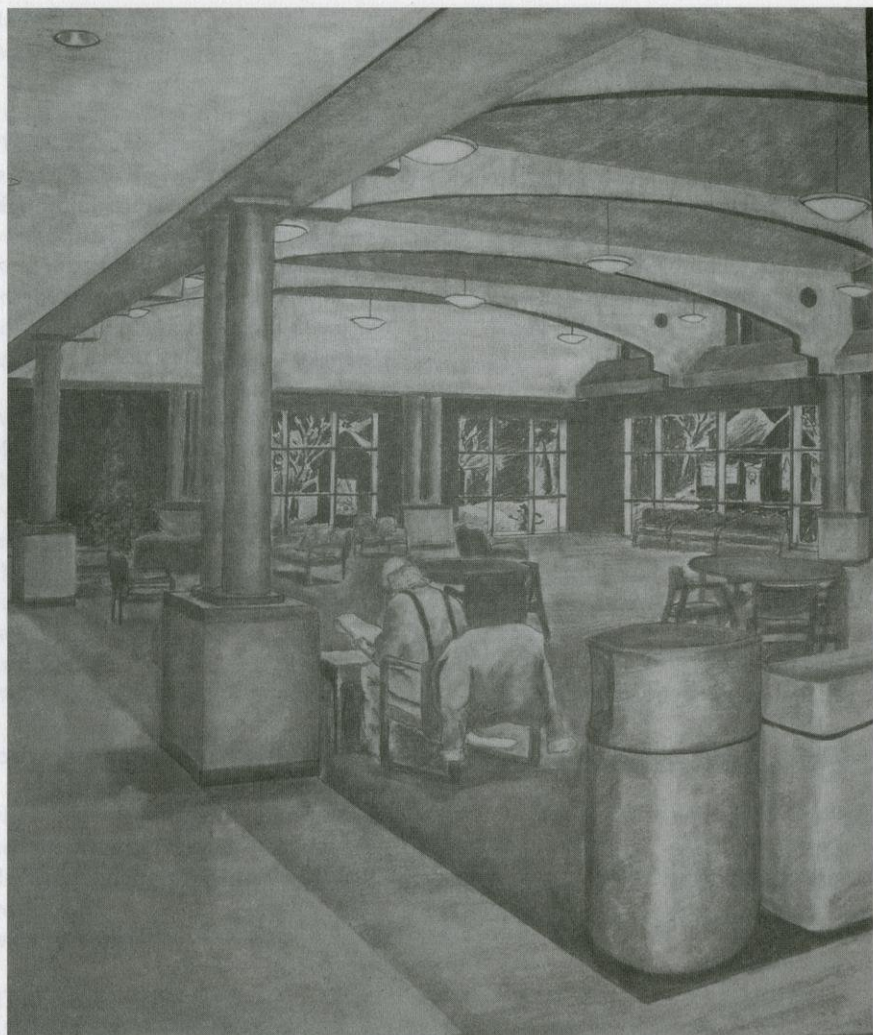
How come I had a warm home
a mother who cared, a working dad?
While all they had was a dirty blanket
and a hope that the next town brought
a couple of hours washing dishes
or pushing a goddamn broom.

Once a tall man walked up to me,
He looked mean, dark unkempt hair,
the lines of his face etched
by bitter cold sleepless nights.
His bloodshot eyes glared,
but I wasn't scared of him.
Is there a soup kitchen, Kid?
He searched my face
Anybody lookin' for a handyman?
Any factories, Kid? I shrugged.

He shuffled off,
his questions unanswered.

I saw lots like him
move off the boxcars
looking for a different life.

I was glad I wasn't him.



Drawing by Jack Kaminski

The Words Beneath

Brandon Peters

Seven days I waited, though I didn't know what it was I was waiting for. I did as she told me, as anyone would have. I would have gladly stuck a knife into my chest if she hadn't come. I was looking forward to it in fact. That was how I had decided to do it. I needed desperately to feel the pain; something a bullet's quick release couldn't promise me. I hadn't believed her distant whispers at first, I thought I was going mad. Her voice had come faintly and light as a feather touched me. She told me beautiful things that I could not understand, but I could feel them like a song in my veins.

I soon found myself whispering the words under my breath. They intrigued me, seemed familiar even, like the questions to answers I already knew. I waited. The knife would still be there when I needed it. Time became inconsequential for me; or rather I realized time had always been inconsequential. The impossible words were ever present on my lips and in the darkness beneath my eyelids, wiping away the ticking of clocks and other white noise of the world. Though the whispers were far away, their promise was so close it was a part of me. I couldn't sleep. I forgot to sleep. Her words became my world. In them I could feel something I had not felt for years. Something I'd left behind long ago in a box with my childhood toys was fighting its way out. It was calling from the musty corner of some basement, and awakening in the farthest reaches of my higher brain. It felt like hope.

Seven days. God created the world in seven days. When you go that long without sleeping your mind starts playing tricks on you. Or maybe, your mind starts telling you the truth. The visions I saw seemed more vivid than reality. I don't pretend to know what was real and what was not. I found myself walking through walls, instead of the doors I had meant to go through. The walls didn't slow me down much, but it felt cold in all the inside places you've never imagined you could feel. The piercing cold of atoms pushing and shoving, distorting and diverting, fighting to hang on to each other while fighting their way through the network of the wall was exhilarating. I don't remember ever feeling so free. I especially enjoyed the ripples that marked my passage. They seemed to go on forever melting into the ceiling and floor both. Even as they crossed over doorways and openings you could see them moving the dust of the air in waves. They gave me the idea that the walls were laughing, that they enjoyed my passage as much as I had.

Then came the spiders. Crawling, biting, whispering, they came out from every crevice and some places where they couldn't possibly have come from. They seemed to drop through the ceiling but they left no ripples of pleasure, only a strand of silk that looked as though it were a part of the fabric of the house itself. Their whispers were a crescendo that drowned out every other sound. I could no longer hear her distant promise. I could barely hold on to my own echo of that promise. Their very presence seemed to be the antithesis of my existence, either they weren't real or I wasn't. I told myself they weren't real. When you can't even see through the mass of spiders to the floor, it gets hard to convince yourself of anything.

Have you ever been hurt by something you cannot hurt back? Touched by something that cannot be touched? I would stand in my sink for hours with the water running on my feet to keep them from climbing up, even as they descended on me from above. I would fill my mind with the random facts I had picked up. *Most spiders are harmless. People from all cultures hallucinate about spiders, when going through*

withdrawal, so this has to be a hallucination, like sleep withdrawal. It was the spiders, whispering doubt into my ears and spinning it around my arms and legs that almost convinced me to stop waiting. The knife that lay on the kitchen table began more and more to creep back into my thoughts, cutting the link between me and her half-remembered words.

It was the seventh night since I first felt her touch; I had gone out to my yard to try to find a spider. I wanted one that felt natural just so I could crush it in defiance, just so I could feel it wriggle, just so I could watch it die. I was losing my will. I needed to do something. I needed to show them I wasn't afraid. I needed this one action to keep going at all. I was down on my hands and knees, searching the infinite sea of grass. It was hard because I had to keep moving to keep from sinking in. Blades of grass are sharper and colder than the walls. For the walls it is an exhilarating rebellion against their creators to allow you passage, but the grass is not so passive. It seizes the chance to cause pain. Everything in this world resents us.

It almost defeated me. Not the grass, and not the spiders, but the sudden realization, the weight of everything against me almost crushed me. I was lying prostrate when she came. I could feel the blades reaching into my belly and my lungs. I thought it was over. I thought the pain would kill me, it would capture me in a sleep until forever, and I would miss the promise for which I waited. The whispers that had been my life for seven days seemed like a thing of the distant past now. I remember wishing I hadn't left my knife all those miles away on the kitchen table. I wondered how I could still see it so far away, and why it was pressed into my stomach. I decided that all the pain was either sharpening my senses, or making me delusional.

I don't know how long I had been lying there. It doesn't matter. When I felt the warmth in those places inside that I hadn't known I could feel, I knew she had come. I stood, my strength renewed, and reached up with all of me. There just between the Gemini twins I saw her in all her brilliance, and the pain melted in the warmth of it. My eyes were drawn by hers even at that distance, and I felt her already around me in the light. Nothing is more brilliant than the light of an angel. It wasn't a burning light or a cold and cutting light. Our man-made imitations cannot begin to describe the sensation. The sun, faded as it is, is but an echo of the warm brilliance. It pierced my soul without feeling intrusive. It was an extension of her, exciting and sensual to touch. She touched my flesh with hers, and I felt an embarrassing throb between my legs. She opened her mouth and sang into me, and I felt the words like a part of me that had been missing. Her song told me that this moment was what I had been praying for, waiting for. It was the birthright of man.

When I awoke, they told me I had been in a coma. They told me they're helping me, and that I have to stay here. They won't tell me anything but lies. I've told them my story over and over. I don't know how long it's been. It doesn't matter; none of it matters. I understand that now.

I tried to show them the words so they might understand, so that they could be happy too. She sang them into me. They are a part of me; inside of me. I can feel them beneath my skin. I peeled back the skin on my forearm so they could see the truth there for themselves. They only strapped me down then, hid the song and the words beneath their bandages.

They don't understand. I can see it in your eyes, neither do you. If you would only listen; everyone has the answers they just don't know what questions to ask.

Fist Fight

Brandon Peters

Blood tastes like iron, they say,
My tongue slides into the rift,
Where flesh was once whole,
Pillowly-thick pounding and,
Swollen-torn, the wound separates,
At the self-destructive touch.

Tight-shut eyes leak hot retribution,
A bitter river over insulted skin,
As I delve with eager tongue,
To explore the nervous chasm,
Rent between treacherous teeth,
And the force of your will.

I follow the seeming endless injury,
To the point of cruel resolve,
I can almost reach my heart.
Your sweat and mine salts the surface,
Of curiously curved lips. They say,
This is what it is to be a man.

Commitment Phobics' Love Song

Gail Richardson

Are you so afraid I'll fall in love
Spoiling a perfect casual affair?
Am I so afraid you'll fall in love

You'll forget that passion dies in a lair
Where the exit door has closed
Spoiling a perfect casual affair?

Did it feel so dreamily cozy as we dozed
That I started a fight last night, afraid
The exit door had closed?

Because was that compromise you just made?
Am I so afraid I made you happy
That you started a fight last night, afraid

I might succumb to domestic trappings?
Or are you afraid that you will?
Am I so afraid you made me happy

That love will destroy the thrill?
Are you so afraid I'll fall in love?
Or are you afraid that you will?
Am I so afraid you'll fall in love?

To Be a Mother

Gail Richardson

To be a Mother,
you need to go to a hospital
and deliver a baby.

To be a Mother
you need to
contact county social agencies
and foster a child.

To be a Mother,
you need to approach officials
in foreign governments
and just say
"I want to adopt one of your
needy orphans"
several times

They'll give you a lot of red tape,
but be sure you don't settle for
"No"
Because you want the *Real*
Thing:

A child
To call your own,
So you will be a Mother

To be a Mother,
you have to be
jumping double Dutch ropes
and asking people to join you
through the limericks and the
heat;

They won't lose the beat,
and from there you can
jump into motherhood.

To be Mother,
you have to go
around and around
singing ring around the rosie
in the green space of the park,
around and around
some historical statue

and after you get tired of that
you have to tell some policeman

that it's ring around the rosie you're playing—
not tag, not London bridges
certainly not hop scotch,
But ring around the rosie, you know,
all join hands,
chanting pockets full of posies,
and ashes, ashes,
ring around the rosie, you know,
and we all fall down.

To be a Mother,
you have to get into somehow,
the Golden Arches of McDonalds,
where they'll tell you to
make a right
at the K-mart blue light special
and keep on a-going to Wal-Mart.

To be a Mother
you have to walk to the bathroom
at dusk,
and then pat and console a sick, crabby toddler in
the bath tub
getting wet up to your elbows,
soaking your robe
as you recite
"Hush little baby, don't say a word, Papa's gonna
buy you a mocking bird"
over and over,

and from there really
any direction will get you to Motherhood.

To be a Mother,
you have to look at your watch during story time
from the very first page where The Cat walks in,
overlooking If you would eat them here or there;
your watch is set
to nap time,
so you wave good-bye
to Sam I Am, Thing One, Thing Two,

and set out
south to the trundle bed.

To be a Mother,
you have to know
where you're going,

you have to know
what you're doing.

To be a Mother,
you have to
live in Motherhood,

You have to
be a Mother
for a long time;

You have to
drive a child all around
over and over;

You have to
walk a child all around
through all the seasons;

You have to
talk about children,
think about children,
ask about children,
know about children;

you think you're
familiar with what it takes to be
a Mother,
think that you
finally know what it means to be
a Mother,
really know what it is to be a
Mother,
a real Mother,

someone will ask you,
or you will ask yourself:

"Where are all the Mothers?"

"Who are all the Mothers?"

"What are all the Mothers?"

and despite all of your knowledge,
all of your Dr. Spock books,
all of your Super Nanny tactics—

all the certificates and documents
and photographs
you have as proof—

Motherhood, as you *think* you know it,
Motherhood, as you *know* you know it,

This state, this time, this person
called "Mother"

will disappear before your very eyes,

gone forever,
as if she never,
existed—

and when you blink your eyes again,
you will be standing in line for a picture
with Santa
or driving through traffic to attend a
Kindergarten play,

startled back to your senses,
to life as you know it, accept it,
and say to yourself:

*"Welcome back, Grandmother.
Welcome back home."*

Hunting for Thompson Part I

Robert Francis Curtis

I was somewhere past Lomira, and encased in a thick fog. All around me was the chemical warfare of a new and powerful empire. I couldn't breathe with all that fog. Perhaps the thing to do would have been to roll down the window and allow this cloud to circulate outside of my Cavalier. Instead, I decided to turn the radio loud and listen to the vibrations of the mellow waves. The bastardization of free speech in America is most evident in the blunders of morning chat radio. Consequently, I aborted my decision to listen to the radio. Driving in silence and choking on cigarette smoke, I mourned the death of Hunter S. Thompson and with him the death of the American Dream.

One contemplates suicide many times in one's life. Thoughts of how to kill yourself fluctuate from day to day. To slit your wrists would be a bother; slow and horrifying. There is too much risk in hanging yourself by a belt attached to a shower curtain rod. I saw myself in an overflowing bathtub filled with dingy water and grapefruit, and attempting to pull the radio into my aquatic nightmare. Then, he leaps into the room pressing the same shower curtain rod to my belly, screaming about Moby Dick.

"I am Ahab," Thompson howls, "I am the old man battling the sea! I am everything you've come to know about Gonzo journalism!"

All I can muster is a groan in response.

The night before I took my trip I tried to read his books and watch his films. My depression grew. I wouldn't allow the fog to clear because I felt a massive beast towering over me. Lizards were falling from the sky to devour me. And in my confusion I fled, finding myself just past Lomira.

Suddenly, as if hit by the second-rate ghost story effects of late night television, I was attacked, not by Lizards but by a swarm of red and blue lights. The dragons screeched into my ears with bloody, swooping roars. They dove all around me, but I couldn't see them through the fog.

"Damn!" a voice was yelling. "Where are these goddamned animals?"

The source of the horror eluded me. Rather than pull over my car, I decided not to let these monsters catch me and cook me as they had Thompson. I sped up to the brink of existence, attempting to outrun this tragic end of days. Perhaps I should have shot myself to escape the mutant army forcing down on me. No. I could not allow them to take us both out in this guerilla warfare. I had to march on. I was the last line of defense against the take over from hell. Somewhere, in the distance, Lucifer's muffled voice was commanding me to stop. "Was this the Apocalypse?" I wondered, "I could stop it."

Fueled by Hunter's spirit I opened my window. The fog escaped as I lifted myself out the window, swerving the vehicle like a drunken redneck hopped up on amphetamines. My fist shook wildly at the sky.

"Never! I will never surrender!" Hunter S. Thompson's words came from my lips, "I am Ahab! I am the old man battling the sea! I am everything you've come to know about Gonzo journalism!"

The Devil replied, "This is the Wisconsin State Highway Patrol. Please pull your vehicle over to the side of the road."

It was at that moment that I realized I was being pulled over by the Wisconsin State Highway Patrol. Those damn pigs had caught me. The jig was up. At first I thought I would play it cool, like Thompson would have. Maybe then they would never find the case and drug collection in my trunk. Thompson lived in the "generation of love."

Unfortunately, I had forgotten that this, the year of our lord two-thousand and five, was the “generation of cop.” I pulled over to the side of the lane, disregarding the yellow lines in the center of the back roads highway.

The patrolman walked up, “Have you been drinking today sir?”

I shoved a beer can under my seat with my foot, “Why no sir. I’m not even old enough to drink yet.”

“Can I see your driver’s license please?”

“Of course you can uh... Officer Devlin, is it?” I pulled out my wallet and gave him my I.D. “Is there a problem here sir?”

“Where are you headed today, Mr. Higgins?”

“Puerto Rico! I hear I’m old enough to drink in the Caribbean!”

“I hear that too. Are you aware that you are heading north sir?”

He had me pinned, but I shrewdly thought up my retort. “I wanted to take in some scenery.” In my head echoed ungodly things, *Soon they’ll have the dogs on me. Leeches! Oh God. Prison rape. They’ll send me up river to work houses, where I’ll be a pint of fresh ale the inmates can drink up. And chuckle about each night as they give me cat calls through the bars. I should steal the patrolman’s pistol. Go out like Thompson.*

“Sit tight for a moment sir. I’m gonna run a check on this.”

I mumbled below my breath, “Fucking dragon beast. I’ll show you.”

In the car I still felt the eating breath of the Lizard Army on my neck. Hot fiery breath. I began to sweat. I was soaked. They were closing in on me, ready to pounce on me. Lucifer had set me up for the ambush. That fucking pig bastard! Thompson could get out of this. He was everything the world had come to know about Gonzo Journalism. I was in mourning, but that would be no excuse for dishonoring the death of an American hero chalked full of grit. I’ll do Thompson proud. I’ll get out of this, sell it to Rolling Stone, and be a grit worn hero too.

“Can you step out of the car please, sir?”

“Righteo-man. Righteo!”

“Do you have any needles, knives, or anything that’s going to poke me in your pockets?”

“No.”

“You smell like alcohol. Are you sure you haven’t had anything to drink today, sir?”

“No.”

“No, I haven’t had anything to drink, or no you aren’t sure?”

“No, I haven’t had anything to drink sir. Of course not! I’m not nearly old enough. I’m sure. I’m sure! Can you here me?!”

“There’s no need to yell Mr. Higgins. Can you step back here by the trunk and place your hands on the car. Spread your feet.”

He was going to assault me sexually. I played along, waiting for the moment his gun was unguarded. The pig ran his hands down my limbs, and then by my groin. That bastard. I began to ponder the possibilities of running again. I wouldn’t need to drive to Puerto Rico. I could walk. Easy there Officer Devlin, not so rough. In a matter of moments you’ll be dead on the side of the highway with a bullet hole in your throat. Just a little higher. Soon after, the Lizards will eat you too. They will joust upon you from the heavens in a burst of eternal flame. Brimstone will rise up. You, Officer Devlin, will be eaten. Devoured. Charbroiled. The rest of your damn pig buddies will never find you, because you will be in the belly of the beast.

"So what's the score here?"

"What was that, Mr. Higgins?"

"What's the score here? Are you going to arrest me or what?" There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. "If you're not going to arrest me..."

"Do you mind if I take a look in your trunk?"

Of course I mind you pig fucker. "No." He was going to find the drug case. Sure, I didn't need to bring it, but what better way to mourn the death of Hunter S. Thompson than to mourn it doped up, drunken, and stoned beyond comprehension. This highway patrolman was going to find the drug bust of his life.

He opened the trunk, which was empty except for the large, black hard-case along the backside. The patrolman picked it up and opened it. Inside he was to find a bottle of tequila, a pound of pot, a salt shaker of cocaine, and a zip-lock bag full of an essential rainbow of pills. The patrolman took a small taste of the tequila. "Apple Juice?" He smelled the grass. "Oregano?" He licked his index finger and dipped it in the cocaine. "Powdered sugar." Then, he found the bag of pills. "These look like cold tablets. What are they?"

"They're not narcotic! I swear!"

He took one, "Wal-phed? Wife makes me take them all the time. Look, maybe you should go to the rest area three miles ahead and take a nap."

I had seen this scenario before. "Where's that?" So, I'll play dumb, knowing that his intention was to make me his bathroom bitch only a few miles from where we stood.

"Two exits up the interstate."

"That's further north. I'm headed south sir."

"Alright sir. We can do this the easy way, or we can do it the hard way. I won't write you a citation provided... provided you take advantage of the upcoming rest area. Do you understand me, son?"

"Why yes sir. Thank you."

"Good. Now, get back in your vehicle and enjoy the state's fine resting facilities." I got back in my car and started the engine. Rolling back onto the road I was attacked again by the same bombardment of lights and screams. The Devil was pulling me over again. He was toying with me. Fuck! This bastard was toying with me. I lit a cigarette and waited for him to enter my window again.

"Is there a problem officer?"

"You forgot to use your blinker when you entered traffic again, Mr. Higgins."

"Oh, is that all?"

"No. One more thing."

"What else! I mean, what else?"

"I never gave you your driver's license back."

Damn the Devil to the depths. This was madness. Some sort of strange vibration had come over me with such utter disdain that I felt trapped. I was trapped, so it made no difference. I had to escape for Thompson. So, when the patrolman looked up and down the highway again, I hurled the driver's side door into his crotch and ran. Any minute, I thought, a platoon of demon reptiles would scoop him up as an appetizer before taking me as the main course.

The trenches of the snow covered corn field mounted a new obstacle on my journey. I could barely lift my feet above the frozen top layer of the field. Without warning, the sky became gray and dark, hovering over me, mocking me, torturing me.

The monsters in the air were about to come out of hiding. Rumbles in the clouds became louder.

“Holy Jesus!” I yelled, “The mouths of heaven and Hell are opening to swallow this disgusting place!” Perhaps it was Thompson sending me a message from the great beyond. “Thompson! Thompson, tell me!” I swear that for a brief moment I heard him cursing the world, and finishing his flask before he was interrupted by the Earth and its multitude of problems interrupted him.

The patrolman had begun to open fire on me. I secretly hoped he would kill me; that a bullet would penetrate my skull and stain this perfect white blanket with my insides. Only then could I join Thompson in the afterlife. In Nirvana or oblivion, where all things are good, we would take part in the discos and casinos of the gods. Still, rather than stop I continued to run. The Apocalypse was near...

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