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Literary & Art Journal

Brushing

ROLLINS COLLEGE
ART AND LITERARY JOURNAL
VOLUME XXXII, 2004

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Editor's Note

The 2004 issue is the result of hard work and dedication from many sources. The diligence and creativity of the entire staff of *Brushing* has been superb, particularly considering the multiple demands of being undergraduate students. Furthermore, *Brushing* could not exist without the institutional support of Rollins College and the students' and faculties' willingness to submit their works to this highly competitive journal. Thank you to all those who submitted work to us, on behalf of all of the editors; it has been a pleasure to review your work.

The cultural and artistic hub of Florence, Italy awaits my arrival next year, and I am bittersweet as I terminate my two-year editorship of *Brushing*. Happy because this year's journal is outstanding, and sad because I am walking away from a position that enabled me to connect, directly and indirectly, with a community filled with artistic vitality. Directly, this year at Rollins was booming with creativity: visits from filmmaker Amy Hobbie, playwright Edward Albee, Limon Dance, and writers Sena Jeter Naslund, Silas House, Diana Abu-Jaber, and Kaye Gibbons. The professional guests invited to our school were dynamic. Indirectly, I have been honored to read and review the works of some truly talented individuals, many of whom have inspired me and most of whom I have never had the privilege of meeting. Thus, as another academic year wanes, may this journal be a reflection of both the public and the private creativity housed at Rollins College during 2003-2004.

Myriah Hampton
Editor-in-Chief
Brushing Art & Literary Journal
2002-2004

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Can I Call You Daddy?

Matt Dicker Rothschild

During the first year I taught kindergarten, in total, I had eight students diagnosed with ADD, one student with a near fatal allergy to nuts, two epileptics, and a student who lived in a homeless shelter. This was two years before I graduated from college, and when I was offered the position I suspected that my supervisor, Janet, had my application confused with somebody else's. This somebody else had several years of teaching experience, or, at the very least, a degree in education. Instead they got me, Mr. Matt, whose idea of teaching was to teach kids how to wash my car.

Originally, I had applied to work as a fifth grade teacher's assistant because I hoped it might build my patience. Kindergarten didn't excite me; five year olds were an entity for which I had no interest. The last thing I wanted was for a student to approach me twenty years later, and blame me for his nervous twitch, or for every one of her failed relationships since the sandbox.

"If that's the case," I would have to explain, "we should actually blame my mother. She's responsible for my nervous twitch and every one of my failed relationships."

Teaching for this particular after-school program, an educational enrichment series at the Orlando Jewish Community Center, was a transient position. During my first week, three teachers quit for the opportunity to travel cross-country as groupies for the band Matchbox Twenty. I, on the other hand, had no interest in pop rock and decided a classroom full of slaves to get me endless refills of grape juice and Rice Krispy treats, my two drugs of choice, would be more rewarding.

On my first day as Mr. Matt, a Friday afternoon in the middle of October, I met Parker, the student who lived in the homeless shelter. Fridays at the Jewish Community Center were special because mock Shabbat services were conducted by the Judaica specialist, Marcy, for all of the children. Conditioning starts at a very early age in Judaism: Marcy instructed the children to join hands and sing and dance to

Hebrew songs. All grades were expected to attend, so my students formed a line and marched down to the auditorium where I told them to sit in a circle and hum “Hanukah o’ Hanukah.” We waited for Marcy, who was apparently on Jewish Standard Time, which runs about forty-five minutes behind Eastern Standard Time. As I had been late for events most of my adult life, I was pleased to learn I could use minority status as an acceptable explanation.

As the class happily hummed the dreydel song, Parker stood up and bolted behind the curtain of the auditorium stage, leaving me to sit and wonder, “Wait, can he even do that? I’m Mr. Matt!”

I saw Parker’s face poke out behind the curtain, mocking my authority.

“Mr. Matt, it’s not fair how Parker gets to sit out of Shabbat,” one of the epileptic students complained. “I want to sit out, too.”

Until that point, it never occurred to me that children had opinions, and I wasn’t interested in changing my perception. The other teachers, noticing Parker’s behavior, looked at me sympathetically, like that was going to do any good. Call his mother, I thought, and let her come and threaten to tell his father like all other mothers would.

I asked one of the other teachers, someone who actually had control over her group, to keep an eye on my students while I chased after Parker. I found him sitting against a wall, staring at the floor. In my most sympathetic Mr. Matt tone I asked, “What’s your problem, little boy? Do you want me to get in trouble?”

“I don’t want to do this,” he said. “I don’t want to be in Shabbat.”

“And what am I, the Shabbos Fairy?” I asked. “Wait, don’t answer that.”

“I just need some time alone,” he said. He waved his hand in some gesture of finality, like a boy twice his age.

“Why do you want to be alone?”

“Because I have a migraine.” He pointed to his temples.

“Okay, if you need anything I’ll be over there.” I pointed to the rest of the group, banging their fists on the floor and screaming, “I hate Shabbat!” “See what you’re missing?” I said.

Marcy finally arrived, toting an elementary aged son and a toddler daughter. “Sorry everyone,” she said sighing into the microphone. “I had to drive my other daughter to work, and little Daniel has a rash.” She spent much of Shabbat screaming at Daniel, who was making faces at his sister. At one point, Daniel took his sister’s stroller hostage, and ran for the exit. Marcy’s broken singing voice could be heard from all over the JCC as she galloped around the auditorium in hot pursuit of her son. I’ve since come to the conclusion that Jews who convert out of Judaism do so because of the singing.

As we tried to keep up with Marcy’s frantic pace, I glanced back to the stage only to see Parker yank his face from view when he caught me looking. Eventually I gave up, almost forgetting he was up there, and after half an hour, much to my relief, Marcy decided she’d had enough. It was time to light the Shabbos candles. As a result of my secular upbringing I was lost at the first “shalom,” lip synching words I had never heard, hoping nobody caught on.

As the groups sang the prayer to welcome the Sabbath, Parker crept from his hiding place and plopped into my lap. “You’re not supposed to cover your eyes while the candles are being lighted,” he informed me.

“Why?”

He shrugged. “Just the women do.”

As we left the auditorium Parker clutched my hand. “I’m sorry I ran away.”

“Everyone needs time alone, I guess,” I offered.

“Will you tell my mother? If you do then I won’t earn my sticker for today.”

“I’ll probably forget before she comes,” I said.

Later, when it was time for him to go home, Parker asked, “Can I call you Daddy?”

“Why do you want to do that?” I asked.

“Because I want you to be my daddy.”

“But I’m not your daddy.”

“I don’t have a daddy.” He hugged me and darted out to meet his mother.

Janet, a plump little woman with thick glasses, patted Parker on the head as he ran out. “How was your first day, Mr. Matt?”

“It was okay, but what’s the story with Parker?”

She sat down and indicated a seat for me as well.

“His parents split up before his mom brought all the kids down to Florida. Mom has four she’s raising alone. They were living out of their van, but they’re staying in a shelter now.”

“What about the father?” I asked.

“Dad’s not in the picture. He doesn’t even know where they are; he was abusive. You have a very special bunch of darlings, Mr. Matt.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about these kids?”

“If I had, you never would have taken the job.”

And I had thought Janet was the one being duped.

The following Monday Parker came to class with a plant in a foam cup. “His name is Herbert. He has to be close to me all the time.”

I tried to explain that if he continued to carry Herbert in his pocket it would die, but he would have none of that.

“All the time,” he repeated. Again, the hand gesture of finality. It occurred to me later that he was just giving me the bird. The secret hand gesture was just to prevent punishment. When I was his age I flicked people off just for fun, but Parker chose his battles wisely.

“I could put the plant on the window sill so that it gets light,” I suggested. “You can pick it up before you leave.”

“Someone might steal him,” Parker said.

I wanted to tell Parker that anyone could go out, pick weeds in a field, and put them in a cup. Presto, their very own Herbert! I didn’t say that of course, I just left it alone.

"I want to give him to my baby brother," he said. "Do you have a plant, Daddy?"

Suddenly, I heard children laughing.

"And what are you laughing at, Sammy Joe?" I asked a little boy nearby.

"I'm Andrew," he said.

"What's wrong with Sammy Joe?" I asked.

Andrew just stared at me, confused. "Why does Parker call you 'Daddy'?" Andrew asked.

"Because he's my daddy," Parker said.

This can't be good, I thought.

"Are you Parker's dad, Mr. Matt?" Andrew asked. A crowd was gathering.

"Well, no. It's just pretend, like a game," I told them. Parker looked to the ground.

"Like when we play Daddy outside on the playground?" another little boy asked.

"You play Daddy on the playground? What happened to hide and go seek?"

Andrew explained that Daddy was a variation on tag. I was only half listening, watching Parker for some reaction. He put the plant on the window sill.

While the other kids were on the play ground, Parker sat by himself in the middle of the field. Fearful of another performance like last week's Shabbat, I walked out to the field and sat next to him.

"They don't like me," he said.

"Who doesn't like you?"

"The other kids." He was picking up tufts of grass, scattering them into the wind.

I picked up a blade of grass, held it between my thumbs, and blew. Parker watched.

"Did you know that I played an instrument?" I asked, making the blade hum. Parker was already on his hands and knees, searching the field for a piece of grass to blow.

"It has to be perfect," he told me, and I wondered if I had been that smart at four. "What was your dad like?" he asked, not looking up from the ground.

"I don't know. I never met him."

He looked up. "Why not?"

"I guess my parents didn't get along so well. He left before I was born."

"And you never saw him again?"

"Never," I said.

Parker plucked a blade of the grass and crawled into my lap. I put the blade between his thumbs, pushing the two thumbs together as tightly as I could without hurting him.

"Do you know how to whistle?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Same idea. Put your lips together and blow out."

He tried but all that came out was the sound of him blowing air.

"You have to be patient," I told him. "Sometimes you have to work the hardest for the things you want the most." When in doubt pull dime store philosophy out of nowhere.

When it finally worked he settled back against my chest. "Do you miss him?"

"No." But even as I answered, it came out too fast. Much of the hurt and disappointment that I thought was gone flushed back.

Parker looked upset.

"But I did miss him when I was your age, though," I said. "It's hard to grow up without a dad."

"I wish you were my daddy," he said.

"Why's that?"

"Because I love you," he said.

"You like me, and I like you too. It doesn't mean we can't be friends. And I can probably teach you a lot of things. But, Parker, I can't be your dad."

"Why?"

"Because I'm twenty years old. Because I can't even take care of a dog. Because I don't know what it's like to have a dad. Lots of reasons, pick one." I started to tell Parker that it would be all right, that he'd only think about it once or twice a day tops. Instead, I sat there silent while Parker blew onto the piece of grass, and I tried to remember how many men I called 'Daddy' when I was his age.

Having children never crossed my mind, but I wondered if this is what fathers and sons did. Did they sit around in fields bonding over blades of grass, or was there something more? Working with kindergarten was the closest I had been to spending more than five minutes with small children without running in the opposite direction. Maybe I wasn't the perfect teacher, but someone needed to teach these kids how to get the tooth fairy to jack up her rates. This would be my gift to future generations.

Parker's mood picked up by the end of the day, and as he was walking out to meet his mother he ran back into the classroom to hug me. "Night Daddy," he said. My shirt muffled the sound of his voice.

Parker didn't show up the next day. I walked down the hall to find his older brother, but he wasn't around either. I went to the office to see why the two were absent.

"They're not coming anymore," Janet said.

"What do you mean?" I asked, more nervous than I had intended.

"Mom took the kids out," she sighed. "She has a sister down in Boca who said the family could stay with her."

"That's great." I feigned enthusiasm.

"They'll be in a house now," she said. "Maybe it'll be more stable, too."

I nodded, walking back down to my classroom.

"Mr. Matt, Mr. Matt!" Andrew bounded over.

"Yeah, Sammy Joe?"

"Mr. Matt, can I water the plant?" he asked.

Parker had forgotten Herbert the day before.

"Sure, go grab some water. Then I'll tell you guys all about plants."

Andrew took a cup and ran over to the water fountain, and I asked the other kids to sit in a circle so we could have a lesson. I grabbed Herbert. And as I rubbed my thumb across the surface of the cup, I wondered whose son Parker would be tomorrow.

Marianna's Garden

Geri Throne

My cousin Janka struggles to find the right words in English. I wonder if she understands my questions: "What happened to your grandmother, Janka? Did she die in the war?"

We sit in a garden that many years ago was part of her grandmother's large farm in Krzepice in western Poland. Janka doesn't know how long this land has been in her family's hands, but it likely has been for centuries. That is the way things are in Poland. Land passes from generation to generation, like a sacrament.

In my head a Chopin melody repeats itself, a sad soft strain that builds into joyous crescendos. A warm breeze embraces us. I feel comfortable here, as comfortable as I felt as a child in a great-aunt's garden in America. I want to know everything about Janka's family -- my family in Poland. I want to know the story of Marianna, who was Janka's grandmother and my great aunt. Why did Marianna remain in Poland when all her brothers had left for America? What became of her? All I knew of her was what I saw in an old yellowing photograph -- a tiny, pretty woman standing beside her tall, thin husband and their two solemn children.

Marianna's oldest brother -- my grandfather -- left Krzepice when he was only 16. His two brothers followed. Their exodus took place at the turn of the 20th century, when Poland, in Europe's eyes, did not even exist. Its enemies had divided its fertile fields among themselves and wiped Poland off the map for almost a century. Hardship was a way of life. Yet Marianna stayed.

"Tell me, Janka. What kept her here?"

Serendipity brought me here. When I was 17, my grandfather gave me an envelope. On it, like a template, he had written Janka's full name -- Janina Dobranowska -- and her address in Poland. "This is your cousin. She is the same age as you," he said. "You should write to her."

My grandfather spoke so rarely to me that I took this brief conversation as a command. I wrote Janka, and she replied in lush, formal textbook English. She urged me to come see her beautiful country. Maybe some day, I thought, when I have the money, when I learn Polish, when communist Poland has fewer troubles. But a few years after my grandfather died in 1968, Janka and I lost touch during a period of too frequent moves and too few letters. Too easily, our families became separated.

Thirty years later, an uncle researching the family tree found envelopes pre-addressed to people in Krzepice among my grandfather's papers. Trusting the fates, my uncle sent them all a letter introducing himself and asking for information. Miraculously, an elderly woman wrote back. "You can reach us through my daughter's e-mail address," she wrote. "Her name is Janina Dobranowska."

As if all those years of separation had never happened, Janka and I began corresponding again. We exchanged e-mails about our siblings, our mothers, our jobs. On Sept. 11 of \2001, she sent a simple, profound sentence of condolence. Later, she sent photographs of herself and her family. She begged me to come to her country. I stared at the image of her face, wondering again about taking a trip to Poland. The idea remained daunting. My concerns seemed reasonable, even logical. Poland's economy remained fragile. I had heard of rising crime and soaring unemployment. I knew more German and French than Polish. Besides, my relatives still were strangers. Would they accept me?

My real fears remained unspoken. The voices of my past provoked me, and I felt too embarrassed to repeat their cajoling aloud. My lineage is Polish, but few Polish-Americans I had known ever bragged about their roots. As a child, I heard my parents whispering about relatives and friends who changed their names to escape ridicule. One uncle was urged by his corporate boss to Americanize his name if he wanted to get ahead. My father never changed his name. He didn't have to; it didn't sound Polish. Many business acquaintances didn't know his ethnicity. One once warned him to "never trust a Polack. They'll stab you in the back."

When I was about eight, my father became furious when he heard me correcting a curious adult who had asked me if I were Irish. "Never, ever, tell someone you're Polish," he said. "If people ask, you tell them you're American. That's what you are. American. You were born here. Don't forget that."

I resented his rejection of his heritage. As an adult, though, I tasted a little of the world he experienced in the 1930s and '40s. People who found out that I was Polish gleefully shared "dumb Polack" jokes. Jewish friends berated me for Hitler's slaughter of the Jews – accomplished, they said, with the average Pole's help. Their voices easily joined the critics of Poland inside me. They remained a powerful army. On the other side, now, was one lone woman writing kind e-mail messages from across the sea, urging me to see her beautiful land.

It wasn't until Janka started writing about her mother's failing health that I began to relent. I feared I was letting a moment of discovery slip by me. I decided to meet head-on a land I did not know, cousins I had never met and a vowel-less language I had never mastered. My husband agreed to join me. We would visit the land of my ancestors. I remained nervous beyond all words.

Two months before our departure, I received an email from Janka:

I am really moved by your coming to Poland. It will be a new experience for both of us – a clash of different worlds, customs and cultures.

The first time I saw Janka in the lobby of a resort hotel in Posnan, I was struck by her sophisticated elegance. Petite and blond, she had a youthful complexion and wore a smart gray business suit and high heels. Her serious garb was a disguise. It hid the heart of a romantic. When she saw me, she grabbed me in a long, fierce bear hug. A torrent of Polish mixed with her tears. "I cannot believe this," she said in halting English. "So many years. So many years. And you are here. I cannot believe it is really true."

My husband and I were not prepared for what came next. We are guests in Poland. Janka's guests. During our time with

her, we fight for the chance to treat her to one dinner, pay for one museum, leave even one small tip. It is a futile struggle. In Poland, it is said that a guest in the home is God in the home. Even God cannot win a battle over the tab with a determined Polish host.

The first day, Janka escorted us to the busy industrial city of Katowice, where she owns a small, thriving advertising firm. Her apartment is a postage stamp, two tiny rooms in a grim gray high-rise – an ugly remnant of Communist sensibilities. She doesn't mind, because she spends most of her waking hours at her spacious, handsome office nearby. She is single by choice, and her longtime love -- a retired engineer named Jerzy -- understands. First and foremost, Janka is a savvy, hard-driving businesswoman.

We sat at a table that, when fully opened, consumed her living room. As small as her apartment is, Janka would gladly have given up her bed and slept on the tiny loveseat for us. "It is OK," she assured us. "Really, there is much room." But she knew better than to insist we stay. That night, we drove to a nearby Novotel Hotel, a sleek, modern facility featuring every amenity and a parking attendant who slyly overcharged us.

Today's Poles relish the free market. They love to buy things almost as much as they truly love Americans. The lucky ones, like Janka, have made an easy leap from Communist rigidity to capitalist profit-and-loss columns. Those with less education and training depend upon government aid or their wits. Prosperous Poles frequently warn us of car thefts – apparently a popular way to supplement one's income. But in our three weeks in Poland, this greedy parking attendant was our only disappointing experience.

In the garden in Krzepice, I see Janka soften. The small town is two hours from Katowice's industrial congestion and a few miles northwest of the famous Catholic shrine of Czestochowa. It is where Janka was raised and where her mother and sister, Irena, still live. Her soul is rooted here.

Inside the two-story stucco house, Irena prepares a feast. A land assessor by profession, she was the first woman in Krzepice's 650-year history to be elected its mayor. She recently resigned from that post to care for her ailing mother, but she has no regrets. Irena is the family's caregiver.

Irena speaks no English, but her warm smile and four-course meal need no translation. She is cooking, from scratch: egg noodle and vegetable-and-chicken soups; cucumber salad, cabbage salad and Bibb lettuce salad; a main course of rolled pork stuffed with prunes, veal baked in a pastry crust, mashed potatoes, potato noodles and gravy. For dessert, she will bake a cheesecake and a lavish Karpatka cake topped with a baked meringue that looks like the mountain in Poland after which the cake was named. Janka will help in the kitchen today, as will young Agnes, but the meal is Irena's masterpiece.

Outside, a warm breeze nudges the spindly branches of an apple tree in Marianna's garden. A blue-and-white umbrella shades us. Janka and I are joined by her nephew Krystof and his wife, Agnes. The young couple's first child, 10-month-old Victoria, gurgles happily in her mother's lap. The family adores Victoria, as every Polish family worships the hope in each new generation.

During our time in Poland, my husband and I have seen this adulation in the loving eyes of adults wherever we have gone. Nowhere have we seen an adult spank a child, or even speak harshly to him. As we traveled, we began to understand why. This is a nation that believes in the miracle of birth and rebirth. How else could it recreate itself from the ashes of World War II? Whole cities were leveled in the final delirious revenge of the Nazis toward the end of World War II. Millions upon millions of Poles were killed, methodically and wantonly – Christians and Jews, fathers and gay men, babies and grandmothers. And yet Poland survives. In a glorious display of its stubborn will, it even flourishes in some regions. Rebuilt marketplaces bustle with shoppers, restored churches sparkle with color, flower stands decorate every street corner.

Here in Krzepice, in Marianne's garden, time seems eternal. The mood is quiet, gentle. Krystof, a university

student fluent in English, wants to help me understand his great-grandmother. She was a determined woman, he says, who did not want to leave her native land. After her brothers left for America, she married and had two children, a daughter, Josefa, and a son, Wladyslaw. When her husband died, Marianna raised the children by herself and ran the farm with the help of hired hands. She died in the war.

I turn to Janka. "What happened to her?" I ask.

In Poland, I will learn, questions such as this have no easy answers. Layers of pain interlace with national pride. A nation of survivors has a language of its own.

Janka has much to tell and too few English words to serve her. Frowning, she turns to Krystof for help. She will tell a story told often to her by her father and mother and siblings, a story that took place before she was born. Her nephew becomes her Greek chorus, an echo in English to her Polish tragedy.

Janka speaks softly in her native tongue, smoothing her apron as she talks. In 1939 the German border was different. It was very close to Krzepice. On the first of September, the Nazis began their attack on Poland only seven kilometers from here.

"You know that date, yes?" Krystof asks me.

September 1, 1939 – the first day of Hitler's Blitzkrieg. His punishment of Poland for ignoring his demands. Hitler ordered his troops to spill Polish blood, to show no mercy. They gladly obliged.

Squinting, Janka points to a house across the street. She continues her story. That house over there once belonged to a very rich man. In his yard was a cellar. It was agreed that this was a place the neighbors all could be safe, where they could hide from the Germans until the trouble passed. But the border was so close; the Germans reached Krzepice on the third day.

I calculate the date. That would be Sunday, Sept. 3, 1939, a sunny Indian summer day of growing mayhem. On that day France and England did what no country – including the United States – yet had dared to do. They declared war against Hitler's Germany, even though the two countries offered

Poland no real help in the weeks to come. World War II began that day. It meant nothing to Krzepice.

Janka speaks faster. I hear the rushed murmur of her voice as Krystof translates her words into English: "The planes swept so low my grandmother could see the pilots' faces. They bombed her wooden farmhouse. It burned to the ground. Marianna grabbed her grandson's hand and ran toward the rich man's cellar. A German pilot saw her and aimed at her. The bullets struck her in the stomach." Janka points to her midriff and grimaces. *Tak bolacy.*

A stomach injury is the worst kind, Krystof explains. Marianne died slowly, a painful death. Some bullets struck the boy – Janka's older brother – in the foot. He survived.

Janka grabs Krystof's arm to stop his translation. She points again across the street and then turns back to me, a look of triumph on her face as she explains in halting English.

"Today, that house is mine. The rich man's house – mine. It was empty 20 years. Last year, I buy it. I fix it. One day I will live there. I do this for my grandmother."

I look across the street. The rich man's house is so close. Just a few steps from the garden. I picture Marianna writhing in the street, just outside her gate, a few feet from shelter. I want to cry, but all I can see is Janka's proud, beaming face.

Poland sings like a Chopin Polonaise – a rich melody of melancholy, courage, romance, determination, bitterness, pride and hope. Minor keys of tragedy never overwhelm triumphant chords of strength and survival.

I think about my own country, which stood by in 1939 as Hitler's troops gunned down Polish grandmothers and leveled cities and homes, which stood by again in 1945 as Russia grabbed Poland as one more spoil of war. I cringe at my hesitation to visit this country, the land of my forbearers. I think about how Janka's family survived war and poverty, how it was reborn in Marianna's grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In hard times, the family sold off pieces of the farm to make sure every child could attend a university. The adults work hard to support their families, and Janka gives generously whenever her help is needed. This family is strong, resilient, proud.

I cannot think about my roots the same way. I hear Chopin's song now. In Warsaw, the heart of Chopin is buried inside the Church of the Holy Cross. Half Polish and half French, Chopin left instructions in his will: Bury my body in Paris, but my heart belongs to Poland.

Talitha Cumi

Calypso Jewel

When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him...Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi" which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age.

~ Mark 5:39-42, NKJ

I died at age eleven.

The day began like most others in the Jamaican summer. I blinked open my eyes and stared through opaque glass louvers at sunlight glinting around the edges of monsoon clouds. I glanced right, at my sister's crib: empty. The baby must be sleeping with Mommy. I was alone.

My stomach gurgled and my throat hissed for satisfaction. A long glance at the kitchen door, over the foot of my oak-framed bed, and then I rose quickly. Time to make dumplings, squishy on the outside - firm, salty and white inside like swordfish. Mommy would make sweet yellow ackee and the awful cho-cho that's wet, tart and tasted like fresh cut grass, no matter how much hot sauce I poured on it.

No one awake yet. Only the jingling wind chime on the verandah broke the silence. I plucked the black spaghetti straps of the bathing suit I slept in, tip-toed over to Mommy's door: closed. Ratid! It wasn't time to cook after all. She had bionic ears. The strike of a match to light our stove would elicit a moan of, "Calypso! Cho ras, gal..." I couldn't risk it.

Just then, mango sap, sweet and pungent, wafted into the small, white room. I cranked open the window louvers and scrutinized the tree. Its expansive branches were 13 months pregnant, laden with ripened fruit. Wide, waxy, round leaves flapped back and forth in the gusts of ocean air. Barefoot, I crept out the front door and relieved it of several deliveries.

I heard a shrill cry overhead. Stinkin' john-crow! Carrion eaters circled the sky above the beach, searching for their breakfast of dead fish. Rays of sunshine pierced through billowing storm clouds and crowded the sky. Mottled shadows played on the undulating grass of the Plantation cow fields on the left, across the thick vegetation and mangroves that shielded the bay and housed a million frogs, and over the corrugated tin roof of my house. The roof and the stone veranda cast rippling shadows on the glaring white marl rock of our front yard. Hurling a third mango seed over my house, I heard bamboo creaking by the shoreline and smelled the algae exhaling salt into the air.

I snuck back into my room to retrieve my swimming gear and crept out the door and onto the road beyond our marl yard. Dripping with pulp and juice, I skipped down the street and up the hill, made a left, and stepped gingerly over the rocky path that lead to the bay. The wind blew my once-black hair over my burnished shoulders. I saw my bumpy shadow moving across the dirt and noted the beauty of long tendrils stretching and bouncing as in a silent movie. I looked thin and muscular in my shadow; I loved my shadow.

I ducked under the barbed wire fence that encircled the abandoned property, crunched my way over a million mating love bugs and leapt down the steps to the beach. With a broad smile, I dug my toes into the powdery sand. I was always struck by the color of the sea. Its blueness made me dizzy and joyous.

Lobsters hid in clusters at the shallow end of the bay, under and around coral vestibules. With my mask and snorkel, I waded into lapping waves and eased over to them. The shy things scuttled backward into the shadows, keeping many pairs of eyestalks on me. I floated on the water's surface, unmoving. After awhile, they edged closer, pumping their fantails and kicking up puffs of waterlogged sand. They brushed me with long, segmented tentacles, inspecting. One by one, they returned to digging in the sand, sucking particles into whiskery mouths.

A manta ray fluttered by. They were difficult to keep up with. I terrorized the lobsters as I spun in the water and swam

full-tilt after the ray. I tried to cast my shadow on its silky gray back, but only managed it a moment before the rippling of its body became a vibration and it disappeared into the swaying kelp beds.

I'd reached the coral reef though. Panting through my snorkel, spraying saliva like a miniature whale, I scared a shimmering multitude of fish. "Cho bumbo hole!" I cursed and grunted. My mask filled with steam, forcing me to dog paddle to clear it. The clearing required an old-fashioned remedy; yanking hair from my scalp, I pulled my mask with one arm and swished water with the other. I spat saltwater, then saliva into the window, rubbed with my finger and practiced breathing only through my mouth.

The sun passed over my head and into the rain clouds beyond the hills before the fishes returned to flick and flutter about my body.

Tiny violet and yellow fish kissed my mask; others ate withered skin from my fingertips. Giant discus fish, whose puny mouths and striped eyes squeezed together in Ohs, floated and stared, until prey came by. Darting forward, they could devour a smaller fish in a single gulp.

My stomach burned.

I wondered what time it was and looked away from the sea, over the tree line at the white-hot sun. Kenny! Arms flailing, mouth wide in a call. I guessed Mommy *wasn't* home when I woke up, or she would've sent him for me sooner. I liked him though. He was the only boy who'd race me.

I decided to impress him. With calloused hands, I sunk under the waves, darted towards the reef bed, and burst from the surface with a loud, "oi!" He dropped his arms and stared at me. I grabbed the coral rock, sharp as volcanic glass and crusted with sea salt. After several maneuvers, arching my back and pushing with leathery feet, I pulled myself onto the rocks. He didn't know I could do this thing.

I stood and waved triumphantly at his skinny ebony body standing mute on the shore. His mouth opened and closed, trying in vain to reach me with his voice.

I reluctantly swam back. Doubtless, he'd chide me with, "no pickney gal shouldda' go out dere!" Jamaican mothers didn't approve of little girls cavorting in the cove. I didn't even know how to sew. Kenny was too much like his Momma anyhow.

"Hey, wha' ah go on? Ya'ah go swim outta' da' reef agin?"

"Yah. Wha' ya' wan now?" I didn't attempt to cover my irritation and began flashing my steel knife.

"No pickney gal shouldda' go out dere!"

So predictable.

"Cho!" I kissed my teeth, strapped on my mask and ran back into the water.

He screamed authoritatively, "You mudda' is 'ome an' callin' you!"

The baby! Oh no. Mommy wasn't home! That's why I never woke her up, and now I'd left the baby alone. Ras clot! I paused, considering a lie. "I never saw Kenny. I didn't know you were gone Mom..." Her eyes penetrated. I couldn't fool her.

While I paced in the shallow waves, Kenny ran up the steps yelling over his shoulder, "You mudda' want you Caleepso!"

Covered in brine, I trudged back to our whitewashed cement house. I could already smell the aloe shampoo and feel its sugary coolness on my reddened skin. Its yellow label read: "Processed in Kingston." Distraction faded and I began debating the possibilities.

Mommy would certainly yell, but what if? Jamaican mothers used the switch, but Mommy preferred wide leather belts. She had one for every disco dress and casual suit: aqua, red, black (in two sizes), yellow and hot pink. She usually chose red for spankings. The red belt, its oversized buckle, made me shiver, though heavy clouds bore down, thickening the humidity of the day. Sometimes the belt slid in her hands and its shiny buckle would pound into my legs, leaving vicious purple and blue welts. My jaw clenched. Mommy's boyfriend lounged on the verandah's low wall. I was in luck. She wouldn't beat me in front of *him*. I opened her door and stared wide-eyed at the goings on. A scraggly man, with his hair in long dread-locks and a giant spliff in his

mouth, hunched down on the floor, tearing a strip of brown packing tape. The scent of his burning joint combined with the fragrance of freshly pressed marijuana. Then Mommy saw me.

"Cho ras clot! What the 'ell you 'tink you a go' do...leavin' you sistah alone? You mad?"

"But she was asleep!" I couldn't speak the patois to Mommy. To her, I had to confirm that I was an American who didn't belong in this country.

"Where da' 'ell you been?"

"Swimming." Her eyes bulged.

"Gal, you head is too big!" She calmed a little, softened by guilt. "Me a go take dat' trip today Calypso."

"Do you have to go Mommy?"

She glared at me; I knew she must leave. No money. No money in her suitcase. No cash in the jewelry box. And almost no food in the house.

I glanced down in time to slap a mosquito off my arm. *Cho!* Another bite to itch me like mad until I dug holes in my skin from all the scratching. Tropical mosquitoes embody the size and ferocity of the insect kingdoms. I scowled as I reached down to rub the penny-sized bump.

"I'm gonna' bring you 'dem lemon cakes 'dat you love! You know I can'nuh take you nuh!" Yes, I knew.

Last time, she strapped the bricks of ganja to her stomach and pretended she was pregnant. My sweaty hands shook. I could barely carry my suitcase. I wanted to run through customs but Mommy told me to "act natural." The baby slept on Mommy's shoulder, oblivious as always. Mommy promised we'd see Gramma. I missed my Grandmother so much! I gulped down the lump in my throat, stilled my trembling nerves and kept walking. We made it to the last turnstile, when a woman in blue stopped us and looked into my eyes. She told Mommy to put down her bag then poked Mommy's fake baby with her nightstick. Her eyebrows shot up in angry discernment. The heavy black woman called to the guards and they took her in a back room. Someone was called to collect the baby and me.

Mommy came back three weeks later. She had been to jail, thanks to Calypso. I was bad. The idiot baby good. "Scared as 'dat pickney looked, of course they wouldda' figured me for a smuggler!" she reminded her friends every time she re-told the story.

This time would be different. Mommy and Job rolled the ganja tight with packing tape and stuffed it into tent rods so the dogs wouldn't smell it.

Mommy donned a royal blue silk dress and splashed on Obsession. She rolled her auburn hair tight at the nape of her slender neck. She was beautiful. I knew her routine well. I watched envyingly as she deftly stoked on eye shadow and slid black stockings over tan, freckled legs. On the edge of the waterbed lay her favorite black belt, with tropical hibiscus flowers beaded into the center of it. I reached out and stroked the shiny, tubular beads.

Mommy's head jerked up and she yelled. "Get out 'nuh! You a go drive me mad!"

"Can I put it on Mommy? Please, please?"

"What'd I jus' say? No!" The baby started crying. Someone told me to pick her up, but I skulked away. Suzy the Maid went in my stead, cooing and rocking the toddler child. Harry smirked as I passed him on the way to my room; I shuddered, knowing I had a secret about him Mommy wouldn't like. My suit crackled as I tugged it off my body and changed into shorts and a t-shirt. I loped back outside and resumed bargaining.

"Please, Mommy...".

"Me a go' lick you gal!" The renewed threat sent me scurrying.

"Cho bumba hole! Where is 'dat ras man?" Her voice faded behind the closed door. I flopped into a hammock and wrote in my little green diary. Suzy the Maid and her children left. The boyfriend kissed Mommy goodbye.

The baby slept. I hated her. I hated them all. They were leaving so I hated them. All this I scratched into my diary, leaving deep grooves on the page with my ballpoint pen. An old blue Honda pulled up, sputtering from the salt breezes eating away at its metal innards. Mommy called me in

to explain that Mitchey would look after me; she'd only be gone two weeks. I'd be alone but he would bring me money and check up on me and...

I looked Mitchey over. A tall redman with fluffy curls and a potbelly. An unfunny clown. I hated him too.

Mommy took another quick inventory. Mitchey handed her the baby. She took a deep breath and turned to me, "Hug you Mudda' Calypso. I love you..."

"Please Mommy. I'll be good. Please take..."

"I'll be back in two weeks wid' dem' lemon cakes, sweetie. Good-bye. I love you."

"I love you too." My pounding heart sunk into my feet.

I hated her. I should've hidden the beaded belt so she couldn't leave.

The car ground and gasped into gear before listing away. She looked back and waved, "Two weeks..." Cacophonous evening feeding of cranes on the bay suppressed her "I love yous." Like pigs squealing before the butcher's axe, the birds yelped and squawked: a deafening jangle that swelled, pulsed.

I stood alone in the faded road. It stretched away, around the coconut Plantation and over a hill. I stood helplessly, watching the dented, rusty blue car until it lurched around the bend and disappeared.

It hit. Sound stopped and I choked. Tidal waves inundated my body. Salty tears stung my sunburned cheeks. Each wave flattened, pressed, and pushed, until I lay gasping in the road. Surely, I'd turned to jelly, a mass of broken bones and soggy flesh. The clouds must've fled, allowing the bay to run wild, cover everything.

At that moment, I knew my nothingness.

I heard a piercing scream and looked up. No John Crow. My lips peeled back so tight they hurt. I heard my own voice, felt my lungs squeezing into my throat. Rolling onto my stomach and up on one knee I leaned into the hurtling sound: "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy! Don't go! Take me with you!"

My shirt hung slack with tears. A breath of wind cooled my chest. My legs bolted up and forward, and I ran ran ran until I collapsing at the top of the hill, amidst a cluster of

mosquitoes and tall grass. It was no use. A knot in my brain confirmed she'd gone forever. Waves ebbed back to the glittering sea and the sun set. I slowly turned towards the whitewashed house, on stilted legs.

~ * ~

Epilogue

About two months later, Mom returned on a double-decker tourist bus from Montego Bay. It rumbled up, screeched to a stop, panting diesel into the yard while Harry and Mom unloaded her bags. No baby. Just Mom.

Sometime during the following week, a rain cloud began dropping its load at the top of the hill. The cloud moved slowly down the road, centimeter by centimeter. I'd never seen or imagined anything like it. I called my friends out of their houses. We wheeled in and out of the wall of rain in the dull sunshine of that day. Wet. Dry. Wet – dry. Wet, dry.

“Mom!” I shouted at her bedroom door.

“Wha?” I heard the slap of her feet on the tile then she swung the door open.

“Mom, look at the rain. It's dry on one side and wet on the other! Can you believe it?”

She squinted through a haze of rum and crack smoke, then blinked. “Yeah,” she said, “I've seen it before.” She slammed the door.

I didn't believe her.

The Reporter

Darlyn Finch

The little newspaper was called The Reporter, and it came rolled up tightly in a tiny rubber band and tossed under the wheels of the cars in the driveways of our North Jacksonville homes. Many of the people in the neighborhood left them there and ran over them with their tires until they were little more than wet, soggy, torn piles of brown, dirty paper and forgotten news ink. But not me. I watched intently for the weekly delivery, and snatched ours up so fast it didn't have time to get dusty, much less ruined.

The paper was written and managed by our elderly neighbor, Miz Myrtle Geiger. She lived in a huge gray stone house set well back from the road, at the very edge of the Trout River. Miz Geiger wore what she wanted to wear, said what she wanted to say, and wrote what she wanted to write. She played several musical instruments and wrote poetry, which she then published in her little paper. I admired her from afar. She terrified me. I wanted to be just like her.

I finally met Miz Geiger face-to-face the day I went door-to-door selling Girl Scout cookies, when I was in the fourth grade. She had the biggest lot, the largest house, and the longest, spookiest driveway through the pine trees, of anyone on Trout River Boulevard. I knew this was the house of my heroine. I knew that she had the power of the press in her hands, ink under her nails, and fire in her blood. I marched up to her front door in fear and trembling, in my little green dress, badge-covered sash, and green beret. In the pocket of my uniform I also carried my secret. It was a poem I had written about the Fourth of July. It was called *Independence*.

At my timid knock, the great lady herself threw open the door. She took one look at me down her aquiline nose and ushered me inside with a flourish and a commanding, "Come in, child. Have some lemonade." I gasped in awe at my good fortune, and followed her into wonderland.

Anytime I had ever seen Miz Geiger out and about, she always had her hair in a tidy, amazingly large bun fastened with an assortment of combs, pins and what-have-you's. But

today she wore it loose, and it cascaded an astonishing length down her back in a riot of untidy gray-brown curls. She wore a loose kimono that brought nothing to mind more than the illustration of Joseph's coat of many colors in my Sunday School book. All in all, an imposing personage.

We got the business of the cookie order out of the way. We drank the lemonade. Then she began to show me her impossibly large house. Each room contained some sort of treasure to my child's eyes. There was a Hammond organ in the parlor, where she coaxed out several tunes, before demanding imperiously that I "play something, anything at all." I gave her "To a Wild Rose," the only song I knew how to play. She seemed pleased; I think she half-expected me to butcher "Chopsticks."

When we resumed our tour, she tossed open the door to one room as if she had obviously forgotten what it contained. Inside, the only object was a fully-decorated artificial Christmas tree. It was quite lovely, if somewhat dusty, and she explained that it was "easier to keep it up all year and just drag it to the parlor" when it was needed.

At last, she showed me the inner sanctum ... her writing room. There was a tiny roll-top desk in there, full of cunning little drawers and clever cubbyholes. It was completely covered with assorted stacks of perilously piled papers, so that it was obvious the desk had not been closed in years. That was fine with me. What good was a closed writing desk?

"I am a writer, too, you know," I told her. I pulled the tiny poem from the pocket of my Girl Scout Uniform and handed it over. She carefully lifted her glasses from their resting place, hanging from a ribbon on her generous bosom, up to her nose and stepped into the light cast by the reading lamp. She perused the piece once, twice, then a third time, her lips moving silently as she read. My lips moved with hers, reciting the words I had written and read so many times.

She threw her arms around me and crushed me to her bosom.

"This is quite good, little lady. Bring me more!"

The next time The Reporter landed in our driveway, *Independence* was on page one.

The Apartment

Kimberly Murphy

The renovations started three weeks ago. The landlord asked if you wanted a new back door. He was replacing everybody's. You said sure. The contractor was there, standing off to the side leering at you. He said it would only take a day, maybe two, to finish. He winked at you after he said this. You're not sure why. Three weeks later and it's still not done. The first week and a half, you had the pleasure of living in an apartment with a new door propped in the hole where your old door used to be. It wasn't attached to anything. If you tripped (which isn't so unusual), and hit the door, you would go flying through it and surf it off the second floor, winging over the skeletal remains of your deck, and plummeting to the construction littered ground below. The new door has no doorknob or lock. Apparently, this shouldn't concern you. "After all," the contractor told you, "if someone wanted to get in, they could break a window and come right in anyway." This is supposed to make you, a woman who lives alone, feel better.

The contractor, much to your delight, decided that in order to install the new door, it was necessary to rip out your entire kitchen wall. "The wood was rotten," he explained to you. You needed him to talk to you in a slow, patronizing manner. After all, you are a woman. You have no concept of the intricacies involved in door replacement.

You are completely unused to being treated like an overreacting woman, so his lecture catches you off guard. All your life you have been one of the guys. You drink beer. You watch football and can quote stats. You have been an "honorary dude" at more than one bachelor party. Your guy friends call you to go to Home Depot with them. You are not some sheltered housewife. You know this guy is giving you the runaround.

The day laborers employed by the contractor were kind enough to leave all of your possessions in the kitchen while they worked. They saved you the trouble of having to move it all back into the room after they were done. They didn't cover

anything before they started. But, because you are a woman, and you like nothing more than cleaning, it shouldn't bother you that everything you own is covered in dust, dirt and chunks of wall. Between working full time and taking an overload of college courses, you have plenty of time to scrub everything you own. Besides, you should have enjoyed the moonlight filtering through the one-inch gaps in the siding where your wall used to be. It made a pretty pattern on your filthy floors.

On Monday, the fourth day of no lock, no knob, a door that might blow over in a strong wind, a wall that was actually the wood siding of the house, and daily reassurances from the contractor that it would be done "today", you called your landlord. You had been trapped in your house for four days. How could you leave when any wacko off the street could just waltz in and have a look around? Your neighbor told you the crack-head, the one you are sure is the person who has been breaking into everybody's cars, was standing in the yard watching the construction the other day. This revelation fueled your paranoia and anger. The landlord's answer to your complaints was, "What do you want *me* to do about it?" Barely containing your anger, you told him "I want a lock on my door!" Your assertiveness must have worked. The following Saturday, you got your new lock. Of course, at that point you didn't have a ceiling, but at least you had a lock. The door still wasn't exactly anchored to anything, but that new imitation brass doorknob sure did look pretty.

The contractor feels that he gave you fair warning that he would be ripping out your ceiling. "I'm going to fix that spot that's leaking." He told you. You knew what he was talking about. A month after you moved in, a piece of your kitchen ceiling had collapsed. You had been there when it happened. You saw what fell out of the hole when that chunk came down. Your landlord had done, as you now knew, a typical, half-assed repair job. That particular spot had stopped leaking, but now there was a small waterfall in your cabinets every time it rained. Your landlord knew about it. He "fixed" the leak by nailing a slab of wood to the top of the cupboard. It took a few

weeks before the water found its way around the wood and back into the cabinets. You told the landlord that there was still a leak. He didn't believe you. So, you put a large bowl on the top shelf to catch the rainwater that you, a silly woman, are only imagining. But the contractor believed you. You didn't even have to tell him about it, he could see the disgusting brown stains and the bowl full of dirty water for himself. You were actually pleased that it was going to be fixed.

When you came home on Thursday, after a long day at a job you despise, you saw your 1950's kitchen table laying on its side on the newly refurbished deck outside your kitchen's not actually installed door. That table is your most prized possession. You had worked your ass off in your friend's antique store for it. You hadn't stood around all day looking pretty and selling overpriced furniture to get it. No, you slaved away in the freezing cold garage "workshop" refinishing, sanding, polishing and moving ridiculously heavy Arts and Crafts furniture onto trucks. Your friend was short on cash so she gave you the table as payment for your labor. You wondered why they had to take it out of the kitchen. It was nowhere near the leaky spot in the ceiling.

You started to get nervous. You went in the front door and walked back through the apartment. You couldn't help but notice the big, dusty, white footprints throughout your home. Visions of construction workers frolicking around your abode, your panties sitting playfully atop their heads, flit through your mind. You see the filthy contents of your kitchen strewn haphazardly about your bedroom area. A small, metal rack on which your precious, painstakingly amassed 1950's kitchen collection is usually displayed was pushed up against your bed, spilling dust and dirt onto your one hundred and fifty dollar velvet comforter. None of your collection was on the rack. You wondered where it was.

You walked slowly back to the kitchen and peeled back the sheet that you had the foresight to hang from the doorway. A poor little Hispanic worker stood in the middle of the room, looking at you with something close to terror in his eyes. He was covered in white powder. For a split second, you were

reminded of Al Pacino, covered in cocaine, in that unforgettable scene from Scarface. You looked up at the roof of the house. Not the ceiling, the roof. You could see the individual metal shingles. You entered the kitchen, carefully avoiding the cloth-covered wires hanging down from where your lights used to be.

The perpetually shirtless, red headed contractor sauntered in through your door hole, cigarette dangling from his lips. You realized at that moment that you hated him. "What do you think?" he asked, as though he had just transformed your humble apartment into the Waldorf Astoria. You couldn't even speak.

The Hispanic guy started to wildly explain to you how disgusting it was when he tore out the ceiling. "I had to take seven fucking showers." He told you. "I ain't never seen nothing like it." Vaguely, you wonder if he used your bathroom. You told him you knew how bad it was, you had been there when the ceiling fell out before. He didn't seem to think you understood. He went on and on about the bugs and the shit and other grossness that he had to endure that day. You stood speechless. The contractor looked amused. "It ain't that bad. It's going to be beautiful when I'm done. I got you recessed lighting. I'm going to popcorn the ceiling. You're going to want to cook me dinner when it's done." He leaned up against the not-sturdy door and looked at you with what might have been his version of a seductive gaze. You stared at him, unable to speak. Dinner? Why in God's name would you ever want to cook this revolting little man dinner? He shakes his head and walks out, disgusted. You must have been acting like a silly woman again. After all, how could you not relish the chance to spend more time with the man who left you such an incredible mess to clean?

"I can't stay here," you said to the Hispanic guy.

"No, mama. It ain't safe. There was asbestos and shit up there. You shouldn't be breathin' that shit in."

You turned and walked out of the kitchen to your porch, began chain smoking and waited for them to leave.

Later that night, the maintenance man showed up. Unbelievably enough, he was there to paint your porch and put in new screens, a project the landlord had started six months ago and never finished. You like Mark. He is a fat, harmless, drunk guy. Unfortunately, he showed up at the wrong time and had to hear your wrath. You made him go in and look at the kitchen. He agreed with you, you couldn't stay here. He called the landlord to tell him what was going on. You stood next to him listening to the conversation. The landlord told him to "Clean it up so she can stay there," and refused to talk to you. After all, you were acting like a silly, hysterical woman. How could he possibly have a rational conversation with you when you were being so crazy? You were incredulous. Clean it up?

You began to rant insanely to the maintenance man, telling him everything that had been happening. He was very sympathetic, especially since you were plying him with beer. You finished your tirade by telling him that you thought somebody had been on your porch the other night. You told him that you heard somebody sneeze when you were getting out of your shower and then noticed the next morning that one of your chairs was moved. "Oh," Mark said, "That was Dave. I'm sorry. He was up there before I knew it. When I heard him sneeze I realized he was on your porch and made him get down right away."

Dave is your creepy neighbor that you swear is stalking you. He borrowed your plunger once and then asked you out as he was trying to return it. When you turned down his invitation to a free concert at a lake, he became rather nasty with you. He became more incensed when you wouldn't take your plunger back, after all he insisted, "I cleaned it." Every since you declined his enticing offer, he has been very strange. You swear he watches your every move. You have caught him more than once lurking in the bushes under your porch, listening to you talk on the phone. He even yelled at you when you stopped parking in your normal spot next to his big white van. He owes the landlord money and is working for him to pay it off. You have told your landlord repeatedly that you don't want him anywhere near your apartment. He creeps you out.

"What was he doing on my porch?" Now, on top of being furious, you were scared.

"He said he was painting," Mark said. There are no lights on your porch. How could he paint in the dark?

Mark decided that he really was going to paint your porch. The absurdity of the whole situation began to strike you as humorous. Maybe it was just the beer. You called a friend and asked to borrow his digital camera and told him that you'd be staying with him for a while. He came over with the camera and a twelve pack. He's a good man. You took some pictures of your kitchen so the landlord could see what was going on, just in case he is deluded enough to think that you would actually be paying rent. You packed some things and waited for Mark to get done. Before you left, you barricaded the back door with the oven and wedged a mop handle between it and the refrigerator. Nobody could get in, unless of course they simply pulled the door from its hole. You left.

You didn't come back until Saturday at about two in the morning. You got into a little tiff with your friend and decided not to spend the evening at his apartment. Just this once, you will admit that you acted like a bitchy PMS'ed monster. The two of you were supposed to go out to dinner. You hadn't eaten all day. You called him around six to see what he was doing. He said he would be done by eight, so you decided to wait until he was off work so you could both go eat. You let yourself into his apartment later that night, showered and waited for him. His truck was there so you didn't think he could have gone far. He doesn't have a house phone so you had no way to call his cell to find out where he was. You waited until after nine before you started to worry. You couldn't figure out where he was. You found a payphone down the street and called him.

"Hello?"

You heard noise in the background.

"Hey, where are you?"

"I'm at dinner, where are you?"

You lost your temper at this point. Ranting like a mad woman, you told him about how you had waited all day for him and that you had been waiting like an idiot at his apartment for almost two hours. He apologized repeatedly and offered to bring you something back. You asked him who he is with and he said the name of your, not his, friend, which made you even madder.

Your friends went out together without you?

You went back to his house and began packing your stuff. They pulled up just as you were leaving. Your girlfriend apologized for not waiting for you and you, in turn, were completely rude to her. When she left, you went into the apartment to confront your friend. He apologized again and offered to take you out to dinner somewhere else. After some cajoling, you finally agreed. The two of you went to a chain restaurant and spent an awkward hour trying to make small talk. You couldn't stop being mad. When you finished dinner and went back to his house, he immediately went to bed. Enraged that he dared ignore you, you stormed out, determined to sleep at your own place.

You entered your depressing, smelly, dusty, dirty apartment, crawled onto the couch, and fell asleep. Someone pounding on your back door awakened you the next morning. Annoyed, you ran to the kitchen to see who it was. You were halfway there when you slipped and almost fell onto the floor. You looked down and noticed the water leaking out of your now non-functioning refrigerator. The maintenance man was outside, watching warily as you let a string of obscenities fly from a very unladylike mouth. You unlocked the door to let him in. He looked afraid. You showed him the water on the floor. Suddenly, you were aware of the horrible odor wafting from the fridge. You stood wondering how long it had been off. You retreated to your porch to smoke a cigarette. It was only 8:30 in the morning and already, everything was shit.

Mark found you sulking on the porch a few minutes later. "I have bad news," he said in his corny West Virginia accent. You were quiet. "It ain't the fridge. It's the outlet." You just looked at him. "Don't kill me now," he says as you continued

to stare. "They're probably gonna have to rip the ceiling back out to fix it." What could you say? You lit another cigarette.

Monday morning, when you went out to walk the dog, you saw your creepy neighbor in the vacant apartment out back. The apartment with no doorknob or lock on the door. The one with the "for rent" sign in front of it. The one that every single vagrant, crack-head that walks up and down your street knows they can catch a quick shower in. You wondered what the hell the creep was doing in there. You avoided him and left and went to your dismal job.

When you got home that night you saw your two neighbors outside talking. You went up to say hi. In the middle of your bitch session about the condition of your respective apartments (all agree that yours is, by far, in the worst shape), you mention that you saw creepo that morning. They told you that the keys to all of your apartments were laying in plain view on the floor inside. Your heart sank. "Great," you thought, "he probably made copies of the keys."

What were you supposed to do? If you called the landlord he would, as usual, treat you like some dumb, hysterical bitch who makes senseless complaints for the sole purpose of annoying him. You walked upstairs to your apartment and went inside. Your door was somewhat stable now. It was still not finished, but it didn't look like it would fall out if you closed it too hard. You looked at the unfinished sheet rock that was your new wall. Your eyes took in the popcorn ceiling, and the popcorn window, and the popcorn window blinds, and the popcorn light bulbs in your new popcorn recessed lighting, and the popcorn cabinets. You walked carefully over the yellow, heavy-duty extension cord stretched across the floor plugging your fridge into an outlet that actually worked. How many more weeks? Later, when you left for school, you stole all the keys to everyone's apartments from the shack out back.

Today, exactly three weeks from the start of this nightmare, the contractor makes a special appearance. He has been coming around less and less. He has other jobs, he told you. Apparently, he is a very important man. He is outside working

on the deck when you walk out, keys in your hand. You are tired of being treated like a dumb bitch. You show him the keys. He looks confused.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” you ask. He straightens up and sucks in his pot belly. “No. Why do you ask?” As soon as the familiar smug, self important look begins to spread across his pasty, freckled face, you tell the son of a bitch what you really think of him. You use terms that you feel he can understand. After all, he is a man, and men are incapable of understanding complex emotional pleas. You have to resort to plain, uncomplicated obscenities.

“Are you fucking retarded?” you ask him.

“Would you leave the keys to your girlfriend’s house in a vacant, unlocked apartment where any freak could walk in and grab them? Do you not see some of the losers that walk up and down this street? Don’t you have a lick of common sense in that stupid fucking red head of yours?”

You couldn’t be more pleased when his smirky expression fades. He actually stammers an apology. You throw the keys at him. “Don’t you dare leave them out again, asshole.” You tell him. You are standing on the steps above him, towering over his paunchy little frame. He actually looks scared now. You think he might cry. You are enjoying this. He apologizes again and promises that he will take the keys with him. You ask him when he plans on fixing your outlet.

“Monday,” he stammers. “I’ll take the whole day and I’ll make sure I don’t make a mess.”

“You do that.” You breeze by him and walk to your car. You can feel him staring at you as you strut away. You’re going to the police station to file a suspicious activity report on your neighbor. Next time the creepy piece of shit decides to spy on you, you’ll call the cops and slam him with a stalking charge. Maybe you’ll get lucky and be able to push him off his ladder before the cops come.

Tonight, you’ll call the landlord. You will tell him everything that has been going on and he will listen, especially when you tell him you have pictures of the illegal, out-of-code wiring in the ceiling and you are thinking about calling someone about it. You know the whole house is illegally rigged. Workers from the

power company and the gas company have told you as much when they were cutting service to the building to force the landlord to fix it. He did his typical half-assed job, enough to sneak him by the pat inspection, but if you brought somebody in... You're going to tell him that you are not paying rent for last month, and if everything isn't taken care of soon, you're not paying rent for this month. You'll use the extra money for the deposit on a new apartment. If he wants to try to screw around, he can expect a visit from code-enforcement and a call from a lawyer.

Who's the silly girl now?

Up, Up and . . . No Way

Russell Scott

To fly, to soar, to glide above it all; most of us have dreamt about it, talked about it, and some of us even worked to develop our wished-for ability to do so.

I had really convinced myself that I would one day be able to fly. My family and friends only laughed when I told them how I would stay afloat longer and longer with each jump. They all laughed, some louder than others; but they all would laugh just the same.

My grandmother was the only one who never laughed at me. It was most often from her small garden shed that I would - over and over again - take one leap after another; hoping to finally be above it all.

"I'm dead," I said with a panic now so in complete control of me that the words went non-stop from my brain and burst out from my lips.

I had crushed the cat! I thought that Electra would have surely noticed me; at least felt me coming considering cats' many heightened "feline senses." Oh, well.

Relax! I said that I crushed the cat - I didn't say that I killed the cat. I didn't actually crush her to death, though I'm sure that I most certainly crushed her to compromise.

I was about 8-10 years old - I was never good with numbers - seemingly possessing at least average intelligence (while embarrassing to admit). My grammar was really pretty good for my age, and I always looked up five new words each day. So, what would make me run and jump off the roof of the garden shed expecting to fly? What would the word for that be: misguided, silly, stupid - well, one of them for sure. I'm sure this situation, or something very much like it, probably happened to many of you as well when you were children.

We called our grandmother, Momer - like "Mom" with an "er" stuck to her backside. Where that name came from I don't know. But I never heard any other kids call their grandmothers "Momer," so I figured that I had the only one,

the best one. It wasn't really her name that made her so special – it was more of the way that she smiled at me, the way she always made me feel. Well, just terrific – that's how!

Her skin was always wrinkled; but I remember that it was wrinkled in a pretty way. She always smelled so good too, and always kept a very small, delicate handkerchief tucked under her watchband on her left wrist – kinda like a secret weapon. It was always within reach; though not really so obvious that anyone would notice it.

Momer and I would sit in her garden as I told and re-told, explained and re-explained just how I would soon be able to fly. I told her how I would be able to soar across the roof of her shed and house and wave at her as she and the neighbors gaped from below with their mouths wide open – as they finally realized just how “super” I really was.

“So you see Momer, flying is very complicated – please know that I realize that.” She would always smile at me with the brightness of a flashlight with batteries that were running low. This light of her smile was not too bright – just bright enough to see your way without the glare.

“I'll explain it again, 'cause I'm sure I left a few things out – and I know that it can all be very confusing.” How will I ever get her to really understand?

“Honey, I remember all that you have told me about flying. I also remember about Superman, Clark Kent, Lois Lane and the whole gang.” Hey, she had been listening; she knew all of my friends almost as well as I did.

I was really excited about her level of interest. “I left some comics on your dresser so that you can read them and we can talk about the adventures next time I'm here.” I had carefully picked out some new comics with deeper meanings, even though I would still probably have to explain them to her over and over again.

Every other Saturday my father would drop me off to spend the day with Momer. He would head out with some of his buddies, to fish, to go bowling, to fly their planes. You know, men stuff. I went with him a few times, but most of the time I really wanted to stay with Momer.

There were a few times that I really wanted to go; but only those times when my Dad would tell that me his friend Randy would be coming - that's when I made sure that I went with him. You see, Randy was a lot younger than my Dad and his other friends. He was very strong and muscular – like Superman – and I had never seen a grown up man who was so handsome except in the comics and on television. I always wanted Randy to be my father; and when he would take off his shirt on the very hot days, he looked just like a human Superman.

Every time we were together, Momer and I would walk to the corner drug store – everyone called it that, though it always confused me because the store was almost right in the middle of the block. I just figured that I didn't understand that, along with so many other things; like why, when I wasn't thinking about Superman, I would be thinking about Randy.

Momer and I would sit at the counter and have a drink, and she would always be breathing heavily by the time we sat down. She would dab her handkerchief around her face and neck as she cooled down from our walk.

I would usually be allowed to buy one, sometimes two comics. I could spend forever turning that squeaky metal rack; which would always make people look at me as I applied all my energy and concentration in my search for just the right new adventures.

You see, I learned a lot from the comics, which nobody really understood. I learned of big cities, of handsome men and beautiful women. You know the kind I mean; the men always wore suits and ties, or even when they wore overalls or jeans they just looked very nice. The women always looked so curvy and pretty; but I seemed to notice the men a lot more; they were really cool.

Not that our little town didn't have a few good-looking people – like Randy - of our own; it just seemed that the comic people had everything all together. But, in the comics, I also learned about secrets and flirting, and sometimes it kinda made me feel all tingly. I did remember that it seemed funny that I never saw anybody ever get a bath or even a shower, or brush their teeth. Though, every once in a while, you would see Superman or Clark Kent with his shirt off; and his big

chest was all muscular and had a lot of ripples on it. Sometimes I would fold that page back so I would remember where it was, even though I never let *anyone* fold my comics for any reason.

None of that stuff really mattered as much to me as my learning how to fly. I knew that somewhere in those pages I would figure out the secret of flying. That's why I read all of my comics over and over; I guess that I just didn't read them with as much effort as I should have. (In school, my teachers would always say that I was looking out the window daydreaming. Yeah, well I wasn't daydreaming; I was watching for Superman to fly overhead. They didn't understand anything!). Flying isn't as easy as you might think, you know; when was the last time you saw someone flying overhead?

When Momer and I would get back to her house, we would usually sit outside in the two rocking chairs on her front porch. After we cooled down, we would head out to the garden.

My Granddaddy – that's all we called him - always stayed in his back bedroom. Sometimes I wondered why they slept in two different rooms; they just did, I guess.

Granddaddy did all the cooking in the house. The only other thing I remember him liking as much as his cooking was when he would take his teeth out and shake them at us kids. My sister was usually the most grossed out; then he would laugh and laugh at us. It didn't really make me laugh for long, but I would usually laugh anyway. Then I would always slip outside to be with Momer in the garden.

"You want to see how far I can fly now? It gets a lot farther every time that I jump." She would always say yes.

'You go ahead, but only jump off that old washing machine. I don't want to see you on that roof again!'

She wasn't the only one who could be hard of hearing. I noticed that when I would say something that I wasn't supposed to say, she seemed to not hear me. It actually became a little game for me, and I learned that I could also use that very thing to my advantage when I pretended to not hear her at times. Like every time she would tell me to be careful. Sometimes, I would say, "yes," even when I really meant "no," and other times I wouldn't say a thing.

I would jump off the washer when she was watching me; then when she would go inside, I would put the ladder on the backside of the shed where she couldn't see me and I would climb onto the roof. She didn't really understand that I needed as much practice as I could get. But, I didn't really expect all of them to understand; they didn't know all of the things that I had already learned.

A lot of times, I would just sit on the slimy roof – careful not to slip off, looking for Superman to fly by. I thought that when I finally did see him swoosh by that I would wave to him and whisper for him (remember he has super-hearing also) to come down so we could talk. I knew he was out there somewhere, saving people from all the nonsense that they created. Sometimes I thought that Superman would save my parents from their divorce. They never did yell or scream or run around like crazy people – so I don't know how even Superman would have known that there was something wrong. I sure didn't.

I never did see Superman in person – though I would sometimes tell everybody that he would fly down and we would sit on the roof and talk. I would tell them how he would put his arm around me, and I could feel his big muscles; which made me feel strong too. I said to myself that just maybe he was passing his super-strength into me. So, when I sat real close to him, and I felt tingly again, it must have been the transfer of his powers. It was like when my Dad's friend Randy would put his arms around me when he would show me how to hold a fishing pole or a bowling ball. Most times, I would act like I didn't know how to hold much of anything. He always made me feel very tingly.

I would tell everyone that I would sit with Superman - mostly when I was sad or lonely. Guess you could say that I saw him a lot. My Dad never made me feel that good, and never tingly. But, when I thought about Superman, he made me feel very special – even if no one else knew but me. So, there I would sit, looking up into the sky so much that my eyes would get really sore and teary-like. Sometimes it was the sun that made me cry; but that was what I told anyone who noticed and said that I was crying. I was too strong to cry.

My Mom and brothers and sister would not come over to Momer's as much as I did – they always had their own things to do. My Mother was always cooking and baking stuff; my sister played dolls, and my brothers never seemed to like being around me much. I didn't really know why. But, I really didn't care all that much. I liked that I could just come alone. Though Momer never would say it – and believe me, I wanted her to – I knew that I was her favorite one of all. It was just something I knew inside my heart.

Every time that I would jump, I would mark my footprints on the grass once that I had landed. I would shove little sticks or stones into the ground to mark my progress. I wanted to be able to prove to everyone just how real this all was. One day soon, I would fly over all of them and then make a super-cool and impressive soft landing.

When I did that, I knew that all of my neighbors and family would run over to me. They would be smiling and cheering; everyone would push and shove to get close to me – to touch me, to see just how powerful and strong I was. Finally they would see that I wasn't just kidding about the flying! See what just a little super-power can do? That's why they call them super.

I promised Momer that once I got really good at flying that I would pick her up and take her for a long ride in the sky. But that would have to wait until I developed my super-strength a little more so that I would be able to pick her up without wobbling. Been working as much on my super-strength as I had on my flying ability – you see, I had a lot to catch up on.

When we weren't talking about flying or how sad it was that Mom and Dad had gotten divorced – we would talk about her plants. She had a yard full of them; I swore that she must have had one of every plant on our planet Earth. What a cool garden she had. Next to my comics, I enjoyed being there the most – it was kinda like another world, really!

We would walk around very slowly, and I would usually hold her hand. Not that I needed to or anything, I just like the soft feeling of her skin. When I held her watch hand, the handkerchief would rub against my hand as well; and I

thought that it was what my someday cape would feel like as it slapped around in the wind once I was air-borne.

We would walk, then sit, then walk some more. All the way, Momer would tell me about all of her plants. She thought that I was really smart, as I could remember most of the plants by name – but spelling them was something different.

She always made me feel ordinary super, which was okay to start with. Even though I hadn't flown around in the sky yet, she always seemed to like me anyway, which I couldn't really understand. I would be so much better if I was only super. But, I liked the way she treated me anyway.

One day, we were walking the garden and we sat down next to this huge old oak tree. It had this amazing trailing plant growing all up its trunk and into the highest branches. This was her favorite plant of all time she would say.

"Honey, this plant is in the cactus family." It didn't really look like a cactus to me, but sometimes things didn't look exactly like I thought they should anyway. So, I guess she was right about the plant. "Sweetheart, see all of those big flowers just ready to burst open? They will open in just another few nights and make everybody who sees them really take notice!"

When she spoke to me, she would always look right at my face, into my eyes. Straight into my eyes – no looking around or anything. That always made me feel good, very important. My parents and other adult people would mostly just talk over my head and rarely looked me in the eyes.

"This plant is called a "night-blooming cereus," Momer said. It has the biggest flower of any plant on Earth." I couldn't believe that! We had this "super" plant right in her garden! I wondered how many other people knew that it was here, and it worried me to think that someone might come to steal it. Her voice was always soft, so I really didn't think that anyone else heard her.

Momer told me, "Some plants bloom and bloom and the flowers last a long time until they slowly fade away. The cereus is a mighty and proud plant, though each flower is only open for one night. And that smell (she would always take in a deep breath here) – completely intoxicating." She had told me this part, over and over, but she acted like it was always

the first time. I guess it was pretty important to her. She would always pause and just look at the plant; it reminded me of how we would act in church. I didn't really know what "en-tochs-y-kating" meant, but it must be something good. So, because I didn't want to ask her and bother her, I would sit quietly and just look with her.

"You know sweetie, if this plant were like all of the others in the garden, we wouldn't notice it quite so much. It can take one's breath away. You see, it looks pretty normal on the outside; all the funny-shaped green leaves, but nothing much more. It kind of blends into the background. But, when it's ready to show you its strength and beauty; it really knocks you out."

"But Momer, look at those "ecks-sail-y-aahs;" they have had flowers on them for weeks and weeks. Don't you like them too?"

"Or course I do. It's just that my cereus plants are the most special - that's why I love them so."

"Well, okay, if you say so." I know that I would rather have the plants that have all the flowers all the time – but I just kept that to myself. It's like someone asking me if I would like a hundred pieces of candy or just one or two – yeah, that's a hard one.

She cut a piece of the plant and let me take it home with me; to plant with all of the other pieces she had given to me because I wanted a garden of my own. Sometimes I would feel guilty about taking all the plant pieces, and she would say to me, "The more that I give you, the more that I have." I wasn't really sure exactly what that meant.

One day, I just grew tired of trying to fly. Momer never brought that up to me to make me feel crummy. She acted like she didn't care at all if I could ever fly or not; she would always act like I was already super to her - but I still wanted to prove it.

I would have kept trying to fly, if only Superman had only stopped by – just once. Maybe he never would. I know that he was always busy, but he could have tried a little harder. So, I

thought that I should try and get along better with the humans around me; they were limited in so many ways, but that made them interesting to watch.

Momer and I would drink her famous iced tea, and she always had some kind of candy around. Now, this was really fun! We spent years and years in her garden, talking about all sorts of things.

As I got older, I wanted to talk more about Superman – but not as much about his powers anymore. I wanted to ask her if she thought I would ever be as strong and smart and handsome as he was. Was he born that way, or did he grow to be that way. You know, how good he looked in his tight, muscular suit. He had muscles everywhere. I wondered what he would look like naked without his costume on; but he never would take a shower – I would have known that! Maybe he was shy or something. I just wondered if his body looked anything like mine. I didn't think Momer would want to talk about that stuff, so I kept a lot of those questions to myself.

And, it wasn't just Superman I had questions about. What about Randy – you know, my Dad's friend. He was so nice and he always would tell me stories and pick me up and kind of “fly” me around with his big arms. I always felt so good when he would grab me and pick me up and put me real close to his face. I liked it, but there were always the tingles.

I thought I would ask her some of those questions later, but I never did.

Before I could ask her all of my stored-up questions, one day – many years later – Momer died. I was so sick about that and it really hurt – I mean really hurt - for a very long time. I was madder than I had ever been! Had I been super like I had planned all along, maybe I could have saved her from dying. But I couldn't. And she did. Maybe I gave up too soon.

After Momer's funeral, I went home and sat in my own garden. My cereus plants were about to bloom again. I counted 66 blooms! When they opened up, they smelled like a “magga-knowl-yah” and a “hibb-bisk-cuits” (where do they get

those names?) all smooched up together. They smelled like nothing else in the garden; you know, intoxicating (yeah, I looked that one up).

When I smelled the cereus, I felt like Momer was sitting there, right next to me. Momer and I, and our cereus plants, were all super after all; we just kept our powers hidden on our insides. While we didn't really want to brag about them, we did want people to notice. But, we had to keep our secret identities safe.

We always showed each other how super we were; we didn't have to tell anybody else.

Double Folding Leaf

Sam Leininger

The tree stand, anchored eleven feet
above ground, is covered in
camouflage netting.

I sit—cramped, unbathed, with bottled
doe urine applied to mask
my civilized musk—

hoping the deer will incorporate
this foreign outcropping, chair,
the thirty-ought-six,

and me into its environment
(There was some velvet, molted,
hanging from pine bark—

they rub against trees to loosen it—
so they are, for sure, around).
It's just a matter

of a lapse, when the deer forgets, when
it relaxes its heightened
suspicious just long

enough to expose a target, and
all its senses, attuned to
the feral forest

and its interlopers, become no
match for the hunter's quiet,
unflinching patience.

I should be scanning palmetto scrub;
peering through gaps in pine trees;
searching for blunders:

a head bobbing, an immature mark
that has yet to fade into
the brown adult pelt.

Instead, I'm in a field in Goodview,
Virginia, knee-high in grass,
picking and eating

ripe blackberries. A doe and her two
fawns were grazing leisurely
across the field, but

they leapt through the grass when a pick-up
rumbled past on the dirt road.
They're still here, somewhere,

peripherally tracking me but
otherwise disregarding
my slow amble, the

prickers attaching themselves to my socks,
and my futile attempts to
catch another glimpse.

Then the grass grows higher and is capped
with yellow rape-seed blossoms.
The parasol blooms

blanket the Salisbury Plain—or at
least this side of the road—with
richly-pigmented,

overlapping florets yet to be
devoured by the grazing
cattle. I fall back,
cushioned by the stalks, and disappear
into the canary bed.
The megalithic

shadows reach across the way and shade
my shoulders; the ancients used
petrified antlers

to plow the rough soil and plant the stones.
No one's sure, but I'm convinced
it was an altar.

So even though the solstice has passed,
and the sunburned Dutch tourists
in matching green shirts

have yet to leave, I make my way through
the crowd, past the Aubrey Holes
and bluestone horseshoe,

to the heel stone. Softly, among the
cameras and candy wrappers,
I ask, with reverence,

for a quiet, unflinching patience
And that you fumble, reveal,
line up in my sights.

Lessons in Rivertalking

Susan Kairys-Courech

A soul cries of hunger
While the winding wild river
twists away
yesterday's questions
beneath broken branches
fallen trees
tannic waters
reflections
greens and blues and
cumulus clouds
wind rustles
a whisper
still
the river rambles
on
knowing
which way
to turn.

Haiku

Michael Trottier

#27

Under a still field
Of snow covered, sleeping earth
A mouse is happy.

#28

A fox is hunting,
Waking frozen, sleeping earth
For the happy mouse.

Some Pale Dove, Again

Nancy Shelton

Lawns cut, striped rows, green grass slowly goes gray.
Moss trails from tall branches. Hovering trees sigh.
Cars wait curbside, shined and tuned for next day.
Doors close. Roaming black dog sounds his lone cry.
Pearl drops cascade from pipes under cool ground.
Porch lights glow bright, but no walker passes.
Whitely, wisps of steam rise, and without sound
Blue TV ghosts wave behind dark glasses.
One more set of headlights gleams and then turns.
Music leaks through shuttered windows until
Clouds pass quickly, host of midnight moon burns.
Long and deeply chords chime. Night remains still.
Faintly, notes of pink dawn's voice again bring
Some pale dove to my door with a torn wing.

Any Day Forecast

Michael Trottier

As those who stood outside complained the rain
Forecast to fall upon us never tried
With mists to fill our air and wet with stain
Our walks, our clothes, and left our heads still dry,
Some watched the sky in shades of gray that chanced
Assuming shapes that in our minds were caught
In shifting capes thrown on the clouds that danced
To show aloud sharp forms to children taught,

That long ago there always was some form
Of small chaos becoming solid line.

To guess a logic from what's random torn,
See steps ahead and how they fall in time,
We'll try to scan the sky and feel our skin.
Our minds say dry as rain fools us again.

STRING THEORY, SING THEORY

Dr. Alan Nordstrom

Think first how from the Void all things began,
Expanding now unendingly through space;
Think then how all evolves as if by plan,
Not randomly, but by some greater grace;
Think most upon this Cosmos' terminus:
The marvel and the mystery of us.

But wait, those thoughts are dated, obsolete,
And we're discerning an improved worldview
Whose scheme's not neat and theory's incomplete
But yet whose vision's awesome if it's true:
A multitude of universes strung
In parallel by strings no one has hung.

The choice is yours, which Cosmos best suits you;
Mine is the first, which sounds like it's been sung.

POLAND'S GARDEN 1939

Geri Throne

Warm sun and kind breezes dust
autumn days with gentle lies,
tickle faces, sigh of life,
whisper hope, hide their secrets.

So that Sunday crept upon
her – that third of September
unfolded soft, hid clever
thunder roiling from the west.

An old dog slept in Anya's
garden; a stork swept low, its
wings spread wide, wide as Hitler's
planes soon sowing fields of death.

Anya clutched her grandson's hand,
dodged bullets, fled her garden,
ran toward shelter in the rich
man's cellar, toward his promise,

saw a flash, heard the strafing
– Holy Mother of God, her
prayer – felt the pain make a
circle taut below her breast.

Steps behind her, crackling fire,
fell her farmhouse burning white.
Round her waist grinning wider
spread a crimson sash of death.

Her grandson, wounded, crawled to
the cellar, cried out for his
Babcia, called her by name, sang
elegies of the bereft.

Beneath the rich man's orchard,
that room perfumed with green apples,
thick with blood and children's tears
hid the lucky and the rest.

Anya's garden lives today,
A warm breeze sweeps it clean
and kisses the face of a
babe asleep in innocence.

Gethsemane

Rini Schultz

Please, accept this bruise
I've tended for you.
We've run out of love again
And I don't get paid till Friday.

I can't sing you to sleep,
For a rose blooms on my tongue.
Its thorns cut my lips and seem to catch
Certain words.

Brother,

Rini Shultz

I remember when we were singular.
Womb filaments bound flesh unto flesh.
Father dreamt us
Into pinkish circumstance;
That gentle separation-
God tore a sheaf of poetry in two.

I think when too much soul slips into one cell,
It must break off from itself.
When you, me and father used to fish
I always cringed when splitting earthworms.

My hairline is straight;
Yours creases over like a folded page.

I wonder if that is my hand
You curl around the brush
untangling sunlight from mother's head.
I wonder, are those lips of yours
Loosening the sparrows of my own song?

Only you know the hideouts and fist fights
And rhymes we are made of;
But do you still recall the beginning
When we were singular?

these cool teeth

Bill Fenton

these cool teeth, smooth and uneven, fuse with flesh

fingers that kiss the marrow
of a black beast who weeps
truth, raw and quivering

as human and tool entwine
flesh and key
foot and pedal

these cool teeth, smooth and uneven, release the wails we cannot

Wick

Anne Schlotterlein

A hot flush of blood
Blazes my cheeks,
Steals the warmth from my limbs,
Until I am as stiff and
Haggard as a faded
Starlet on old film stock.
The darkness is wet
From my heat---
It is melting.
My heart stokes the furnace
Brighter and brighter.
Why, I have never been so incendiary---
All my critics will agree.

Cassandra

Anne Schlotterlein

The faint scent that rises from
a pillow
Is not enough to keep a girl
holding on.
I fear that I have become
merely functional,
Like the smoking apparatus
of her brain,
Fuelled by lithium batteries
and dopamine pills.
I have become, have always been
a spectator,
Serving my purpose as neatly as
a clock on a shelf,
Always watching, I am always
watching you.
I am an excellent judge of character.

The Dress She Wore

Nancy Shelton

Pink, the dress she wore gleams from a tall dark portrait.
Her porcelain face, the painting's heart, beckons,
Precise as a photograph.
She glances away, reticent, considering.
Stately jewels firmly grasp her bodice
Above the drifts of taffeta and lace.
At her feet, confident brush strokes part,
Exposing a delicate pump.

Mute, the dress she wore drapes a lifeless mannequin,
Standing nearby, dumb and brooding as a tree,
Quiet as the ravished, tongueless Lavinia
With broken twigs for arms, forever alone
Inside the gown in the dim, hushed museum.
Tiny hand sewn stitches, even as machine rows,
Correctly march across the billowing fabric,
Spaced like soldiers on parade.

The dress she wore is torn, the hemline neatly mended.
Perhaps her spindly heel caught in the ruffle,
Despite excited fingers clutching the gown high
Over silk clad legs, as, breathlessly, she sped,
Beneath ancient canopies of regarding sentinels
That dappled sunlight on her pearly shoulders.
Tall dark trees that can never be wrong,
Because they're trees.

Lonely

Darlyn Finch

I used to want
to touch someone with a poem
or a beautiful picture of a vineyard in Tuscany
a sprig of fragrant jasmine
or a cup of tea with lemon and honey
a blue feather tipped in white
or a caress
or a smile
or a kiss in the dark, balanced on a stair.
But too many times
a wall went up
an eye glazed over
a shrug escaped
an ear turned away
a hand fell
cold and shriveled and useless
before it touched my hair.
So now I sit and read in the half-light
of a dirty window
overlooking a silent lake
where a fish jumps
and a lazy heron wades
and I hum a half-forgotten melody
as I ponder
a poem
that curls my toes with pleasure
and I tell no one
but myself.

Basketball

Darlyn Finch

I saw you looking
from the doorway of our room
where you leaned,
having just dressed for work.
Your glance flickered between
the rerun of a basketball game
on the little tv that sits
on our dresser and
me, where I stood at our mirror,
brushing my hair,
wearing a towel and
nothing else, so I
stood on my toes and
leaned forward, just a little, to
show you the curve of my hip
and the stretch of my thigh and
Ooops the towel somehow
slipped to the floor and
your image in the mirror
swallowed hard.
I knew I'd won the game,
not the Spurs, not the Knicks,
when your big fine hand
loosened the knot of your tie.

the contents of a shoulder bag

Bill Fenton

strewn inside her typical library nook
rests her ratty little shoulder bag
that has coughed up its contents
all over the floor:

a dasani bottle cap
 from one of the eight bottles she sips each day
a few leaky sugar packets
 which she'll add to her water if it's a "long morning"
a palm tree keychain without any keys
 she always leaves her door unlocked
a saran-wrapped passport
 with the perfect picture she insists looks awful
a plastic test tube half-full of bubbles
 which she'll blow when he smokes
a wad of crumpled camel cash
 she's snatched from his boxes (she's saving up for a
 futon)
a small paw-print mitten
 that hides the large cheetah-print sunglasses she
acquired from her mother
a naked memo pad
 which she can't write in because she says she's lost
 all her pens
a well-gnawed pen
 that appeared "out of thin air"
a scratched-out photograph
 of the man who raped her, inky-faced

Just Fly (with the birds and me)

R. Coleman Walker II

I gotta tell you
That you've just got
To want
To learn

To want

To need

To fly

Yah fly

Like a bird
Bold majestic bird

Swooping

Diving

Ever so

Gracefully gliding

Yah you just got's to want

To need

To be a bird

Spread your wings

And just fly

Yah get on up and fly

Across this room

This state

This nation

And this world

Yah just fly

Be a mighty

Jet plain

And make the jet stream

Be yo baby and love it yes love it

Just jump on up

On way

way

way on up there

Into the sky
Yah get on up there
Past the clouds
 The sun
 The stars
And the moon
Yah jump up to there
And never ever ever ever come back down

Fly up there
 To where
Your feet
Ain't so much
Kick'in up dust
As they is
Kick'in up cloud

Fly up there and be proud
Cause you can fly

It's easy
You just gotta master
Gett'in weightless
Floating away
Like a feather
A seed
A bit of pollen on an afternoon breeze
Just ride the air
Like the notes did
when Miles Davis did
 First put his lips to something music
 And decided to blow

Go on ahead
And put yo head in the clouds
Cause you can't fly
If your head's
In the ground
And I'm tell'in you baby

You gotta get on up there
Up there past that time zone no fly zone o-zone
Up there where it ain't so much real

As it is

Imaginational

Cause once

You way way way on up there

No one

Nor no thing not even gravity

Can bring you down

And you need to know this

Cause baby if you can't learn

To want

To need

To fly

Then you can't

Be free

Like the birds and me

Why I'll Never Stop Smoking

(A poetic response to *The Best Cigarette* by Billy Collins)

R. Coleman Walker II

Because its well past 3am and most of the Guinness I
consumed only hours ago
Now lies in small brown and pink pools beside empty beer
bottles, condom wrappers, and other assorted refuse in the
gutter

And the early morning breeze is biting at my
lips—which are craving something to wrap themselves
around—but I can't seem to find one—let alone a few good
men—so a smoke will have to do—And there's a half smoked
pack of Marlboros wedged between the windshield and the
dashboard of my old gray El Camino

Because as I lie here—beside you—
Our sweat covered bodies glistening in the light of the early
afternoon—that is creeping through my
blinds—despite their best efforts to maintain the comfort of
darkness
And last night—in the drunken neon haze of the Saturday-
night-club—you looked like a young Adonis— but in the dull
reality of a hung-over-morning you're more easily likened to a
Sumo wrestler wrapped in the toga that used to be my new
satin sheets

And now I need a cigarette to clear my head—to focus
my thoughts—so I can devise a plan to tactfully remove your
slumbering heft from my bed

Because I keep finding the bottom of all these
glasses—and these cigarettes keep burning down to
nothing but the ashes—and I've emptied all these shot glass-
es—but these pages are still empty—but this
manuscript must be in by the deadline—or else there'll
be editors seeking my head—to offer up to the Gods of words
on a silver platter

And like a train I need fire to keep my wheels turning,
the thought machine/word processor of my mind
running—so I throw another cancer log in the
furnace—and despite popular opinion and amendment six
I keep sucking and puffing away at life—at the nameless face-
less dry taste that flows like a hot breeze down into my soul—
illuminating every thought, every little poem embryo—like so
many laser beams in the fog

And that Mr. Collins is why—every cigarette is the Best
cigarette ever—
And I'll never stop smoking

I Inhaled

Rebecca Adams

I am sitting in the open air
This evening, with a fresh new pack
Of menthol cigarettes:
The first I have owned, a day
Or so after the last that I
Held you, the last whom I have owned.

I am gazing at this sweet green package
The way lovers do in a dim house
When everyone has gone to sleep:
We mustn't. We mustn't. We can't.
What the hell.

I'm lighting up, inhaling fast,
Rushing my way to the rush
Of raging apathy and numbing calm
That awaits me at the filter,
Blowing all the sobs out of my chest
And watching them float away,
Dissolved by the weakest evening breeze.

Really. I'm fine.
I'm sealing up my bleeding heart
With a nicotine patch,
And I will lose a lung before
You ever see me cry again.

Childhood Pastime

Katie Beougher

I'm not a cruel person.

One day my dad showed me
how to kill ants
with a magnifying glass.

The bright beam formed
a burning path
which intersected with an ant
who stopped, abruptly.

Nothing could prepare me
for the suddenness,
the quickness of that stop.

I don't burn ants.

Orientation

Jessica L. Moses

That girl is a trip
it's not a wonder she
wants
to be shallow the rest of
her life
breast implants and nose
jobs.

I haven't found my niche
I can't attach myself to
people I don't like
Rather sit in my dorm
room and read or sleep

It rains everyday but I
haven't cried
Yet.
And I sweat more than
anyone else around.
I feel like a monkey shot
into space.
I don't quite know what
I'm supposed to be
doing
But I know this is where
I was trained to be.

Socially I feel inept.
Not so much in meeting
people.
It's the second contact
that is difficult.
Just because someone's
introduced themselves to
me,

Does that mean I can run
up to them in the lunch
room?

Call them?

Stop by their rooms and
leave them notes?

Classes will be a relief
I won't have to think
about the social scene so
intensely.

My roommate's a bitch.
A nice bitch. But pretty
pms-y. Not her fault.
Her Mom was pretty bad when
we were moving
in.

She obviously doesn't
want to include me in
her social circle
Anymore than she is
forced to.

I can't wait till
everyone's long distance
relationships come to a
screeching halt.
Wicked I know. But
really who do they think
they're kidding?
Wow I'm a hypocrite.

Two hours till I'm going
to call my peer mentor
and get directions to his
get together.
He's a nerd. A cute
nerd. But a nerd.

He's taking our whole
class. Supposedly last
night it sucked.
We'll see. Maybe he has
cute nerd friends who'd
be into a laid back girl
like myself.

Speaking of the girls,
wow.

This is the college of
beautiful people.

Particularly female
people.

My bitchy roommate
is a size 3.

I haven't been eating. I
don't know if it's the
heat or the excitement or
the girls.

I wish there were more
people from the Midwest.
I'm not used to the east

coast caste.

They're not a touchy
feely people. I really
miss that.

And I have to go to the
bathroom.

It's not so bad but... it's
so weird.

I don't want to do that
while other people are in
the bathroom blow
drying their hair.

And we're not talking
urination.

Fourth day of orientation
and this is what I've got
to say.

Shallow, lonely, rain,
monkey, stalker, bitch,
break up, cute nerd,
beautiful girls, no food,
east coast, shit.

Negative Capability

(for Bill)

Rebecca Adams

i hate all-nighters
hate the pounding head
parched eyes and knotted neck
that accompany eight hours
of clicking at a keyboard

hate wandering back through the chill
of biting, prepubescent morning
the piercing cold a reminder
that children are as full of cruelty
as they are of potential

hate the steaming shower
and icy wind amidst the scalding spray,
whispering that warmth is fleeting
and exhaustion is not water-soluble

i hate all-nighters
but i like it when we swear
off-handedly at obstinate RAMs
at authors long dead
and professors who should be

(ergo, your profane epitaph: john keats died
two years after he wrote this fucker)

i like our imprudent breaks for coffee
for walks, for pianos, for catching up
for moon-watching and cake-eating
for pranks and for profundity

i like the illegible scrawl of marginalia
queries about synonyms and comma usage
constructive criticism and encouragement

and most of all
despairing commiseration that turns to
exuberant accomplishment
sometime after the moon slips a robe on
to hide her naked beauty from the sun

when describing this to jones, i observed
there's a sick kind of kinship in procrastination
stemming from the common dream we toast
with double-shots of caffeine and ginseng:
the dream of outstanding achievement
attained by legendary strokes of luck and genius
while planets cheer, and stars sing our praises

ah you bleary-eyed, bespectacled brother
raise your tea and drink up once to this:

all-nighters are procrastinators' purgatory
but sinners suck the marrow out of anything

Drifting Thoughts

D.W. Carter

Tender thoughts yield only to crude words
Their very souls made flesh with ink
And yet still 8:05 my cell phone says
To the 12:00 green LCD that blinks
In my conceited mind's digital display
Unfettering the cynical soliloquy
Unfolding down the dancing spiraled DNA
Holding back the mind's horizon-boundaries
And in the dark abyss the sugar turns
That mixes with the coffee and the cream
Which sits on table in serenity
Who looks outside to stars and galaxies
Which clothe the slumbering day, and in her dreams
That once the heavens smiled,
Though now they sleep

advice to young poets

Sarah Kathryn Moore

shut down logoff take these bitter thistles
and go. we are weary, we're you know
overlooked and underrepresented
and there's room for no more.
pack up, close down. the words are all
already out there—they've all been said
or sung before. you're not the first
to war for oneness. you're not the first
to fight to fill the hole with holy.
you're not the first
to whisper words into your dumbstruck lover's
shellshaped ear. shut up. drift off.
we've all already heard your words
over and over
before.



Palms Over Water

Olivia Malloy
Watercolor



Sunflowers

Olivia Malloy
Watercolor



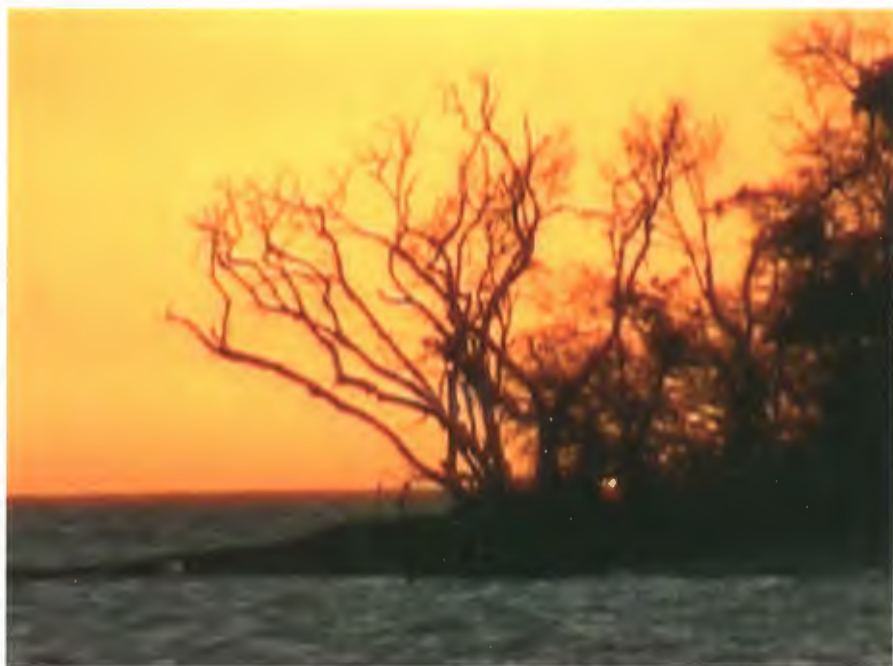
Boom

Maya Greven
Photography



The Blades

Maya Greven
Photography



Black Sticks

Maya Greven
Photography



Lily
Ashli Gagliano
Mixed Media



Yellow Flowers Ripple

Rini Schultz
Digital Photography



der Fehler
Brooke Harbaugh
Digital Photography



Twenty

Brooke Harbaugh
Digital Photography



Halloween

Brooke Harbaugh
Digital Photography



Untitled I

Briggs Jones

Oil



Untitled II

Briggs Jones
Oil



Untitled III

Briggs Jones

Oil



Monochromatic

Sally Woods
Acrylic and Oil



Surface
Sally Woods
Acrylic and Oil



Apparition

Stella Perez

Mixed Media



Meditation

Stella Perez

Mixed Media



Cotton Action

Vanessa Sain
Mixed Media



Mysterious

Vanessa Sain
Mixed Media



Self-Portrait

Vanessa Sain

Oil



Mammalian Mother

Susan Kairys-Courech
Photography



Graevy's Zebra
Susan Kairys-Courech
Photography



Happy in Samburu

Susan Kairys-Courech
Photography

Thirteen

Dientje J. Francis

Rhea waited for the prayers to end, so she could stop pretending. *Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us. Please make my daughter's marriage work.* Everyone was starting to leave now; she could feel their hushed retreat. *Holy Mary, mother of God, graciously hear us. She, as you know, has been divorced before. Let her not bring shame to us again.* Her grandmother lit another candle. Kneeling beside her, she could smell that stale church smell, candle wax and something else, old and used and churchy. *Holy Mary, mother of God, graciously hear us.* She didn't have to hear her grandmother's whispered words to know what they were. *Teach my granddaughter to follow the path of God and not do as her mother has done. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners.*

Rhea wondered what her grandmother would do if she heard Rhea's own one line prayer. *Dear God or Mary or anyone else up there, I don't believe in you.* Her grandmother was right: prayer made you feel better. Sort of like when you had told a lie, and had confessed it, and you were scared for the punishment, but pleased you didn't have to carry it around inside anymore. Yes, the best thing about church was you could pray honestly. Quietly. Her grandmother had said God would strike her with lightening if she ever thought mean thoughts about him. But that was her grandmother's version of God. As far as Rhea knew, God didn't mind a bit. She was still here wasn't she? In God's own church.

Nearly all the parishioners were getting up now. Rhea didn't have to look to know they were mostly withered old women, clutching rosaries, speaking in whispers. The coven of them was headed outside, through the arched doorways into the sunlight. Rhea half expected them to disappear in the daylight. She wanted to look to make sure, but she knew that would only extend her grandmother's prayers. *Holy Mary Mother of God, please keep my granddaughter from her wicked ways.*

Rhea closed her eyes tighter, gently rested her clasped palms on her chin and tried to look like the girl in her catechism book. It was no use. Her back relaxed, her hands drooped and it was all she could do to keep her eyes closed. Sighing, her grandmother started to rise. Rhea got up quickly and helped her to the customary pew.

They sat in silence.

Rhea shifted uneasily on the hard bench. She knew what was coming. They were going to have a talk. She looked at the altar; her gaze meandered up the small stone rostrum, beneath which the old ladies sometimes lay flowers, then up to the stained glass windows with their multicolored but disfigured saints. Something wiggled in the back of her mind. Something someone had said. What was it? It was no use: she would never remember now. Maybe if she stopped thinking about it for a while — her mother said that was the best way to remember things — maybe she would remember then. She turned her gaze from the windows, to the wide low table that held the candles and then up to *Him*. Jesus. She crossed herself. Did He really die like that? She couldn't stop staring at the distended Jesus, its body twisted outward, hands still bleeding from the nails in his palms. Something was wiggling again. She wondered if he looked so pale when he died. She wondered how it felt like to die like that: "head pierced with thorns." Miss Defoe, her catechism teacher, had said Jesus' head was pierced with thorns, a crown of thorns. Now, how do you make a crown of thorns? Jamal, who sat behind her in class and never came to school with shoes (for which Rhea's grandmother had condemned him, shaking her head and declaring his fate as surely as she declared her faith in the Pope — "that one, that one is headed for prison, for sure"), Jamal was her best friend. But what had Jamal said about Jesus? They had both snuck out of class and were taking turns swinging on the old mango tree in the school backyard. *The Bible is a lie and Jesus is really Black*. Jamal had said the Bible was a lie.

Rhea shifted in her seat and shrugged her shoulders. She had run all the way back to class that day, a little hurt, a little angry but mostly curious; curious as to why, after all the times

she had escaped class to be with Jamal, why she should feel—what did she feel? She didn't know then just what it was, but she missed her turn in spelling, and, when Ms. Lovell asked her what was wrong, she couldn't look her in the eye. Rhea twisted and shrugged.

"Chile, you had better stop moving if you know what's good for you." Rhea froze. Her grandmother was looking down at her.

"Yes, Ama." *Please God, let's not have a talk.*

"Rhea."

"Yes, Ama."

"How is your mother?"

"She fine." Rhea waited .

"She is fine, Rhea."

"She is fine, Ama"

"And your brother?" Her grandmother was looking at the twisted Jesus again. Rhea watched the face held high above hers, its skin smooth and tight except for the neck where it hung in gentle folds. She could see the dark half moons under the eyes, the mark of too many all night vigils. *How do you make a crown of thorns, Ama?*

"He is fine, too."

"And Lenny, your father?"

Rhea turned to watch the Jesus. Stepfather.

"Rhea." Her grandmother turned, slowly. Her voice was hard.

"He is fine too." *How does one make a crown of thorns, Ama?*
Silence.

The church was empty now. Rhea could feel the orange sunlight coming through the oval shaped window facing the west. It lightened her skin to a glowing peach color. She put her hand up to her face and wiggled her fingers slowly. *Look Ama, I look like an angel.* A hand reached out and held her fingers. Small liver spotted hands. Firm. Calloused. Capable. Her grandmother spoke.

"Rhea," softly now, inviting confidence. "Rhea, you would tell me if anything were troubling you, wouldn't you?" Rhea was staring at the dark and light of their hands. She was thinking of Jamal, again. She shrugged.

"So you goin to tell her?" Jamal had stopped walking. They were meandering through the school cricket field on their way to Rhea's new home.

"Boy, leave me alone." Rhea waited impatiently for him to start up again. The field looked sad and desolate. A few goats were wandering across the patchy grass, gleaning what they could. From where she stood, Rhea could see the ocean. Not the sea, which to Rhea was the friendly waves that splashed across her whenever she went swimming, but the ocean. Miles and miles of water so blue and deep it made you shiver just to look at it.

"You jes goin let it pass?"

Rhea turned round to look at Jamal. Behind him she could see the school. Mr. Henderson was locking up his office to leave. She watched as he disappeared behind the hedge they had planted on School Spirit Day and reappeared on the other side. He used to be a police man and he still walked like it.

"Well?" Jamal wouldn't let go when he started.

"I doan know."

"How you mean you doan know?" He kissed his teeth.

"You really is stupid, girl."

Rhea started walking again, her school bag banging against her thigh. Jamal caught up quickly.

"Then you mus like him then." Rhea swirled around to face him so fast he collided with her.

"You doan know nothing about nothing so shut up!"

"I know it not right."

Rhea tried to think of all the curse words she knew and came up with, "Fuck you." The look of shock on Jamal's face was almost comical and Rhea would have laughed if she were not so near tears. She was trying to control her bottom lip but she could feel it shaking, could feel the tears stinging, could feel the cry in the back of her throat. She swallowed. "I tell you leave me alone." She wanted to sound angry but it came out in a choked whisper. She needed her anger, needed it to drown the shame she felt over what her stepfather had started doing to her. She turned away from Jamal, but couldn't start walking right away.

"O.k, o.k. You doan have to curse me." He touched her shoulder. He didn't know what to do. "Is just, you always saying how you want your motha to leave him. Maybe if you tell her then..."

"Then what? She would just hate me. She hate me already." Even as she said it she knew it wasn't true, but she was trying to stay angry so she wouldn't cry. Not in front of Jamal. "They fight all de time already. They'll fight more. She always saying she goin to leave him, but she never do it yet. She still there, takin his blows." She sniffed. She was trying hard to keep the snot from running down her nose. Her grandmother was right; ladies should always carry tissue with them. If she had been alone, she would have ignored her grandmother and used her sleeve, but Jamal was there, and lately she just didn't feel she could do anything in front of him. He was still touching her shoulder. "Just forget about it." She turned around and started walking again.

After a second, Jamal followed. They walked the rest of the way in silence.

* * *

"Rhea."

"Yes Ama."

"Chile, what is the matter?" The capable hands were gently tapping Rhea's.

"Nothing, Ama." She decided then to tell her mother. She would try. "Tomorrow is my birthday, Ama."

"I know, chile. You are going to be confirmed this year." There was pleasure in her voice. *Please keep my granddaughter from her wicked ways.*

"You comin' to our house? I mean for my birthday?"

"If your mother does not mind." She stressed the word mother; she only said daughter to Mary. *Please make my daughter's marriage work.*

"She won't. I'll tell her." A pause. "Ama?"

"Yes?"

The church was quiet now. She could feel its silence seeping into her veins.

How do you make a crown of thorns?

Opprobrium

Sam Leininger

Winding through oncoming traffic on subway platforms and struggling to stay within sight of Michael gave the 27 year difference between our ages a measurable tangibility. He slipped through pedestrian gaps that I lumbered to catch before they re-congested, and the balls of my feet ached from the hours of continuous walking (a blister was forming on the leading toe of my left foot). The dampness of the morning air, which had saturated my feeble lungs, had dissipated, but the additional length of my zig-zag path—paced in concert with Michael's more direct (and younger) course—had levied its bronchial tax. At the top of the alley, I saw him enter a store I was familiar with. I took the opportunity to rest for a few minutes before going in. I pressed my left nostril tight against the septum and, with a quick, forceful blow, emptied the contents of the right onto the bricked drive. Allergies. I inhaled two deep, clean breaths and entered the store.

The escalators in the middle of the floor nearly hid Michael, who was browsing among the sweaters embroidered with the name of the school (whose famous doors began a block south from here). I walked diagonally towards the back of the room, maintaining a safe distance. I picked out the two security guards posing as customers: their radios created small rectangular extrusions of t-shirt. From the opening of the stairwell, aided by a convex mirror, I could see him walking towards the back of the room. He was either coming to inspect the pegged wall of coffee mugs, confront me, or use the elevator. I hurried up the stairs; I don't think he saw me.

He exited the elevator moments before I opened the door from the stairwell. From two steps behind (the closest to him I'd been), I noticed identical patches of redness on his ears: evidence of recent piercings. I mirrored his lazy ellipse around the selling floor, pausing to examine the courier bags and put space between us. At the back of the store, Michael

slowed without breaking stride as he walked past an employee deep in conversation; as I passed this young man, he started from the burning gaze of another, impatient, customer and led her across the sales floor. After pointing down an aisle, he abandoned the customer and returned to his own personal diversion.

I continued past a stock boy (who was delaying his duties with a little light reading) and found a comfortable rack to rest against. I was obstructed by the escalator and a cardboard display hawking an animated children's video, but I could still see Michael reckoning and predatorily slinking through shelves. Although his half-sleeve tattoo was covered (which he had failed to hide from his mother for more than a week), the leather pants and bright Hawaiian shirt were a fairly conspicuous countenance. He walked with slow, sweeping steps and encompassing turns of his head and made his way to the four-sided pegged displays on the open floor in front of the cash registers.

I crossed the vinyl floor runner to improve my angle. In the electronics section, my fingers tangled with the merchandise as I watched him examine the racks of cassette tapes and walkmans. I arbitrarily grabbed a power strip; a familiar sensation surged through me. I looked down, and the power switch that protected the multiple outlets reminded me of the red and black safety buttons on the outlet in the bathroom of my childhood home. Like everything else in the duplex, that breaker was always malfunctioning and had to be reset every time the hair dryer was plugged in. And each time, I gladly reset it for my older sister so she wouldn't have to free a hand from her hair preparation.

We spent a lot of time in the bathroom together. We shared the second bedroom of the duplex but could never engage too deeply or loudly in a real conversation there, full of things our parents would not want to know we were talking about, because the wall between our room and our parents' room was even thinner than the main living room wall, which split the duplex, and through which we could hear our neighbors' raised voices. Often, I swore I heard them breathing. Fearing the eavesdropping of strangers and family

alike, we would retreat to the relative isolation of the bathroom. The one-inch white tiles that covered the bottom three feet of the walls echoed our voices back, and when I turned on the water, I felt secluded. My sister (whom I called D.; she called me D., too: our parents had showcased their efficiency and lack of creativity by naming us Danielle and Daniel) educated me in that bathroom.

She told me all the secrets of the junior high teachers—and of junior high girls—and I tried my best to contribute the play-by-play of my latest little league game. From the above-ground dugout, where I would have spent all my time were there not a stipulation that every team member play in every game, I was able to recall not only the game's action (which would interest only other boys) but the sideline entertainment as well. D. loved to hear about Mrs. Jacobs, who came to every game and never talked to the same father twice. In the stands, there were two distinct groups of parents: those attending in pairs, and those attending alone. They rarely mixed, and the single-parent bleachers were mostly (to Mrs. Jacobs's delight) fathers. I always wondered if the mothers present ever alerted the wives who had chosen to stay home, and as I grew older, I began to wonder how many fathers concocted stories of drudgery, dirt, and disappointment in the hopes that they could sneak off to the ballpark alone.

A majority of my bathroom lectures came from D. as she bathed. We both overcame embarrassment issues at a young age when the desire and necessity to move one's bowels overrode whatever else was happening. After that, and catalyzed by our morning routines of teeth and hair brushing side-by-side (and the requisite resetting of the outlet breaker), occupying the bathroom at the same time became preferred. Occasionally, the shower curtain would separate us, but we usually left it bunched on its pole: it had been transparent at one time but had since, with a combination of hard water stains and clay from the baseball diamond, developed a nondescript gray haze that was impenetrable and too reminiscent of the stucco on the outside of the duplex and our lower-middle class adolescence.

As close as we became, there were times when one wanted the sequestered solitude that the bathroom provided alone. With a simple "D., do you mind?" from either of us, the other would immediately exit and keep an eye out for any parental eavesdropping. Except once. In a moment of insecure mischief, when D. entreated for some privacy, I ducked out of her sight line (obscured by the shower curtain) and shut the bathroom door from the inside. She called out, "D.? Are you still there?" I tiptoed, without answering, over to the tub, the audible pats of my footpads on the cold tile floor masked by the faucet that was still dumping water into the tub. I sat down on the floor, hunkered next to the tub and positioned as I normally would be to catch D.'s eyes, but the curtain still kept me out of sight. She reached up with her right foot and twisted the knobs (cold first, then hot) until they stopped. She was submerged, but I could see her left hand resting on the edge of the tub where it met the wall. When I closed my right eye, all I could see was the dirty curtain; with both open, my right eye dominated, and I could see my submerged sister, the beige of her flesh diluted by the water and the phantom gray of the shower curtain that persisted in my left eye.

D. sat in the tub nearly motionless; I could hear her deep, lung-clearing sighs (she had started smoking to impress this boy Nate). After a few minutes, her left hand fell from the edge into the water, which was growing murkier. She bent her right knee and raised half of her thigh and calf out of the water, shooting concentric ripples towards us both. My ripples stopped at the tub's base and reflected back towards her knee; her ripples continued up to her head and diminished, I saw no return rays. She shifted her hips, and an audible splash disrupted the calm of the bath. Settled in her new position, I could see where her hip bone pressed against her skin, trying to get out, and I could still see her right leg. She was gently scooping water over the protrusion; it cascaded down from the kneetop and erased the scattered goosebumps.

Her inhales joined her exhales in volume, and erratic ripples began racing to the edge of the tub. I became entranced by the sliver of soap, green with white irregular stripes, as it was thrown against the side of the tub by D.'s

waves. It would retreat an inch from the edge before being slammed again. The deflected rays didn't have enough power to drag the soap back with them; my eyes were easier, though, and I found the source at D.'s forearm, half-submerged and circulating in small three-dimensional ovals: sometimes up and down, sometimes around. The little hairs on her arm floated weightless in the water and swayed as if they were caught in a current when her arm moved. The ripples in the water, which must have been lapping her neck, were in concert with her arm and the noises that began to emanate from behind the part of the shower curtain that remained opaque. Small swells in the vocal cords, soft moans with natural crescendos and descendos, soon gave way to staccato grunts, and the ripples began to peak higher, and the soap was violently thrashed against the tub wall (where it left its refreshing-smelling mark).

When Mom yelled for D., she yelled back and quickly shot up in the tub. She pulled the stopper up and, as the milky water rushed down the drain, turned the faucets back on. Under the cover and rush of noise and confusion, I slinked out (remaining irrationally close to the floor) of the bathroom, holding the knob tight until the door was gently and completely shut before releasing.

* * *

Michael walked around the display racks, hardly regarding the blank audio cassette packages or mini-cassette recorders he was fingering; but the walkmans held his interest. He removed one from the peg and spun it around in his hands. Would little league have thwarted what was about to happen (not that my marriage could have survived a contemporary Mrs. Jacobs)? He looked to his sides intermittently and stared for ninety seconds at a cashier standing eight feet in front of him. He tried to force direct eye contact, but she was fiddling with a pen cap. Perhaps she was wondering if anyone would notice the twenty dollar bill she had transplanted from the register to her front left pocket. In her contemplation, she was oblivious to any activity, even eight feet in front of her. Maybe she wondered how difficult it would be to obtain a

reference from the temp agency if she was fired; maybe she imagined wrapping up with lots of blankets when the gas was shut off because she wouldn't be able to pay her bills, and perhaps she secretly replaced the twenty dollar bill when an impatient woman paid cash for a pair of bookends.

Michael replaced the walkman on its peg, placed his paper bag with its plastic handles on the ground, adjusted its contents, and resumed his scrutiny of the various models of electronics. On the back of a hard plastic encasement, he noticed a sticker. He slowly, carefully peeled off this semblance of a bar code to reveal, on the sticker's underside, a series of minute wirings designed to activate the security gates located by the elevator, stairway, and front door. The talkative employee had abandoned his friend and had picked up a phone affixed to a column near the rear of the selling floor; the stock boy was still engrossed in his paperback. The cashier was staring straight ahead of her: I doubt she recognized what was going on at all.

I replaced the random box of computer software I had picked up and headed across the floor when I noticed him stepping on the down escalator. The front door was six feet from the bottom of the escalator, and I'm not sure I would have alerted the staff had there been a chance to detain him (judging by an incident when I worked at a hardware store and was asked to help stop a shoplifter who was "gonna run." I found myself paralyzed, unable to chase after and tackle someone simply because he took a jigsaw). When I reached the display rack, one of the metal pegs holding walkmans had just one unit left. I unhooked it and examined it: AM/FM radio, self-reversing cassette player, and the "sport" set of headphones. Soon, the pawn shop two blocks south of the hospital (his favorite, I have found out)—the one with the set of electronic double doors that locks in the potential patron or thief until granted access by the clerk—will be selling this same model, in the package, at a considerable discount. The shop owner may turn enough profit for a few days' worth of groceries, and some frugal college student may be afforded a welcome opportunity to listen to Texas is the Reason on his long train ride into town every morning.

D. exited the store, scanned the alley, hesitated, and headed left out of the alley and up the avenue. He unbuttoned his uncomfortably taut coat as he walked. After crossing the intersection, he took a left towards the park and sat down on a bench away from the main sidewalk but close enough to watch the people walking their pets. His tie, loosened earlier in the day, was kept in place with a gold tie bar that looked out of place on him: his white shirt was wrinkled; his coat hung limply on either side of his belly; but the tie bar shined and reflected the spring sun that was poking through the foliage and causing small beads of sweat to form in the crevices of his forehead. His face began to flush. He rubbed his pulsing temples in small ellipses with the first two fingers of each hand.

On the far end of the park, people were gathering for a baseball game. Too old to pass for the shortstop's father with a wife he convinced to stay home, D. remained on his bench. His eyes reddened and welled. He began breathing through his mouth, and a droplet of mucous slowly descended from his left nostril. His hand dove into the inner pocket of his coat but came up empty. He paused for a minute and, puckering his face, inhaled noisily through his nose; the mucous strain retreated into the nasal cavity with haste, and a deep gurgling signaled a partial clearing of his airway.

Two minutes later, the globule resumed its path to the opening of his cavernous nose and down towards his mouth. D. swiveled dejectedly, searching for something to replace his lost handkerchief. When he felt the warmth from the snot slug reach his upper lip, he flicked his tongue and quickly enveloped its saltiness; a second pass cleared the shiny trail it left in the divot under his nose. With a sigh, his shoulders slumped and his chest caved in. He pulled the slender end of his tie through the knot, yanked it from under his collar's buttoned ends, and brought the wide side up to his mouth. He inhaled, paused for a second, and blew fiercely into the diagonally-striped silk. He folded the wet side of the tie over once and wadded the dry bits around it in a ball, leaned to the

side, and stuffed it in his coat pocket; as he did, the gold tie bar caught the edge of the pocket and sprang off of the tie.

It struck the splintered wood of the bench, bounced up with an audible ring (like a miniature tuning fork, its tone standard and measured), and fell between the slats of the bench seat to a bed of leaves below. As D. righted himself, he kicked a few loose brown leaves over the tie bar. The only parts still visible were the interlaced alligator teeth of the spring-loaded clasp, hidden when properly affixed and still rather unnoticeable.

The Road to Encampment

Eliza Osborn

The drive to Encampment, Wyoming is long and lonely. Once you get out of the bustling traffic of Denver the roads become narrow and straight, the drive frustratingly non-eventful. The only oncoming traffic is large, threatening trucks with suspicious looking drivers who make you wonder how long it would take someone to notice your abandoned car, stuck in the dirt on the side of the road. It is worth it though, once you reach the entrance gates to the A-Bar-A ranch and relief floods over you as see the red painted sign and the acres of beautiful terrain, mountains, rivers, and daisy fields that are stretched before you, welcoming you to a week of escape from the various plagues of everyday life. The man at the howdy gate takes your name, tells you to have a nice time, and you thank him, knowing all too well that you will not be this happy to see him next Sunday when you have to leave this place behind and return to dull, disenchanted reality, whatever that means.

Gillian is driving to the A-Bar-A with her younger sister Catherine and Catherine's fiancé, Edward. They fly into Denver and Gillian leans over Catherine to look out the window. The familiar sight of the airport below brings back memories of years upon years of this same journey and she tries not to think about the fact that in a week she will be watching the airport fade instead of get closer. They pick up their rental car, a Suburban, because that's only appropriate when you're going to a ranch, and begin a drive that Gillian knows will be long and all too filled with the wedding conversation and whispered sweet nothings that make her want to plug her ears with the cotton balls stuffed into her toiletry bag.

Catherine is worried about driving, but Edward doesn't know the way, and Gillian has never been comfortable driving for long distances. She doesn't like extra responsibility and the lives of her little sister and her sister's one-true-love certainly fall into that category.

"I really think an October wedding would be nice, Ed," Catherine says, bringing up the subject that they have been dwelling on since Baltimore.

"You're gonna regret that you'll be cold the whole time."

"Well, we'll be inside anyway. It will be so pretty when all the leaves are changing. And since it's only the beginning of July now, we have a good couple months to plan the wedding."

"Are you sure a couple months is enough, Cath?" Gillian interjects. "You might be underestimating how much time all this planning will take."

"But I don't want to wait until a year from October to get married. Ed, don't you think we can do it?" Catherine puts her hand on his leg and they exchange knowing glances. Gillian leans back against the seat, wishing herself invisible and allowing her mind to wander, tracing back over the same thoughts that have been running through her mind since Catherine called her with the big news less than three months ago.

Gillian is twenty one, and Catherine is nineteen. She is much too young to be getting married, everyone agrees on this, but everyone also likes Edward who is twenty, so no one is going to stand in the way of the wedding. Gillian wishes that someone would, for selfish reasons. She is twenty one and has never had a serious relationship. She knows that there will be pitying glances cast in her direction at the October wedding. *That poor girl, no one wants to watch her younger sister get married before she's walked down the aisle herself.* Gillian wonders how many people at the wedding will know that Gillian and Catherine also started their periods within less than a month of each other, yet another blow to an older sibling's ego. She sinks into the seat and feels tears welling in her eyes as the shame of being further behind in life than her younger sister washes over her, a feeling that is all too familiar.

When Catherine was in 8th grade she asked for a diary for Christmas. Gillian helped her mother pick out an elegant one, whose pages were outlined in gold.

"What are you going to write about in a diary anyway?" she asked Catherine on Christmas Eve.

"I don't know, just stuff I can't talk to you or mom about."

"What can't you talk to me about?"

"Well, stuff that happens at school. I mean you don't know a lot about boys or anything yet. It's just nice to be able to write it all down, and look at it and laugh at myself when I'm old."

A few weeks after the post-Christmas gloom had mostly faded, Gillian snuck into Catherine's bedroom and found the diary. It was tucked between sheets of paper in her bedside cabinet. Catherine was very predictable. In fact, nothing about Catherine had ever surprised Gillian until she read the diary. Catherine had already had a first kiss, more than a first kiss. She had also kept secret the fact that she had a boyfriend. She had been someone's girlfriend for a month. Gillian was in tenth grade and she had never had a boyfriend or a real kiss. She felt more immature than her sister. She felt sorry for Catherine, who had a social failure for a role model. She wasn't sure how to act around Catherine after that. She was unfit to dispense advice or even to act as willing ear. Gillian couldn't bear listen to Catherine talk about school or her friends without feeling lacking, so she stopped listening.

Gillian awakens to whispers in the front seat. It is beginning to get dark now. She looks at her watch and realizes that they have been driving for three hours. Three hours to go before they reach the ranch. She has not seen her parents since President's Weekend, when they had come to visit her at Penn State and smiled politely at her friends before taking her to an overly expensive restaurant and asking her what she wanted to do with her life. They did not think it was a good idea for her to move back home, but the economy was making it so hard for young people to get jobs. Had she considered graduate school?

Gillian is beginning to feel nervous rather than excited, and she distracts herself by listening to the quiet conversation in the front of the car.

"I'm just worried about seeing your parents. I feel so awkward around them, I'm not going to be able to be myself."

"But they like you, Ed, it's not like this is the first time you're meeting them. We'll have fun, I promise. We'll ride and you and my dad can fish. And I told you about the cook-out on the mountain right? With the songs by the campfire?"

"Yeah, I know you're excited. It will be fun, and I'm interested to see the place that you've been coming to forever. I'll be coming here too from now on."

Gillian watches Catherine reach out and touch him, running her fingers through his curly golden hair. He kisses her hand and leans back against the seat, staring out the window. Catherine continues to stare at him, a small smile on her face. In the soft light, Gillian can see the glint of what could be happiness or perhaps excitement in Catherine's eyes and she feels a pang of jealousy. Will she ever look at someone like that? Will she sit beside a man and feel so comfortably in love? "Catherine, watch the road!"

"God, Gillian, I thought you were sleeping. Why are you so quiet back there? You're always so quiet. I kind of forgot you were here."

"I was sleeping, but you need to be paying attention; I don't want to die on this road. You don't want to have any scars for your fairy tale wedding because you couldn't stop staring at the groom." Gillian immediately recognizes her sarcasm. Catherine gets her feelings hurt easily, and Gillian sees her shoulders tense. She has been chewing the same piece of gum for the entire trip, and now her chewing slows.

Catherine is silent for a moment, then sighs heavily and continues her gum chewing. "Just go back to sleep then, ok? You're more pleasant that way anyway."

Gillian doesn't close her eyes. She stays awake and watches as Catherine and Edward continue to hold hands. Edward brushes Catherine's palm repeatedly with his forefinger and Gillian feels empty inside.

When Catherine turned eighteen their parents allowed her to take a road trip with her friends. She was gone for a week and returned attempting worldliness but achieving snobbery. A few weeks later she asked if she could have one of the friends that she had met on her voyage over for dinner. She had come across him in Atlantic City, but it turned out that he was from Baltimore too. His name was Edward.

Edward ate his salmon and talked about his family's house in Atlantic City, how he had deferred a year before attending Bates College in Maine. He was starting in the fall. Gillian found him intriguing. She watched him chew his broccoli and thought that she would never find someone who chewed his broccoli in the quite the same way. Her friend Dani could sense Gillian's interest, her sudden quietness, her slowness in leaving the table after it had been cleared.

"You should really consider getting to know him better while he and Catherine are still just friends," she warned. "Otherwise it's gonna be too late. You probably don't have much time."

"I think he could like me, don't you?" asked Gillian. By the time she was adequately reassured however, her confidence built up to almost existent, Catherine pranced by her room on the phone, announcing that Edward was indeed a good kisser. Halfway through her freshman year at the University of Maryland, Catherine transferred to Bates.

Gillian cringes when she thinks about the immature behavior regarding her initial meeting with Edward, feeling the looming worry that he might have sensed something. She watches him turn his head towards Catherine. "How are ya?" She groans. He rubs her neck and turns his head towards the back. "Not much longer Gill, you hangin' in there?"

"Not carsick yet," Gillian says feeling relieved. He has no idea.

They are close to Encampment now. The road has become more narrow and deserted and they are beginning to pass other ranches. Their mountain ranges seem to go on and on and Gillian pictures herself riding across them. She visualizes her shadow on horseback on the sides of the steep hills.

"So Gillian do you have a cowboy waiting for you in the mountains?" Edward asks.

Catherine snorts. "She would if she ever spoke to any of them. You have lots of cowboys who you wish were waiting for you. What was that guy's name, Chris Canary?"

Gillian is embarrassed. "Chris Canale, and we're going too early this year; he won't be there."

"He played the harmonica," Catherine continues. "Gillian fell in looove with him."

"Just shut up, Catherine, I was younger then."

"It wasn't that long ago, you were still obsessing over him last year. You would never tell me that, but it was pretty obvious."

"Whatever. We won't get to see him anyway, because we had to change our ranch week to fit your schedule this year."

"Oh, so sorry to ruin your imaginary affair." The car is filled with tension now, and Encampment's highway has never seemed so long.

"Well, at least we don't have to worry about damn crushes anymore, right babe?" Edward is attempting to break the silence.

"I don't know about that..."

Gillian swallows hard and imagines stepping out of the car at the A-Bar-A and seeing Chris Canale standing at the door of the post office. He has learned that she was coming earlier this year, and has changed his plans to be with her. This is the kind of thing that should happen to Catherine's older sister. This would make Catherine proud.

Gillian catches Catherine's eye in the rear-view mirror and they stare at each other for a moment. Gillian wonders how often Catherine feels like the real older sister. She looks away. She glances up and realizes that Catherine is not looking at her at all, but at a pair of headlights appearing distantly behind them. Catherine has not even given Gillian a second thought. Perhaps Gillian is imagining that Catherine is disappointed in her. Maybe she doesn't have to worry about her family comparing the two of them. This is all in her head. Perhaps this is the healthy thinking that those therapy sessions have been trying to achieve. Catherine turns around and looks at her.

“Don’t worry. Maybe this will be the year that you finally find Mr. Right on horseback.”

Or perhaps, thinks Gillian, I’ll just hang myself with my teal bridesmaid dress. Catherine has definitely not done that before.

She laughs silently at her cleverness and looks out the window as the car draws closer and closer to the A-Bar-A ranch, where mindlessness and luxury become more and more exaggerated in the mind’s eye each year, where weeks go by in milliseconds, and where, in the end, you are left with only the notion that your life is more hopeless than it was when you left it waiting for you at the howdy gate.

A Bright Room With a Tall Ceiling

Michael Trottier

"Hello, class!" the teacher said, as he entered the room holding books and also folders containing papers.

"It's a beautiful autumn day outside," commented one of the students.

"Another added, "I agree."

"I wouldn't have known," the teacher responded, "I've been upstairs in my office, organizing this and copying that---and sadly---grading things."

There was an eight second pause when no one spoke at all. Melodic bird sounds floated in from the outdoors. There were cool airy breezes and sunshine shadows just beyond the windows.

"I will now read a poem to begin the class," Teacher said. "Chilling Thursday" is by Somebody Who's a Someone." He adjusted his glasses and began to read.

"The fluorescent lights,
Without dimmer, lacking compassion
Hit my eyes all the
While the A.C. froze me pleasantly
Into my chair
Of the hardest, finest, oldest
Wood
Worn smooth by centuries of fidgeting students."

"Isn't that just great?" asked the teacher.

"Wonderful!" everyone said.

"It really gives me a sense of place," a student said.

Another chimed in. "And a feeling of time passing, both fast and slow, now and then."

* * *

"Story at bat, first up," said Teacher. He gave up his spot and First Victim took the long walk in a short time and settled into the chair at the head of the table. From somewhere in the

building, opera music began to rise to a crescendo and a stampede went by in the hallway. The teacher rose and shut the heavy door, effectively muffling the sounds.

"Does anyone else have anything to add?" asked the teacher.

"Didn't the discussion just begin?" somebody asked.

"No, you dozed off," said the teacher. "Now you're next." He paused. "More helpful comments about First Victim's story, please."

"The handcuffs must go!"

"The handcuffs must stay!"

"The villain could actually be seen as the hero in this, if you squint your eyes."

"Absolutely not!"

"It needs more gorilla."

"Less gorilla!"

"The gorilla needs to swear more. Like it does on page three, paragraph five. "Damnation! Sonuvabitch, piss on it! Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

"It's not very good at it...that's what I think."

"Gorillas don't talk, Doctor Dolittle."

"This one does and not badly---considering the way it has abused itself and been abused."

"Okay, let's get off this," the teacher interjected. "Let's have a couple of more comments; we have two minutes and twenty-seven seconds left. You... then Another. Another had a hand up..."

You began, "The dominant characters seem to be a butcher, a baker and a candlestick maker in first, second, and also, third person. It's extremely mixed up and I liked the tale enthusiastically."

"That's not right!" said Another. "I saw it as, almost certainly, being about a public relations genius, on the top floor of a very tall building in a major city, who most decidedly would want to be lawyer instead."

"No, that is impossible. I think I would have remembered that."

* * *

"Now you can see how opinion can be true and yet diametrically opposed." The teacher moved around the table where the students sat in a long oval. The massive wooden table nearly filled the room. He moved intermittently, stopping to view the class from the vantage of the spot from behind whichever student sat in that particular chair. "Remember, if you mean to say 'it is' then that's when 'it's' is called for. Commas should be used to separate the name, in the case the character is called by name inside dialogue. Read my handout." Now looking at a particular student he suddenly spoke louder, "Somebody Somebody, wake up and get in the hot seat; we're going to work-shop your short story for the next twenty-five minutes."

Somebody Somebody pushed his chair out and stood up, while First Victim headed back to her chair, looking pleasantly pleased. Seated at one end of the long oval, enjoying the changed point of view, he said nothing at first but looked out amongst his literary acquaintances. Remembering their names was a huge task. Let's see, he thought, there's He and She and Him and Her and Me and You---That One and Another. I can't recall anymore right now. Oh, yes. And Anymore.

The teacher spoke first, from a new corner of the room. He said, "Somebody Somebody, do you have any questions about how the story works for us? Is there anything you want to ask us or tell us about what exists within these pages?"

A pause of eight seconds commenced while Somebody Somebody gathered his thoughts. "Well, it's written in first person. That's a departure for me. It's not about me specifically. It's fiction of course. There's a little bit of me in everything I do, that might be considered. I guess what I would most want to know is if it holds your interest. Does it grip you with a bland despair that makes laughter erupt from your diaphragms? Because that wasn't the effect I sought. If you detect any run-on sentences, misplaced modifiers, or any overuse of the word 'was,' please let me know.... About the title... I considered all these other titles. I thought about naming it, *A Room with Slowly Turning Ceiling Fans and Bright White Paint*, or, *A Well Lighted Room With a High Ceiling*, maybe even, *A Well Lighted Room With Tall, Clean*

Windows. I also considered, The White Room With A Tall Ceiling, White Rooms With Tall Ceilings, and A White Room With High Ceilings, Ceiling Fans, And Bright Fluorescent Lights before settling on, A Bright Room With a Tall Ceiling. I'm sure I'll hit on the right one eventually."

"Okay, fair enough," the teacher said. "We can discuss those questions." He looked about the room. "Let's have a summary of the plot first. Who wants to try?"

Everyone looked at his or her copies of *Somebody* *Somebody's* story but no one volunteered. He, She, That One, Him, Her, Other, Anyone, Me You, Another, and Someone all leafed through the stapled papers they held in their hands and tried to look inconspicuous. The rest of the class said nothing. Finally, Anymore said that she would give it a stab.

"Okay with me," Teacher said, looking as cool as Elliot Gould in *The Long Goodbye*, without the cigarettes.

"I shall begin to summarize then," said Anymore.

"It's okay with me," responded the teacher.

* * *

"Yeah," said Anymore, sounding like Don, from Mamet's *American Buffalo*. "A child is born in a small mill town in Massachusetts and... wait, it starts with a poem. I'll begin with that."

"Is that necessary?"

"Well, it's subtext and one hundred and sixty words to boot."

"Read on," said the teacher. "Though you could have booted it and it would have been okay with me"

"Okay then. Here it is," said Anymore.

Where the foothills dwindle down
From Virginia mountains, there is a town
Which shows in Spring, daffodils,
And each summer the dales are green spills.
On Sunday the bells call from town.
Dress the kids, feed them quickly, bring them down,
Shining brightly, learning soon,

God with Love makes magnolias bloom,

'All the while,

All this while,

While we watch them grow, there is bread and bacon on the table.

We teach and feed. As strength is able.

'In a house beneath the trees,
With Richmond city so near to see,
The green spills will fill our eyes
With shade and breeze that makes wide leaves sigh
Where vale and dale cascade down
We still hear the bells singing from town.
Pack up the kids, no more play;
Let the soggy cereal bowls stay.

'We try to smile all the while.

Through the trials they are growing up when we aren't watching

Meanwhile,

There is bread and bacon on the table."

Any more let the poem sink in for a few moments and then continued her summary. "A child is born in a small mill town in Massachusetts and he never asked to be..."

"I thought it was about Virginia!" objected Me.

"Did you read the story? Try to keep up. May I continue?" He looked at Me and Me shrugged.

"It's okay with me."

"He naturally, professed agnosticism, even while being baptized into the Catholic faith at the age of three weeks. His mother had begun as a registered nurse, escaping fairly young from a dysfunctional family, but gave it up to have eight children. The father came from a family of recovered alcoholics who were universally Catholic, while the mother

was Presbyterian, or something, from the backwoods of Maine, and gave it up for a supposed 'til death do them part, while dancing cheek to cheek. Young Butterfield Pores was extremely happy for the first five or six years. He had six older siblings, most of them sisters. So, he existed in a wonderful place for a while because everyone loved him and thought of him as special. His Dad brought home all the bacon as a mechanical draftsman, later specializing in electro-magnetic drawings that were specifications of impenetrable mysteries. Many times, Butterfield's Dad would come home from the office about seven in the evening and produce toys or surprises for his son, pulled out of the pockets of his overcoat or suit jacket. On some Saturdays they would listen avidly to a Red Sox game on a transistor radio and hardly speak a word the whole time. Mr. Pores ignored his daughters mostly. They all grew up to be first junkies, then reformed. They dated losers and lost all the custodies of their children to the combined lawyerly forces of their rich in-laws. Butterfield would play catch with his dad after the game on the radio ended. Everything continued just wonderfully until the parents began to have adult arguments about infidelity, shattered dreams, and angrily peevish demands, symptomatic of deeper, psychological needs that remained unmet. These contests of will took place over the head of young Butterfield and contained language that would have given any movie an automatic "R" rating. So they got divorced. One of Butterfield's sisters told him it was about to happen, so it didn't come along totally unexpectedly.

"His oldest brother went in the marine infantry and got shipped off to Vietnam. The mom and dad fought over custody of any children who hadn't been old enough to get pregnant while in high school and leave the house. Butterfield's mom won the remainder and complained all the time about how much everything cost. The dad had to pay child support and alimony and had visitation rights. He now had to eat powdered eggs and live in a dingy apartment so he would have sufficient cash to bring the kids miniature golfing or bowling every other Saturday and..."

The teacher took this moment to interrupt. "Maybe you could hurry this along, Anymore."

"You don't want to hear anymore?" asked Anymore.

"No, I do want you to finish. Just try to speed this up."

Outside, the sunny day had been passing into twilight. The twenty-five minutes allotted seemed to be quickly vanishing.

Anymore continued, knowing the whole class wanted their chances to make comments. "Butter, as he was sometimes called, now lived in Framingham, Massachusetts. The mom dated a lot: an Italian, some nice guy, a great dancer, John, Paul, George, Tom, Jones, and some others. Finally they all got baptized as Mormons after the mom got serious with Mr. Hesselrock, a divorced father of twenty children. Butter played basketball and joined the Boy Scouts at the Wesley, Massachusetts temple. He made a nice terrarium that only lived three weeks because it got constantly over-watered. Mr. Hesselrock, who feared Butterfield's mother thought he had a fear of commitment, lasted slightly longer, running away as fast as he could two weeks before Christmas. Then no one practiced Mormonism any longer, except Mr. Hesselrock. Let's see. Let me see...Oh yes! Then Butter finds out that his brother, Bongo, is actually the son of a guy named Sidney, who manages a local Arthur Treacher's Fish and Chips. But that's nothing compared to finding out later that his oldest brother planned a sex change operation and would become his fifth sister. The one who had been in Vietnam and killed so many Vietcong while suffering from foot fungus."

"You really need to get to the point..."

"Okay. All right. On Christmas morning the same year, after unwrapping his gifts alongside young Bongo and eating breakfast, he knew his mother was sad. She put all of Butter's and Bongo's presents in a big box, along with a few changes of clothing for each of them. Then she left them, with the box, at the curb in front of Butter's dad's house, standing in the snow.

"The dad had remarried by this point with a woman who had four red-headed brats of her own. They met at Parents Without Partners. Butter hated her guts and she was a mean bitch to Butter. He would run away. They'd haul him back and she would pummel his head. The next day he often ran away immediately."

"You need to wrap this up."

"Sorry. He left for good when he was sixteen. He traveled all over the country..."

"No, I mean...wrap it up."

"Eventually he married and went back to school..."

Anymore looked unsure of herself now. She kept her eye on the teacher as she continued. "I feel that I'm leaving so much out of my summary...Okay, to make a long short story short...Butterfield did well at community college so he went on to the university. One night he found himself in a creative writing class, very much like this classroom, but obviously not this classroom. Anyone could tell they were different because today, in this room, the weather is pleasant outside. If we could see the sky the bright points of the stars would be clearly apparent. In the story, however, it is raining heavily. It is definitely not coming down in sheets but rather, drops of various sizes, randomly dispersed over a specific geographic area. So anyone can tell this is not the same room.

"The people in the class are much like the people in this class but they are not the same, of course. We know for sure because they all have names quite different than ours. Later, years later, most of them went on to dominate American literature for most of the twenty-first century. They won so many awards and made so much money that they used their Pulitzer prizes as poker chips whenever they got together socially. If one of them would lose a thousand dollars on a single hand, they wouldn't care at all.

"Now this is the important part of the plot...I'm sorry. It's been twenty-five minutes already, hasn't it?"

"Twenty-six," the teacher corrected her.

"Everyone is in a room at the college. There are bright lights. The ceiling fans are turned off because the temperature is chilly. It isn't like today because it is hot in here now and the fans are on, that's another difference. A short story is being work-shopped. There is a feeling given in the text, the reader sort of knows that some event will occur which will cause the teacher and the entire class to run outside into the pouring rain. The ceiling suddenly develops a huge crack and water gushes out onto the long oval table below. The electric

lights spark and crackle and then go out. Those who are lucky have time to grab their umbrellas and soggy books. They bump into each other trying to find the door but they all make it outside all right. Everyone does make it outside safely. They're all wet though, especially Butterfield."

"Is that it?"

"Yes, I'm finished now."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," she said and bravely smiled.

"I don't want any more summary from you, Anymore."

"You mean not ever, don't you?" The edges of her smile dropped down.

"What do you think?" He stood up. "We have three more stories tonight. That means we are going to work straight through without a break. We're all adults here, if anyone needs a break, just take one. It's okay by me." He walked back and forth for a bit, then sat down in another seat. "Next story," he said.

Plays with Food

Nik Bramblett

The morning sun reflected off the swirling crystals as the falling snow obliterated the remaining traces of what might have been a clue. Perhaps, Pierce had escaped merely by the slightest fluke, some small telling detail overlooked by some overtired investigator, whose keen senses had been blunted only slightly by the bitter cold and the temptation of a steaming cup of coffee – perhaps, even, a cup of coffee from this very café, just like the one now thawing Pierce’s still-trembling fingers that even now bespoke the sheer grotesqueness of the midnight scene.

Clues or no, they wouldn’t catch him. The roads had been deserted as he’d sped away in the black Explorer, and since the snow had started back up, not so much as a tire track or footprint remained to pinpoint his presence there – if the incident had been discovered at all, which he doubted. Her kind, he surmised, weren’t likely to have people waiting at home worrying about them.

Vickie poured him another cup, and he noticed her not noticing at all as he feigned an interest he did not feel in the last of the scrambled eggs, mashing them and swirling them together with the remaining grits and a few crumbles of bacon, none of which he intended to eat. His eyes swayed with the rhythm of her hips as she sauntered away, and he once again felt a reminiscent glimmer of decades-old desire as he caught a glimpse of her still-youthful figure at the next table. A graceful but weathered hand rested casually on one firm hip, and supple dancer’s calves belied her 42 years. Watching her walk around the restaurant flirting with the customers for an extra dollar tip reminded him of their ancient past together. “... so happy to see Celeste. She hardly ever visits any more.”

Pierce’s brow creased as he puzzled over the overheard comment. Who was Celeste? An old friend, moved away, perhaps? A sister? No, Vickie was an only child. That much he remembered from years earlier, when he’d been her favorite customer at the Wild Horses Saloon, then later, her lover. Before she’d vanished. He returned his attention to his

dismembered breakfast, and mixed a little of the ketchup he'd initially poured next to the eggs into the congealing mass.

"So, Tiger, what's up?" Vickie's cheery voice tore him away from his composition. "Sorry I haven't had time for chit-chat this morning; it's been murder in here."

Pierce smiled again as he met her gaze. "Not much, really. I'm exhausted."

"Late night, stud? Out mauling another leggy blonde?" She winked as she said that. Pierce blinked hard and nearly choked on his coffee. Recovering, hoping she hadn't noticed, he attempted an amused chuckle.

"Nothing so exciting as that," he lied. A hint of weariness appeared at her temples, like she was sharing his memory of their brief, stormy affair so long ago. He sighed. "I suppose things won't ever be the same with us as they were back then. Even so, getting to know you again these last few weeks has been wonderful. I'm glad you've come back into my life."

"Me too, honey – although, when you think about it, it's probably just as well things aren't the same." The crease in her brow reminded him of both the good and bad of their few months together back then, in Phoenix. "After all, you were a bit—" She chose her next words carefully – "*aggressive* back then."

Wishing to change the subject from the unpleasant reminder of past mistakes, he asked, "So, couldn't help overhearing—who's Celeste? Old dancer-friend of yours?"

"We don't talk about that," she hissed, looking over her shoulder to see who might be listening. He couldn't tell if she was angry or just teasing. "My *Gentlemen's Club* days are ancient history. Celeste, she's my daughter." She started to say more, but then paused, as if thinking better of it. She simply added, "That's why I got out of the business, in fact."

She ignored his raised eyebrows, and continued. "She's visiting from college, where she apparently has taken a part-time job as, of all things, a *dancer*." She coughed out that last word, as if she felt a bitterness stronger than the dark roast she'd been serving him.

Got out of the business. Her words took him back to that long-ago Thursday, after the fight, when he'd gone to Wild

Horses to try to see her and they'd said she was gone and wouldn't be back. She'd abandoned him, he'd thought. He supposed he might have to pay her back for that now, tit-for-tat, in case they started asking questions. But he didn't mention it.

Near the far wall of the diner, an impatient old man waved in their direction and grunted as his wispy, white-haired wife sat glaring. "Be right back, hon." Vickie grabbed the coffee pot and hurried across the floor, muttering something about Q-Tips.

So she'd been pregnant. She might have told him.

So he'd understand it wasn't his fault, her leaving like that. He did the math in his head and figured Celeste would be about 20. He cracked another quick smile, as he pictured her, gorgeous and vibrant like her mother had once been. An instant later, though, his face darkened again as his thoughts returned to the night before, to *that* girl, whose flirtatious hair-toss had reminded him of Vickie's incessant teasing a score of years earlier, before he'd won her over— and, he realized, before she'd left him to raise some bastard's brat. Under his fork, the bright crimson of the ketchup had faded to pink in the coagulating mass of once snow-white grits, now sullied by the hard splinters of bacon amid the bloated yellow chunks of the softer, fleshy eggs. He'd only intended to offer her a ride. Was it his fault she'd been so beautiful, and then so uncooperative?

Vickie returned, refilled his coffee without asking. And turned away again. In the rising steam, he saw the young girl's piercing blue eyes, like a mirror's reflection, staring back into his own, at first dancing and playful, then flashing to horror before the light left them and the apparition dissipated, leaving behind only the blackness of the coffee.

"You know," Vickie was saying over her shoulder, "she has your eyes." He blinked and sputtered, spewing coffee in his plate. As she walked away, pretending not to notice, she remarked with an offhanded wave, "And apparently, she inherited some of your other appetites too. She didn't come home last night—probably hooked up with some guy."

The Sandbox

Michael Thayer

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon and the Fedder family had gathered at the local park, as usual, to soak up the sun and breathe the fresh air. It was a multi-purposed weekly outing: on a very rudimentary level, the few hours in the park gave the family a chance to unwind, relax, and enjoy one another's company; on a strictly utilitarian level, the outing served to remind the family that they were indeed animals—God's creatures after all, like the birds, bees and bears—and not robots, or simply computer operators; yet, on another level, quite deeper than the preceding, the weekly trip provided each and every member of the family with a reason to look forward to the week's end—a constant and reoccurring pleasantry amid an ever-churning sea of responsibility.

Presently, Alvin and Myrtle Fedder sat at a picnic table, the remains of lunch sprawled out in front of them, watching their two sons, Isaac and Paul, sway back and forth, side by side on two swings hanging from a twelve-foot-high crossbar some thirty yards away.

"Look at those two *swing*," Myrtle said. She laughed and fingered the cap of a mustard bottle.

Alvin let out a short whistle. "Not too bad, I'd say. Not half-bad for two little kids," he said.

"Oh, how *marvelous*! Just look at them go!"

"Like I say, we've got a couple of first class swingers on our hands, honey. I don't think we've done too badly for ourselves there."

Myrtle stopped fidgeting with the cap, turned her head ninety degrees to the left, and addressed her husband.

"What?"

Alvin swallowed, stood up, and began to collect the paper plates, plastic silverware, and napkins that lay strewn across the picnic table. "Nothing, dear. Forget it." He smiled.

"What was that? Speak up. I couldn't hear you."

Alvin looked away and continued to tidy the table. He replaced the lid on the jar of relish, resealed several zip-lock

bags of potato chips and tossed a few plastic forks into a nearby trash can.

"*First class swingers*," Myrtle said. "My God."

"Sorry, honey."

"What are you *doing*?" she asked. "Do *not* throw those chips out! Paul hardly *touched* them." When Alvin removed the lid from the trashcan and began to dig inside, Myrtle recoiled in disgust, muttering to herself, though she spoke loud enough for her husband to hear her clearly, "Oh, you *are* a joke, Alvin."

The woman opened her purse and lifted out a tall, orange-tinted, white capped bottle. She removed the cap and tapped three chalky pills out into her open palm.

"Honey?" Alvin asked from across the table. "Do you have to do that here?"

"Do *what* here?" Myrtle replied. She replaced the cap.

Alvin frowned and closed his eyes, releasing a heavy sigh out through his nose.

"God. Look at you Alvin—just *look* at you." Myrtle brought the now curled hand up to her open mouth and catapulted the pills into the back of her throat.

"Like you're eating popcorn," Alvin said.

She took a gulp of her iced tea and swallowed hard. A lump traveled down her throat toward her stomach. "Excuse me? What on *earth* are you talking about Alvin?"

He sighed again.

"These are for my *headaches*, Alvin. You *know* they're for my headaches."

"Three an hour?"

"Oh shut up," Myrtle told him. "*Popcorn*. My God, you are a joke."

As she was speaking the words, the two boys had begun to run toward the table from the swing set. At six, Isaac was two years Paul's elder, and he easily out ran his little brother. The older boy crashed into his mother's knee and Myrtle let out a delighted laugh.

"Marvelous Isaac! You are Mommy's fastest boy!"

A moment later, Paul grabbed hold of Myrtle's other knee, panting hard, and apparently proud to have taken second place in the two man race.

"Paul! God damnit—that *hurt*."

At that, Alvin's head shot up from the trashcan. He stood motionless, watching his family.

"Paul wouldn't jump off the swing Mommy, so I wonned the race," Isaac told his mother, climbing up into her lap.

Myrtle let out another delighted chuckle. "He *wouldn't*! And why not, Isaac?"

"I dunno. He was too ascares I think."

"I weren't scared," Paul said, his eyes widening and searching his mother's face for a reaction. She ignored him and addressed Isaac once again.

"How far did you jump, sweetie? I bet you're a terrific jumper. My brave boy." She began to tickle him and he laughed shrilly and screamed.

"Oh now-now, come on, no fair screaming like that."

"Richie Tarlington said there ain't no Santa Clause," Paul told his mother.

Myrtle covered Isaac's ears with both hands and shot Paul a hard look.

"Be *quiet*," she mouthed.

Across the table and a few yards off to the left, Alvin Fedder watched silently as his wife and children conversed. He could hear every word and was frowning in blatant disapproval, but he made no move to intervene. Above him, the sun was at its peak, the sky was clear save for a few thin, wispy clouds dispersed carelessly above like the streaks of a white-paint-tipped-brush that has just been swiped effortlessly across a canvas of baby blue.

Behind him was a small concession stand that served ice cream and hamburgers—closed for lunch, ironically enough. Across the gravel parking lot seventy yards away, he could see several fields; baseball and soccer, primarily, though he supposed one might be for softball—what was the difference between a baseball field and a softball field anyway? To his left was a volleyball court, a dense crop of trees fencing it in on the far side. To his right was a playground, one of the swings

on the swing set still rocking back and forth slightly in memory of Isaac's high-flying departure. Near the swing set was a sandbox, and next to that a jungle gym, two slides, and, across the way a bit, a basketball court. Behind the basketball court was a pond, and across the pond was nothing but woods.

"Paul, I am *not* going to ask you again. Now get *off* the ground and put that thing *down*."

"But Ma, I were just lookin' at it. It ain't got a tail," Paul said. He sat Indian-style a few paces away from his mother's feet, both eyes focused on something in his lap.

"Mommy, mommy, what's he got! Kill it Mommy, kill it!" Isaac screamed.

"No! Is just a bug!"

"Shut up, Paul. Now bring it here."

Alvin stood still, his feet beginning to itch. As Paul stood up, walking toward his mother with the bug crawling inside his cupped hands, Alvin moved purposefully toward the picnic table. Myrtle swung her eyes from Paul to Alvin with such deftness and accuracy that the act alone froze Alvin in mid-step. The glare his wife fixed on him was enough to keep his feet anchored securely to the ground and his body motionless.

She reached into her tote bag and brought out a large, thin, hard-covered children's book. Placing it on the ground, she carefully lifted Isaac off her lap and set him down on the grass at her side.

"Now put that thing on the book, Paul." Myrtle had returned her steady gaze to her youngest son, and he dare not defy her order. He placed the fuzzy black caterpillar on top of the book and took a step backwards.

"Now watch Mommy Isaac." She took hold of Isaac's hand and brought her foot up high over the book.

"Kill it Mommy!"

She brought her foot down hard, directly onto the caterpillar. Isaac let out a gleeful cheer, and Myrtle allowed a pleased smile to worm across her face.

Alvin remained still, his face growing red. He licked his lips and swallowed hard. "Now you listen—"

Myrtle didn't need to speak a word, but only swing her eyes back to meet his. Alvin swallowed his words and stood nervously by the edge of the picnic table.

Paul had not said a word. He stood still, a blank expression on his face, his mouth open slightly, looking up at his mother. Isaac had begun to squash the pretend caterpillars that seemed to be appearing everywhere at his feet. Each time his foot hit the ground he simulated a *squish* or *squash* and let out a triumphant "Yea!"

"Now climb back onto Mommy's lap and tell me more about dodge ball, honey. Come on, here ya go." Isaac climbed back into his mother's lap. He began to tell her about the games he played at recess, but she stopped him in mid-sentence and looked deliberately over at Paul, who was still staring at her.

"Yes?"

He didn't respond.

"Mommy's talking to *Isaac* now—*go on*. Go climb the slide," she told him, "or play in that filthy sandbox, for all I care."

As Paul waddled off toward the playground, Alvin took the seat opposite from his wife and eldest son, opened the book that had been resting on the seat, and began to read. The words, however, seemed to lack continuity, and his concentration was broken every so often by a rise in conversation from across the table.

"Oh, wonderful! How *brilliant* of you! And then what did he say, Isaac, what did that dirty boy say to you?"

Alvin stood up and turned away, muttering to himself. Pausing only to mark his page—which had not changed in the ten minutes he had spent reading—he set off toward the sandbox where his youngest son sat Indian-style, digging. As he drew near, Alvin deliberately added volume and tempo to his whistle in attempt to alert his son of his approach. Paul did not look up. Alvin sat down on a low bench located only a few feet from the sandbox. He waited a minute for his son to give some outward sign that he was aware of his father's arrival,

but none came. The little boy continued to dig with bare hands at the sand, stacking it messily on either side of him, immersed in his work.

"Read any good books lately, buddy?" Alvin asked.

"Yes. Thomas the Train." Paul did not look up, but only raised a handful of sand to eye level and inspected it carefully, picking at it with his free hand. He pinched a few grains between two fingers and began to slide the thumb and forefinger together quickly, apparently fascinated by the sand's steady decent.

"Did *you* read it, or did someone read it *to* you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" Alvin asked. "How is that possible? Don't you know whether or not *you* had the book on your lap or if someone *else* had the book in *their* lap and was reading it to you?"

"Someone else." Paul threw the remaining clump of sand down hard into the sandbox and resumed digging.

"Right."

"Do you like sand?" Paul asked.

"What? Do I like *sand*? Is that a joke?"

"No."

"Sure, I like it, I guess. What's not to like, right? Hey, cut that out. Don't *eat* it, for Christ's sake." Alvin's face contorted in disapproval, but he made no move to stop the boy. "Alright, old Paul-buddy, have it your way. I tell ya, though, don't let that mother of yours see you doing that. She'd lose it."

"Why come I can't eat sand?"

"That's a good question. I don't know, to tell ya the truth—other than it's just pretty *dirty*. Would you eat dirt?"

"No."

"Then why sand? Sand's just dirt, but from the beach. Well, it may be made of glass. Or maybe it's glass that's made of sand—I don't know. How's old Thomas the Train doin' anyway?"

"Good. But he ain't a train."

"He ain't a train? Why the hell's he called 'Thomas the Train' then? What the hell kind of a book is this anyway?"

"I don't know. Mommy got it for Isaac." The little boy was still intent upon the sand, scraping it up from one spot and piling it neatly in another.

"Right."

"Why do Mommy only play with Isaac?"

Alvin frowned and looked over toward the picnic table where his wife and eldest son were engaged in a round of patty-cake. He could hear the distant squeaks of his wife's laughter. "I don't know, Paul. But she doesn't play with me either, if that makes you feel any better about it. I think it might be because she and Isaac both like trains so much."

"I like trains!" Paul looked up wide-eyed at his father for the first time.

"Right. Well, Isaac's just a little bit older than you, bud. When you're Isaac's age, then you two will be inseparable—you and Mommy, I mean. Don't worry about it, Mommy just has more in common with your brother right now. You know, they're a lot alike. You and me though, buddy-boy, you and me are a lot alike too."

"Nah'aw."

"Now come on, what're you try'na do here? You tryin' to hurt Daddy's feelings, or what?"

"I don't care." Paul returned his attention to the sand.

"Well, that's just great. Thanks for *that*. Good to know, little buddy, good to know." Alvin reached over and mussed up Paul's hair.

"Richie Tarlington says there ain't no Santa Clause."

"Who said that?"

"Richie Tarlington."

"Well, Richie Tarlington doesn't know his ass from his elbow then, buddy. Me and Santa Clause go way back; I met him, ya know—winter of '73. One hell of a good guy, that Santa Clause."

"No you didn't."

"You bet I did, buddy. I met him in the kitchen, when he came to get the milk and cookies. Only he didn't want the cookies. Ya know what he wanted instead?"

"No."

"Well, you want me to tell ya?"

"Yeah."

"He wanted a *banana*, what d'ya think'a that?"

"He probably wanted'na give it'ta Rudolph."

"No kidding? Old Rudolph a big fan of those bananas?"

"I don't know." Paul suddenly stopped digging and began shaping the small hill of sand he'd piled at his side.

"What're you building there?"

"It's a secret." Paul looked up again and moved to block his father's vision from the mound of sand.

"Oh, excuse me. I didn't realize it was such a personal issue. I won't ask again. Christ, you'd think I'd asked you for your social security number or something. Which I know, by the way. I bet *you* don't even know it, do you?"

"What?" Paul screwed up his face.

Alvin let out a full laugh. "So you gonna tell me what that is you're building, or am I gonna have to tickle it out of you?"

"Not tickle," the little boy answered. "It's a house. For where me and Mommy are gonna live when I'm Isaac's age."

The smile fell from Alvin's face all at once. "Right, sure. That's *exactly* what it looks like."

"I know."

The sudden pounding of footsteps behind them announced Isaac's arrival. "Hey!" the other boy said. He hovered at the edge of sandbox. "You're supposed to use a shovel! Mommy! Paul's digging without a shovel! He's using his *hands*!"

Myrtle had followed Isaac halfway and now stood with one hand pressed against a slide for support, her eyes narrowing. "Oh God, Alvin. Can't you even handle *this*? Can you do that much for me?"

"We were getting along just fine, Paul and I, before--"

"Oh God. I'm absolutely not in the mood for this, Alvin. I'm just not up for another argument. Will you just *watch* them while I go out to the car?"

"Okay."

"How wonderful of you." She turned and left.

Isaac now stood on the edge of the sandbox and watched as his brother continued to push the mound of sand closer

and closer together. The sandcastle—or house, as Paul had named it—was beginning to take form, not a form that terribly resembled a house, but a definite four-sided cube. Paul, on hands and knees, scampered over to the far side of the sandbox, picked up a long twig that lay there, and then stuck it in the middle of his construction.

“Is it done?” Alvin asked.

“Yes.”

“It’s stupid. I’ll make a better one.” Isaac climbed into the sandbox and began to hastily construct a pile of sand only a foot or two from Paul’s.

“I think it looks perfect, buddy-boy—a perfect house. I like the stick, a nice touch.”

“It’s a flag.”

“Of course! What’d I say?”

“Stick.”

“Well, in any case, regardless of what I *said*, I *meant* flag. A perfect flag. Is it an American flag, or a Martian flag?”

When Paul turned his back to inspect another stick that lay in the shadowy corner of the sandbox, Isaac stood up. Looming directly over his brother’s construction, he lifted his leg up high in the air and brought it down hard, leaving only a crumbled pile of sand where the house had stood.

Paul heard his brother’s cheers and turned suddenly to gaze upon his ruined work. He waddled over to his brother’s incomplete mound of sand and kicked it.

“Hey!” Isaac let out a shrill scream and looked on the verge of tears. “I’m telling Mommy right *now*!” He hurried off toward the parking lot.

Alvin had watched the scene unfold, but had not interfered. Now he offered his remaining son some words of consolation. “No big deal, buddy, you can build another one, right?” He smiled weakly. “To hell with that creep, he’s just jealous *he* couldn’t make a house as pretty as yours.”

“It weren’t pretty, it was scary,” Paul told his father.

“You bet it was, boy. I’m almost *glad* that creep crushed it, I was getting downright terrified of the thing.”

“You were?” Paul’s eyes widened.

"You bet I was, boy. Just *terrified*. Why don't you build a new one? You know, make it even scarier. I'll bet Isaac gets so scared when he comes back that he pisses those overalls of his—soaks 'um right through."

"Okay." Paul turned away from his father and resumed his work.

Looking out toward the parking lot, Alvin could make out the shape of his wife, their son standing in front of her, the little boy's head tilted backwards, staring up at his mother. He didn't try to imagine their conversation.

* * *

"He did *what* to your castle, sweetie?"

"Kicked it over, Mommy! He kicked it over!"

"That little *monster*."

Isaac was standing next to the parked station wagon and looking up at his mother. He noticed that she was holding two bottles in her hands, a large clear one and a much smaller, cylindrical orange one. Both were empty. "What're those for, Mommy?"

She tossed the bottles into the back seat of the car through the open window. "Nothing. They are for Mommy's headaches, sweetie. Now what did that *monster* do to your sandcastle? Tell Mommy what that bad boy did."

"Kicked it! He came over and wrecked it!"

"What a monster! Oh, God, that really *gets* me. That just *gets* me." He noticed that his mother's eyes were moving independently of one another, rolling to and fro in their sockets. She bent down, stumbled forward slightly, and came back up again with a rock the size and shape of her fist clutched tightly in her right hand.

"You take this sweetie, and you go to that—" Her eyes rolled back into her head suddenly and she stumbled backwards against the car. She was, however, able to regain her balance before she lost her footing.

"Mommy?"

"I'm fine, honey! That little monster just *gets* me. That's all. Oh boy, does that just *get me*." Her teeth were now bared. "Now you take this," she pressed the rock firmly into her son's hands, "and go find your brother in that sandbox..."

* * *

"You wait here, buddy, I'm gonna go see if I can't set the record straight over there. You wait here, I'll be back in a minute."

"Okay."

Once his father had turned his back, Paul lifted his head quickly to watch him go. He had rebuilt his house, this time much scarier, in his opinion—which his father had enthusiastically verified—but he continued to improve upon it. He'd placed a few leaves strategically around the perimeter of the house—windows, he'd told his father. "You bet they're windows!" his father had replied.

Paul, intent on administering the final touches to his masterpiece, did not see his brother fast approaching from the parking lot, something held tightly at his waist by two rigid hands.

He stretched out flat on his stomach and inspected the sand-house carefully. Using one outstretched finger, Paul etched a squiggling line across the top of the structure, adding a few artistic flourishes here and there, but careful not to press too hard. He squinted and licked his lips, holding two open palms against either side of the house. He pressed them toward each other delicately, then placed one hand on the top and pushed lightly down, only a short pat away from completing his masterpiece.

Paul heard the faint reverberation of a scream from the parking lot, and, turning to see what had caused the disturbance, he found his brother looming over him, crowding his vision and blocking the parking lot from view. Paul tilted his head slightly backward and noticed that Isaac's arms were poised high above his head—and he was holding something. Paul watched as his brother brought the object swiftly down. Just as it hit his head, Paul distinctly heard the sound of his

father's voice—a shout. The front of his head exploded in pain. His vision flashed white and faded to black. For a minute he felt the sand underneath his face, sharp grains crunching between his teeth as he slowly worked his jaw. He heard a third scream—his mother's?—and then saw another flash of white. This time it was not followed by black. He vaguely felt the third blow fall, and maybe a few more after that, a scream seeming to accompany each one. Then all was colorless, and he heard nothing more.

Déjà Vu

Bill Fenton

3:00 AM, a Thursday morning: you're in Tampa, an hour and a half from your school, and your first class begins in less than eight hours. You don't know why you agreed to this, but here you are—at the very least you should find a good story. The car collapses into the last open parking space. The engine coughs hoarsely as you duck out of the back seat. Even at this ungodly hour, bass thumps inside the structure like the kicks of a child against the stomach of a pregnant mother. Pink and blue neon lighting encircles the cold concrete building; two monstrous search lights spiral and twist in a mesmerizing rooftop dance. A vicious-looking man -whose nametag you mistake for "Maurice"- opens a dark-tinted glass door and you descend, behind your friends, into the black, steamy caldron of Club Déjà Vu.

Sticky air suffocates the pores. You approach a tall black desk. Behind the barrier a skull-faced woman taps long, phony fingernails on the highly-polished surface; the glassy, blood-red extensions glow with a color that doesn't belong to her. She wears an expression of muted impatience and grins wickedly when she snatches your creased bills. In a wiry voice she tries to persuade you to visit their erotic store, a quiet, dimly-lit room behind another dark-tinted door to your right. The faces of your friends burn with anticipation for they are eager to plunge into the club. They race off towards the darkly-tinted door to your left. Bass seeps through the quivering glass and a thug-of-a-man tears open the door. He smiles knowingly.

Submerged in the stomach of Déjà Vu, the surroundings assault your senses. A fog of tobacco smoke blankets the expansive room. You follow your friends past a long, well-lit bar, past a mob of poorly dressed, loud men, past a pink-neon sign that reads "4U2P," towards the vast, elevated stage, around pink pleather chairs with toothless old men, to some empty seats on the far right of the room close to the stage. The chairs aren't as comfortable as they appear; the cushions

are hard and slippery and the armrests are too narrow. You immediately feel disconnected with the impersonal surroundings.

Your attention immediately shifts onstage where two girls twirl like perverse ballerinas around chrome poles located at opposite ends of the stage. Though they still wear thongs, stiletto high heels, and push-up bras, their faces are bare—cold, mechanical, and emotionless. Bleached blond hair defies gravity as it flows in slow circles, bronze-tanned flesh spirals round, and patches of pink cloth swoop past in streaks of artificial color. As the monotonous thumping of bass quickens, the girls dismount their silver shafts, and, while swaying suggestively to the rhythm, provocatively press their full red lips together as they scan the gawking audience for potential business. Over the next five minutes they disrobe completely, except for their clear-plastic high heels, exposing themselves in mortifying and mesmerizing ways.

When the roaring music slams to a halt, they scramble, in a feverish wobble, to retrieve hot-pink undergarments and moist, crumpled, one-dollar bills. The incarcerating trance fades, and you begin to feel reality, hot and oppressive, surge back into your veins. Before you can decrypt the previous scene, as you always do, a wild and incomprehensible voice screams through the speakers and a deluge of sparsely-clad bodies flood out of an inconspicuous door to your left. Most of the girls look the same: thin, tan, bleached blond, artificial-chested, Barbie-faced, Minnie-Mouse-voiced clones. They make the same moves: caressing arms, tickling chests, stroking thighs, falling into laps, draping hair over faces. They lead herds of men away from their seats for lap dances. Before long your friends disappear with three indistinguishable buxom beauties. You swallow the last ounce of your complimentary soda. It was mostly ice.

Abandoned in this cyclone of indulgence, one girl after another seeks to seduce you, or at least your wallet. You grow weary of the nauseating phoniness and the repetitive response, “no thank you.” Up on stage another set of girls dance; they twist and undulate in the same ways, to the same tacky music, to the same tasteless introductions. Below, you wait in your uncomfortable pleather chair, submerged in the sound

of thumping bass, clicking high heels, obscene hollers, and superficially sensual whispers. Saturated in smells, some sweet, the scent of soft perfume, some harsh, the stench of body odor and whiskey-laden breaths, you wonder why you can't enjoy the madness. Who do you carry this weight for?

Time trudges on, your friends are nowhere to be found, you've said "no thank you" more times than you can remember, and you're about to laugh at the absurdity of it all when she walks your way. She isn't like the other girls, you can see that even from a distance. She isn't as thin, she isn't as disproportionately feminized, and her hair shines a different shade of blond. Her heels aren't as high, her patches of cloth aren't as pink, and she walks with a different kind of rhythm. Collapsing into your lap she winks suggestively and smiles weakly. She has a little gap in her front teeth. Not a word is said as she tugs gently at your collar, her dulled blue eyes darting nervously from left to right. You can't get over how young she looks.

Finally she says something. She asks about where you're from, "baby." You lie, she knows, and you both continue with the phoniness. She says her name is Sonny and switches to her business: twenty five dollars for a dance, one-fifty for the VIP and "a time you won't soon forget." You say that won't be a problem and for some reason you start making conversation. You ask where she's from, how long she's worked in this line of business, when she goes to school, if she has any pets, why she wears peach-scented perfume. She looks at you in disbelief, as if you're crazy, and who can blame her. Rolling her eyes, she repeats her proposition as if you hadn't said a word. She runs her hand up and down your thigh. Her fingers feel small and fragile like a child's.

She moves her face closer to yours, and her long, golden hair drapes over your face like a tent. It chafes the face, coarse and dry—not nearly as soft as you expected. You struggle to rupture the silence by making conversation again. Again, she rolls her eyes. She says you're cute, "baby," and passes her little hands through your hair. Her face is so close you can smell her strawberry pop-tart-scented breath. She

moves even closer and rubs her tiny nose up and down your neck. You try to see her eyes but she always looks away.

When she repeats her price, you aren't listening. There is something beautiful and strangely familiar about Sonny. It's as if you met her before, in a different time and a different place, but she's the same, except for the skimpy outfit and bristly hair. As she leans closer and closer still you notice she's wearing a small, almost imperceptible necklace. Strung tight to her neck, suspended from an almost threadlike chain, dangles a tiny, golden butterfly. It can't be much larger than a bead of sweat, yet, now that you've seen it, you can't remove your stare. Every detail, from the creases in its wings to the folds in its antennas is etched with painstaking precision into this tiny treasure that you might have never noticed. You start to wonder who gave such an understated gift... why they gave it... when she first wore it... why she still wears it... what it means to her. Questions flood the mind and you realize that this girl, this stripper named Sonny, wears a treasure and carries a story. For a moment her humanity surges through you like a current and it is more true and more honest than the hair she drapes upon your face or the hand she runs atop your thigh. For a moment there is a connection, something you have not felt for all too long. For a moment she is real and you are real.

Yet, before you can relish this split second of human authenticity, the moment is shattered when her lips touch yours. Reality plunges back, hot and oppressive, and you feel yourself catapulted back into yourself. It's all too much. Suddenly you realize that behind those dull watery eyes, beneath that coarse blond hair, underneath that golden butterfly, sits a woman-child, naked and unmasked. She's more familiar than ever now, you know you've seen her before—because you have—except she's not like the other girls you've known in your life. Somewhere along the way she got lost and now she's sitting in the laps of perverts inside a sleazy strip club called *Déjà Vu*. You want to wrap her up and take her away from all this, but you know you cannot. Instead, you tell her you have to go.

Running to the bathroom, you see the girls onstage wobbling around in their high heels, fetching crumpled one-dollar bills. When they're not dancing they look clumsy, tired, and pitiful. You see other girls in the laps of the hideous, toothless old men. When they're not leading men off they resemble slaves in the hands of these illicit masters. Finally, you pass beneath the "4U2P" sign, fall through the heavy door, and catch yourself on a dirty sink. You run cold water over your face as you avoid looking up and catching a glimpse of the monster in the mirror. There isn't any soap left.

Eventually you decide you need to get out of this place, so you leave the bathroom and march towards the exit. The fog of tobacco smoke drapes thicker, the bass pounds louder, the reek of body odor hangs heavier, and the fake marble ground presses harder. You pass through the first tinted door, past the smiling thug-of-a-man, past the skull-faced woman, through the second tinted door, past the vicious-looking man you mistook for "Maurice." The air outside nips at your skin; it is cool and moist.

Since your arrival two hours earlier, the world cried. A different kind of fog, soft, pure, and natural, veils the surroundings. Scattered puddles reflect the neon lighting. The parking lot is almost empty. You decide to take a walk until your friends leave, for there's no reason to return inside and ruin their good times. As you approach the back of the parking lot you see a gasoline puddle. You marvel at how it shimmers, a rainbow of color, and wonder how something so beautiful can be so foul.

Eventually you return to the entrance of Club Déjà Vu where the last stragglers, including your friends, funnel out of the dark-tinted doors. They chatter and snicker, and chances are they didn't even notice you left. The once-gorgeous girls of the stage hide beneath cheap fur coats and wait impatiently for taxis and "asshole boyfriends." They puff feverishly at cigarettes whose glowing embers color their faces scarlet as they swear quietly to themselves. They don't seem so happy after such a profitable night.

As your friends walk back towards the car they notice someone left a plastic cup full of beer or piss behind one of the tires. After they manage to shift it away they determine it's piss—a fitting farewell. You slide into the creaky leather seats and brace yourself when the car rumbles to life. You pass a Mobile station and see one of the girls, still in her stiletto high heels, pumping gas into an old, beat-up Vespa. It could have been Sonny, but your friend speeds down the road too quickly for you to tell. You wonder where she goes after work. In fact, you wonder where all the girls go. Passing another car, you try to look inside but you can't make anyone out behind the dark-tinted glass—just another black silhouette staring ahead. Sometimes the distance between drivers is impenetrable. You leave Tampa at 5:30 AM on a Thursday morning, racing off into oblivion with three unfamiliar friends and a world of strangers.

The Rain Came Down

Donna Gibson

Marcos Antonio Gonzalez leaned back against the green station wagon. Trying to appear nonchalant, he pressed his lips down on the choicest curse as it began to drizzle. He hated the rain, especially in Bogota. The city was a pile of noise, stench and pollution. He wanted to reach into the car and grab his jacket, but any second now she would come walking down the sidewalk and he must not be distracted.

This was it, he thought. The images of what was certain to take place in the next few minutes flashed through his mind again. It was like a movie that he'd seen a thousand times, and returning to it gave him that same rush. He clung to its perfection like he had clung to his AK-47 when he was a boy.

When he was a boy... Was he invincible then? Standing over his mother's body? He remembered that night, or was it day, when the rain muffled the sounds of the jungle and enhanced the numbness in his chest. He still didn't feel the pain of her death. But it was there. She fought well and died honorably. That's how it goes. He had covered her body with a tarp, picked up both their guns and ran to catch up with his comrades. The military would find her and see to her burial.

"Stick close to *Capitan* Manuel," she had said. "Stay in his good favor and he will take care of you." Marcos did everything she told him.

The *Capitan* did look out for him and taught him things his mother hadn't known. And so, Marcos learned how to read people: who to trust, who to use and who to fear. He learned how to plan attacks, memorize maps that showed where the military would and wouldn't go, when to fight, when to run, when to look away and not ask questions. He learned how to kill a boy his age, how to squeeze the trigger even though he was looking right at him, how to close his eyes and still hit the mark, how to step over the body and laugh about it later with his comrades.

He took it all in and never thought too hard about any of it. Not until they were ambushed by the military. *Capitan* Manuel had to kill the hostages just when a deal was about to go

through. Marcos escaped with a shoulder wound but spent a miserable four months hiding out at his aunt's in Puerto Inirida. With too much time to think, he learned what it felt like to be a caged animal. The town was crawling with military.

No sooner did he get back on his feet when he was drafted. All eighteen-year-old guys did their mandatory one year of service in the military or the police. The irony was not lost on him.

His military career was the hardest year of his life. How does one sleep in the enemy's camp? He made an effort to blend in but he had seen things and could never identify with those idealistic and incredibly stupid boys. Even so, the lines between good and evil blurred somehow. He began to watch his back, wondering if perhaps Capitan Manuel figured he had turned. They might send someone to take care of him; one of his own comrades might even do the job.

He never learned pure loneliness until that year.

When he'd done his time, his life seemed to slip further out of control. He got a "real job" that after a few years moved him to this wretched city. That's when he met Claudia, Raul's sister, and decided to play the family man for a while. Then she took the kids to Santa Marta and eventually stopped writing him. Just as well.

He exhaled through his nose and glanced down the street. Now he's working for Heimar. Heimar taught him about extortion.

Does surviving mean you are invincible? He didn't feel it. There's no cause anymore, not really. No glory. It's all about money, being smart and staying alive.

"Marcos!" The whisper came from Raul, inside the car. Immediately, his eyes flew to the figure coming toward them. It wasn't her.

The man passed by on the other side of the street, eyeing them suspiciously. Marcos feigned disinterest. This was her father, probably on his way home from the bank, he thought bitterly. The man had been their initial target. But this *gringo* was too wary. His daughter, on the other hand, would be easy.

In a way, it was good to know the man they'd be negotiating

with in the next few days, weeks, whatever. He dressed like a typical, middle-class Bogotano but Marcos knew he was hiding his wealth.

All *gringos* were rich, or spies, or both. Even if they weren't, they were useful. The stupid ones were useful. The tourists, the hikers, the anthropologists, the missionaries ... and the teenage *monas* with their heads in the clouds.

Without looking, he knew the *gringo* had disappeared around the corner. He breathed in slowly... then out, releasing the tension in his gut. He mustn't daydream.

The rain grew more insistent, making promises to be a downpour in a matter of minutes. He felt his shirt begin to cling to his shoulders. "*Mierda!*" he swore under his breath. Only a fool would be standing out here like this.

"Marcos?" The whisper was louder this time. Obviously, Raul was having second thoughts. But Marcos pulled up his shirt collar and ran a hand through his hair. Fool or not, he was sure she would appear any second.

Once again the images of his perfect scenario played over in his mind like a memory:

She walks right by him like she's done before. She thinks nothing strange about Raul starting up the car. Then Marcos opens the car door and grabs her. She is startled but he pins her arms against her sides and covers her mouth and nose. He pulls her into the car as she begins to resist. Raul reaches back and shuts the door. He drives down the street at a reasonable speed. Then he pulls out into *El Dorado* traffic and cranks up the radio. The fast disco/middle eastern beat of Shakira's *Ojos Asi* assaults their ears.

Marcos has the challenge of keeping the hostage in the car. He holds her tight against him as they struggle, half on the floor, half sprawled across the back seat. She kicks him in the shin with her heel. *Maldita*—! He traps her legs with his offended limb and snarls into her ear, commanding her not to move. "Stupid girl! I WILL kill you," he warns in English. Her body goes rigid.

Her chest rises and falls rapidly, vying for space within the tight circle of his arms. He relaxes his hand on her face, enabling her to breathe more freely through her nose. He

keeps his own breathing measured so she knows he's in control. He's not afraid at this point. The hard part is over.

He's so aware of her. He knows her thoughts are spinning and that her eyes are very likely wide open. Her blonde hair is sticking to his cheek. Maybe he'll chop it all off when he gets a chance.

He can smell her perfume. He blows impatiently out his nose as if to erase the memory of its sweetness. She's not a person, she's money. That's all.

Raul maneuvers out of traffic and gets onto *Ochenta*, heading south.

Twenty minutes later, he can still feel tension in her body. Her muscles must be getting sore by now. His arms are stiff but they're almost there.

They turn onto a side street and in a few minutes Raul stops the car and jumps out to open the garage gate. Then he drives them inside and turns off the engine. Marcos waits for the sound. Finally, the lock slides into place and the gate is secured.

It's that easy.

They'll put the scared little *chica* in a secure room and wait an hour or so before calling her *Papi*. Any number of things could go wrong but there's no point in thinking about that.

Naturally, the rain was not figured into his perfect scenario. That realization did absolutely nothing to improve his mood.

He ran a hand through his coarse, black hair. Any decent citizen walking down the street would see a youngish, nice-looking, idiot loitering about in the rain. Someone with a little more perception might see the hardness in his eyes that kept him standing there and walk quickly by.

What will she see when she gets the chance to really look at him? He consults his perfect scenario for the answer.

"Here we are," he would say to his captive as he gets out of the car. He looks at her expectantly, holding the door open like a gentleman. Marcos, the gentleman. He smiles at the thought. She sits up slowly but doesn't move from the car. She glances around then back at him, uncertain.

"This is your home for as long as necessary," he says, his manner true to the famous Colombian hospitality.

Reluctantly she steps out and that's when he notices her grocery bag. Two bags of milk and a loaf of bread. She glances down at the bag in her hand then slowly raises her eyes to his.

Are her eyes blue or green? He'll know soon enough. If the girl would just show up! Where had she gone that was taking her an eternity to come back?

Relax! Breathe in. Breathe out.

He would take her upstairs to the room prepared for her. Cement block walls. Cement floor. Barred windows. And nothing but a narrow mattress for comfort. It's perfect. He pushes her inside, relieves her of her groceries, and starts to close the door.

"How long—?" The panic in her voice is satisfying.

"Ah, the *gringa* talks."

"I'm not a *gringa*. I'm Colombian." Now she is too confident so he steps toward her and she backs away.

"You are nothing," he says quietly. "And when we're done with you, you'll be begging your *Papi* to take you back where you came from." He holds her gaze until she looks away then turns and walks out, locking the metal door behind him. He waits until he hears little sniffs and gulps then smiles to himself. He walks away, ignoring the cold bitterness deep inside. It's just a job.

The rain, with its cold reality, wiped the lingering smile from his face. He was thoroughly soaked. An indiscriminating Andes wind sent a shiver through him. It set off the rage he vainly tried to keep at a low simmer. Where was the girl?

Walk down this sidewalk now and I will make you miserable. I was planning on returning you to your Papi once he paid the ransom but now... Some part of him, a feeble part of him, was warning him not to think these thoughts, not to wonder if he could do the things he'd seen done. Would he kill her? Or sell her? White girls fetch a high price on the black market. Even for parts, if it came to that. He might keep her for a while first.

If she would just appear!

He heard Raul repeat his question. Should they go?

The rage was almost beyond control. Marcos felt it broiling inside him, just under his lungs. He got in the car and sat rigid, staring at the rain attacking the windshield. He sensed Raul's fear of him.

"Go," he whispered.

His plans would wait. She would be stupid tomorrow.

Raul drove down the street at a reasonable speed and turned onto *El Dorado*. Marcos glanced back one last time. A cold, hard sensation struck his core, taking his breath away.

There she was. She walked calmly under a white and red umbrella with a grocery bag swinging in her hand.

Healing a Split *Rebecca Ramsay*

Act 1, Scene 1

SCENE: Modern day. The stage is Dr. Jung's office. There is a fireplace with a mantle on the right and a chaise couch on the left. The door to his office is in the middle. As the lights come on a man and woman are making out on the couch stage left. A velvet rope blocks the front of the center stage fireplace. The steamy make- out session lasts for several minutes.

FYODOR: *(in between kisses)* No...no...no. I came in here to break up with you and now look what you've made me do.

TOURGUIDE: *Fyodor, you were the one who came in here moaning about what a cad you are. You were near tears when all I tried to do was comfort you when you made a pass at me. What does a cad mean anyway?*

FYODOR: *You wouldn't understand. (pushes her away from him and stands up) You have a simple mind and are constantly talking of dreams. (straightens his jacket and smooths out his hair) Dreams are rubbish. Real life is gritty and you don't deal with it very well.*

TOURGUIDE: *(stands up behind him and runs her hands over his chest and into his hair) Would you like to hear my latest dreams? You should. (coming around to face him) You are in them. Wouldn't you like to know what you are wearing? (starts undoing his tie and taking off his jacket) or not wearing in my dreams?*
(they start kissing again)

FYODOR: *(pulling his jacket back up and taking a step away from her and towards up stage left) You are making this up. How do you remember your dreams anyway? (tightening his tie) You sleep in so many different beds, I would think you might forget where you are.*

TOURGUIDE: *(walks over and slaps him in the face)* You're calling me a whore are you? *(Fyodor touches his jaw and turns away to prevent her from seeing how much pain he's in)* Fine treatment from a man I've given my best years to, and with nothing to show for it *(starts buttoning up her blouse)*. You said I was bringing light into your life for the first time, ever. I thought you cared about my dreams. I thought you wanted to help me figure out why I was seeing disasters before they were happening. *(starts to tear up and goes to sit on chaise)* I thought you found me interesting *(starts putting her shoes on)* because I've seen places of your childhood in my dreams. Places I've never been, but when I described them to you, you began to cry. *(turns toward him and reaches for his hand)*.

FYODOR: *(yanks his hand away from her and crosses to stage right)* All right, all right. Let's just announce to the public how many times you've made me cry. Would that make you happy? *(crouching down and speaking in a mocking voice)* Fyodor weeps like a baby when I talk about my dreams. *(crouching low and walking up towards her)* Look at the big, grown man in the suit whose lower lip is sulking and his face is wet with tears. *(in her face)* Is that what you want?

TOURGUIDE: Why do you always have to act like you're better than everyone else? *(stands up, face to face with him; his hands are in his pockets)* It's human to cry; it's humane of you to care. *(her hands are cupped together in front of her)* These emotions repulse you because they leave you feeling vulnerable.

FYODOR: *(he dumps his pocket change into her hands)* Thanks for psycho lesson, "Psycho." *(pats her on the head and walks toward the door)*.

TOURGUIDE: *(slinking the change from one hand to the other)* Oh, Fyodor...

FYODOR: *(opens the door and turns around to face her)* Yes?

TOURGUIDE: (*shifting her weight from one hip to the other, walking slowly towards him at the door*) Don't you want to know what happens to you in my dream? How we still end up together in a strange way despite all this?

FYODOR: (*walks up to her*) No. I'm finished with your lies. There are no such things as dreams or fate. If there were I would have one. Besides, there's only one reason I pretended to be interested in whatever you were talking about (*adjusting himself*).

TOURGUIDE: (*putting the change into her pocket with a smirk on her face*) Well there are such things as bus fares and you shouldn't have given me yours. (*laughing and exiting the room through the doorway*) But then, I already knew you were going to do that, Fyodor. I already knew (*closes the door behind her*).

Act 1, Scene 2

FYODOR: Well, I certainly told her. (*puts his hands in his pockets and walks toward mantle*) Yes sir, that whore was just begging for a verbal beating. (*pulling his hands out of his pockets*) And I gave her my bus fare. (*gives audience a "Dick Van Dike" grin and starts playing with the pipe on the mantle*) Who needs her anyway? Girls are all alike. And cheap. And ditzy. Really! Whoever heard of seeing the future in your dreams? That's ridiculous (*pipe falls off mantle but he catches it before it hits the floor*). Ree-diculous (*looks around the room and quickly puts the pipe back together, setting it on the mantle*). There's no way she can have all those dreams...is there? (*goes over to chaise and lays down. Picks up pillow and puts it over his face to block out any light. Tosses and turns a couple of times. Throws the pillow back into the chaise and stands up.*)

FYODOR: Sleep is so over rated. (*looks at his watch and walks toward bookshelves*) Let's see what Dr. Jung has to say about all this, shall we? (*runs his finger along books*) The Development of Personality, Symbols of Transformation, Freud and Psychoanalysis, The Psychogenesis of Mental Disease. Doesn't look like these are in alphabetical order. Aha! (*picks a book and pulls it out*)

Act 1, Scene 3

SCENE: *Switzerland, 1945. The stage is Dr. Jung's office. There is a fireplace with a mantle on the right and a chaise couch on the left. The door to his office is in the middle.*
UM knocks on the door.

UNDERGROUND MAN: I'm calling on a Dr. Carl Jung.

DR. JUNG: I am he. How can I help you?

UNDERGROUND MAN: Well, I don't know if you can help me. My name is...actually it doesn't matter what my name is, only that I have this problem. Come to think of it, I have many problems. But the reason I am requesting your services is in regards to what you might call a breakdown." (*Before the Underground Man could finish, Jung interrupted him in a tone that sounded as if he was not listening at all.*)

DR. JUNG: All right then. Make an appointment. When shall I expect you to come by my office?

UNDERGROUND MAN: Why do I have to come to your office? Is that what your clients are in the habit of doing? I cannot come to your office. I am beginning to think I should not have come by at all. Jung...that's not a German name, is it? I apologize. While I am an educated man, I am still superstitious.

DR. JUNG: It is you who are in need of my services, obviously. So you will come to my office tomorrow around seven o'clock. I will be here regardless, so you are welcome to join me. And, no, I'm not German.

[The Underground Man exits.]

DR. JUNG: Glad you could make it Mr. My Name Doesn't Matter. Have a seat on the couch by the fireplace.
(*Both men move to UC*)

UNDERGROUND MAN: I prefer to stand, thank you.

DR. JUNG: Do you always suit yourself in such a manner?
(*Sitting in wing back chair LC*)

UNDERGROUND MAN: I do. That is, I did until a few days ago. I believe you should always do as you please; otherwise you end up living your whole life to please someone else. And what kind of a life is that? It's a non-life. It's a waste of clothing and food and air that someone else could be wearing, eating and breathing.

DR. JUNG: Do you think you are a waste of air "Mr. I'm Not Worth a Name"? (*Takes out legal pad, begins to write.*)

UNDERGROUND MAN: You are getting me off the point doctor. I am here to figure out why I sobbed uncontrollably the other day, unlike I ever had before, with the vim of a man facing a slow death. (*Pacing back and forth center*)

DR. JUNG: Hmm, yes, I see
(*on mantle above fireplace "The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: If there is any reaction, both are transformed."*)

UNDERGROUND MAN: I was in the company of a young woman at the time, so you can imagine how uncomfortable I felt. (*stops pacing*) Even though I had invited her over, I had every intention of making her leave for good. I was rude and insolent, shouting for her to go. Her face softened however, when I called myself a cad and let a few tears fall – the kind of crying that can manipulate a sensitive woman. (*sits on chaise*) Her reaction was so strange. She ran up to me, holding me, comforting me and began to cry as well. Only now my tears gushed forth. This woman, whom I had just spent so much energy on turning into a worthless piece of annoyance, had turned right around and made me into a sniffling child. (*lays down on chaise*) Doctor, if I have lost my ability to have control over myself and other people, I simply cannot go on living.

DR. JUNG: Don't you think that living to control people is the same thing as living to be controlled by them? Did you not say that living for someone else is a worthless life?

UNDERGROUND MAN: It is not the same thing. I am in control and that is all that matters.

DR. JUNG (*putting down his pen and standing up from his chair down center*): Ah, but you are not. Your actions are pre-determined by a universal life force beyond your years.

UNDERGROUND MAN: Of course, I forgot. I am a rat in a maze. Like all other rats before me I bang my head against the walls until I reach the cheese.

DR. JUNG: If you were in control, then why did you cry so horrifically? Perhaps she saw how unhappy you really are and you recognized that you were caught – only you almost wanted to be caught, to be rescued by her. She is your anima (*moves to bookcase and picks up book Up Right*). You are so afraid of experiencing life first hand (*opens book*). Instead you see life through the perspective of reading a book (*leafs through book*), where the reader may put the book down (*slams book shut*) at any moment.

UNDERGROUND MAN (*sits straight up*): Yes, that is it. I now see why you came so highly recommended. I am unhappy. I have been waiting my whole life for a prostitute half my age to show up at my flat, see how poor I am, and make me cry like a baby so we could run off into the sunset together and manipulate each other out of spite for the rest of our lives. It makes me feel warm inside just thinking about it.

DR. JUNG: Mock me if you will, but I am probably not far from the truth. Most men are not in touch with their deeper longings and your sarcasm reflects a valiant effort to stave those off.

[The Underground Man shoves himself off the couch and moves to the fireplace.]

UNDERGROUND MAN: Tell me then, what benefit would I gain from being in touch with my longings? Would I suffer any less than I do now? Since when has information about myself prevented me from avoiding pain? I chose pain, (*sitting in chair down left*) doctor, because I chose consciousness.

DR. JUNG (*moves down center*): Being informed is not the same as being 'in the know', as they say. Even a man of high intellect can go astray for lack of intuition. Imagination and intuition are vital to our understanding.

UNDERGROUND MAN: But it doesn't matter if I have intuition (*starts playing with Jung's pipe on the end table*). All that it would tell me is how I am supposed to react and I can derive that from social norms, which by the way, I have every intention of rebelling against. I understand that I am not connected. (*unscrews pipe*) I can't be. I'm not unconscious – ever. (*pipe falls to the floor*)

DR. JUNG (*crosses to pipe on the floor, picks it up*): That is because you mistake social norms as a denial of self. Not only are social norms not a denial of self, but they are a liberation of it. (*starts putting pipe back together again*) Our social behavior, our cultural minds are the result of an evolutionary process in which we make ourselves the greater benefactor. (*places pipe back on stand*).

UNDERGROUND MAN (*moving with an embarrassed shuffle, heads for the mantle again; leans against it*): We are always the greatest benefactors indeed. We invest in the sciences until they bring us to our knees before a newly designed weapon. We create formulas until there is nothing left to do but meditate. I personally have benefited greatly from our advances in two plus two equals four. I can't tell you how much more bread is on my table because of such progress. Sure, we have evolved. I can now kill you in less than ten seconds without getting my fingers dirty. Would you like to benefit from that?

DR. JUNG: I agree with you entirely. But what is a man if he is not part of a larger social structure?

UNDERGROUND MAN: I am an individual. Is that so hard for you to imagine?

DR. JUNG: Fine. (*begins cleaning the pipe*) You are an individual. Just keep in mind that as you drive yourself inward you are merely joining a larger archetypal group referred to as the modern man who is utterly predictable.

UNDERGROUND MAN: This is more frustrating than arguing with myself. I may as well resign to the fact that volition and reason may be tabulated into some sort of table and we will all exercise our will according to it.

DR. JUNG: Quite right sir. (*begins filling pipe with tobacco*) It's called the Myers-Briggs test. Even though it was developed after my time, it has the ability to classify what type of person you are through a series of yes or no questions.

UNDERGROUND MAN: That's just grand! Men love abstract reasoning and neat systematization so much that they think nothing of distorting the truth, closing their eyes and ears to contrary evidence to preserve their logical constructions. We must be able to behave according to a free human response. Otherwise we are merely sprigs.

DR. JUNG: You possess a clearer grasp on life than you may think "Mr. I'm not worth a name". You have found a way to live with your shadow – that part of ourselves we rarely show the rest of humanity because it is usually deformed. Unfortunately, your shadow has pervaded the rest of you and it would do you good to let in some light. (*lights match as if he is going to smoke.*)

UNDERGROUND MAN: (*blows out match*) I have known the light to blind men into forgetting, into becoming unaware.

DR. JUNG: Not if the light you speak of is consciousness. (*strikes another match*) When you are conscious, you are aware.

UNDERGROUND MAN: That's the problem doctor. I am never unconscious. (*walks slowly upcenter*) Consciousness is an illness and I am dying of it. Yet I would rather not be alive than be unconscious, for then I would be without character (*turning back toward audience*). Don't you agree?

DR. JUNG: Well, sir, it is a delicate balance. There are polite niceties we perform in public to be courteous, acting as if we were on a first date. But in private, or with our close friends, we feel freer to raise our voice or throw a fit. (*huffing on pipe*) Man is rarely all of one or the other yet he is usually unconscious of these differences in his behavior. I believe man's purpose is to press upward from the state of unconsciousness. The difference between you and me (*using pipe to point*) is that I am also aware of the secret factors influencing my life's arrangements and you are not. Everyone is influenced by his surroundings to some degree.

UNDERGROUND MAN: How dare you assume that I am not aware of something going on in my own life! There is nothing secret about how precisely I arrange everything: the dinner with my comrades, the encounter with the officer, the night at the whorehouse, all of it. (*sits*)

DR. JUNG: Then why are you in my office trying to understand what made you sob like a baby in front of that woman? Don't tell me there is only one little incident in your life that is inconsistent with the rest of your behavior. And now you are here, having an epistemological crisis on my time. Life is full of inconsistencies: good and evil, dark and light, passion and indifference.

UNDERGROUND MAN: You need not tell me about evil, doctor. I have a garden of it, underground. (*starts to lay on couch*) I tend it and nurture it, loving it in a servile way. This is what brings me closer to suffering.

DR. JUNG: Suffer all you want, my friend, (*walks to chair*) but know that you are not doing it alone. You can lock yourself in your little underground world and still be a part of the collective unconscious because you were born with certain innate understandings. Those fragments of knowledge came from those who came before you. In reality you desire to be with other people. You want to be a social being and as you deny yourself these relationships they turn into demons for your little garden. Despite your awareness of your psyche, you are still nurturing childish delusions. (*begins to write on notepad*) In other words, it is permissible for you to give in to your uncontrollable fits of tears in front of this woman. This type of breakdown happened 500 years ago because of the same natural instincts and it will happen 500 years from now for the same reasons. You mentioned you were a superstitious person despite your education. From where do you think you get your superstitions? That same society from which you claim to be so disconnected. You are still under the spell of symbols even though you work so hard at being in control. And why is it that you are so afraid of losing control of your emotions and still so driven by them?

UNDERGROUND MAN: If I lose control, then I give control to society – a conformity, which is the death of identity. However, if I suppress my emotions then my soul becomes nothing more than a mathematical formula. (*picks up paperweight on table*) But when a woman, a prostitute of all things, who is supposed to be below me, can turn a strong man such as myself upside down, I am baffled. Truly baffled.

DR. JUNG: What does a woman represent to you?

UNDERGROUND MAN: A victim or an oppressor. (*turns table weight from one side to other*) Never anything in between. (*tosses it air, catches it*)

DR. JUNG: What process has led you to these two conclusions?

UNDERGROUND MAN: If I love a woman, then I have the upper hand. She becomes morally subjugated to me. Her day will be good or bad based on my affections toward her. This makes her a victim. If you reverse that, and I fall in love with her, she can rule my will. I begin to feel smothered in the need for her love. (puts both hands on paperweight to smother it) Such tyranny is very real and difficult to exist in for a long period of time. It has always been this way with me. Even in my dreams. You mentioned earlier about living life as though I were reading a book. You were right. There is a sense of safe distance or detachment in viewing things that way. I can breathe when I feel as though my true self is not at stake.

DR. JUNG: So you admit that acquired your idea of love from a dream. Interesting. Well, based on that information I think it is safe to say that the closer you get to 'real' life, the closer you get to the collective unconscious. That feeling of vulnerability is real. And the desire to protect yourself from being vulnerable comes from somewhere, even if only in your dreams. Do you understand? That desire is an archetype of emotion. These are only your conscious emotions. Let's uncover those unconscious factors.

UNDERGROUND MAN (*puts paper weight down and with his arms folded squarely across his chest says*) I don't want to uncover any more; I just want to prevent the uncontrollable sobbing.

DR. JUNG: The sobbing is a consequence of your desire to prevent your vulnerability. All emotional archetypes have consequences. I am beginning to fear that you will never recognize this. One day you will simply lose control, go mad and not be able to calm down, no matter how much sweet tea someone brings you.

UNDERGROUND MAN: But if I don't see life as a book, I don't know how to see it.

DR. JUNG: It would be meaningful for you to examine what is in your unconscious. There you will find a place logic cannot touch because the heart is king, even if it has been damaged. *(stands and moves behind chair he was sitting in)* Another reason I think you fear this is because being in love with this woman gives you another identity in this world. It increases your participation in this universe, and you tend to shirk from much social activity. At least, you like to think you do. But you do not, proving my point that you are utterly connected to the collective whether you are awake or asleep.

UNDERGROUND MAN: No, I'm not.

DR. JUNG: Follow my advice and your insomnia will disappear as well.

UNDERGROUND MAN: *(sitting up)* How did you know I suffered from insomnia?

DR. JUNG: You suffer from everything, why not sleep deprivation also?

Act 1, Scene 4

SCENE: *Modern day. It is Dr. Jung's office preserved exactly how it was in 1880's. There are cobwebs over everything and the couch is roped off. A tour guide brings a group into the room and the overhead light is shining dimly.*

TOURGUIDE: And this is where Dr. Carl Jung spent hours with his clients, gaining incredible insight into the human psyche. He would take on the most strange and unique cases, catalogued them and built his own library of conscious knowledge....Um, excuse me, you, with the sunglasses on, please do not touch the books. The pages are like old leaves and can crack with the slightest touch. Thank you. Now, where was I? Ah, yes, Dr. Jung's collection of information from primary research is still used today, as he is the pioneer of the subconscious world.

YOUNG STUDENT1: Is this place haunted?

YOUNG STUDENT2: Yeah, why don't you dust in here?
I thought this was a museum.

TOURGUIDE: Dr. Jung specifically requested in his will that things be left as they are, or were. He thought that by preserving the natural energy of the room, every deep secret that was exposed here, might linger. Spiritualists who have come on this tour have said there is a certain energy about this room.

AMERICAN TOURIST: So, when did you say Dr. Freud died?

TOURGUIDE: That's Jung, sir. Dr. Carl Jung, not Sigmond Freud, and he died in 1944.

YOUNG STUDENT2: I thought it was 1961.

TOURGUIDE: If you will allow me to finish...he died first in 1944 and again in 1961.

[On the right side of the stage, two teenagers are trying to catch a spider on the bookshelves.]

TOURGUIDE: After his near death experience, Dr. Jung turned much more attention to his studies of the Hindu religion, because of what he saw while he was hovering above the earth.

YOUNG STUDENT1: Where did you say the bathroom was? Or watercloset, or whatever you called it...

TOURGUIDE: Down the stairs and to the left.

ELDERLY WOMAN: How many lovers did Carl have?

TOURGUIDE: More than we can account for, I'm sure.

AMERICAN TOURIST: Do you think Freud had sex on this couch?

TOURGUIDE: Will the American tourist please refrain from asking anymore questions until the tour is finished? Please.

AMERICAN TOURIST: But...

TOURGUIDE: Please.

AMERICAN TOURIST: But –

TOURGUIDE: Pull – eaze!

AMERICAN TOURIST: bmm –

TOURGUIDE: Thank you.

[The guide leads to the crowd to the fireplace mantle.]

TOURGUIDE: Hear, at this mantle, Dr. Jung smoked many leaves of tobacco as he developed the Shadow theory. (*points to pipe Jung was smoking*)

TOURIST2 (*stage upright*): Psst. Janet. Are you going with us to the spa later?

TOURIST3: No. You know I don't like being touched by strange people. I'm going to the market with David. Hey, Deb, you should come with us.

TOURIST2: I'd like to leave now actually. Think there's a backdoor out of this office?

TOURGUIDE: Could you two in the back keep your voices down? I will not try to compete with you. As I was saying, Jung did not agree with Freud on many subjects. While Dr. Jung considered himself to be a scientist not many scientists considered him to be one.

[Two of the young students capture the spider in a container by pulling down on a book, which opens the shelf like a door, into another room.]

ELDERY WOMAN: Did he take drugs? I heard these psychologists love to take drugs.

TOURGUIDE: I do not know of any records or journals that show evidence of that, ma'am. But I am sure there are many people who say that only drugs could explain where he got most of his ideas.

[Janet, her boyfriend, Deb and Dave sneak through the open bookcase as the two young boys drop the spider into a young woman's hair.]

TOURGUIDE: If you will follow me to this wall of bookshelves, I will explain to you why most of us feel that Dr. Jung's spirit never really left this room.

YOUNG GIRL: *(screams)*

YOUNG BOY: *(puts his hand over her mouth and scoots her into the open bookcase door)*

[The lights go out.]

TOURIST1: Hey, what's going on?

TOURIST2: I didn't pay to go on a ghost tour.

ELDERLY WOMAN: Woooh! Whoever just touched my bum, I'll meet you for a drink in the lobby.

TOURGUIDE: Everyone just stay calm. I'm sure the lights will come right back on. *(lights come on)* Now follow me as we go into the room where, we believe, Jung solved all of his problems. *(Everyone follows the tourguide through the bookcase "door")*

YOUNG GIRL: I don't believe this. It's so cool.

ELDERLY WOMAN: Of all the things I've seen...*(bookcase door closes)**(Young Student comes back in; jumps at the shock of the room being empty.)*

Act 1, Scene 5

[Lights come back on and it's 1945 again. Underground Man and Dr. Jung are in freeze frame from their same positions.]

UNDERGROUND MAN: Did you hear that?

DR. JUNG: It was like a scream echoing from the recesses of an ancient spirit, begging for transcendence from a distant dimension.

UNDERGROUND MAN: It came from your bookshelves. Perhaps your books are as tired of listening to you as I am.

DR. JUNG: The bookshelves, you say? How perplexing.

UNDERGROUND MAN: What is perplexing, doctor, is that you have spent a good deal of time analyzing a sound instead of getting up to find out where it came from.

DR. JUNG: You're a fine one to lecture about inaction Mr. I'll Talk the Prostitute's Clothes Off.

UNDERGROUND MAN: Your mind games will not work on me. The sound came from your bookshelves, so you will be the one to go and investigate.*[Dr. Jung walks over and peers around his desk, fireplace and shelves. UM gets off the couch and begins looking in the wastebasket and end tables.]*

DR. JUNG: There is nothing physically observable that can explain our communal experience.

UNDERGROUND MAN: And even worse, there's nothing here to drink.

DR. JUNG: I cannot prove to you that we heard a scream, just as I cannot prove to you that God exists, but my work has proved empirically that the pattern of God exists in every man and that this pattern in the individual has at its disposal the greatest transforming energies of which life is capable.

UNDERGROUND MAN: What pattern do you see in me, doctor? Because I would say you look rather plaid.

DR. JUNG: If you were a line, I would draw you as a wide circle that continued to close in on itself until it was merely a pinpoint spinning until it made itself dizzy.

UNDERGROUND MAN: But I am not dizzy. I am a very clear thinker with hardly any fluid movements. Certainly, none fluid enough to be circular.

DR. JUNG: *(puts pipe on the mantle)* That is because you are seeing yourself from a myopic perspective. You are your own mastermind and you enjoy having a great deal of control. *(walks over to bookcase)* You create all these little scenarios and dialogues in your mind. *(starts fumbling with the book corners)* You tell yourself what other people meant by what they said. You turn everything into a task instead of into a relationship because tasks have a start point and an end point and you can control both. *(finds the right book and pulls on the corner)* This reality may be safe, but this reality is not true. *(book case opens "door")*

UNDERGROUND MAN: Doctor, I believe it is you who is now turning in circles.

DR. JUNG: I was going to wait until our next session together, but I believe you may be ready now. After you... *(points to book case)*

UNDERGROUND MAN: Ready for what? I thought I explained to you that I do not enjoy surprises. *(walks toward doorway).*

from hōl
Sarah Kathryn Moore

the poet

when I was little,
i wanted to be jesus.
walk on water.
raise the dead.
i'd have the power
to heal,
and i would, and i'd
love my enemies,
even if it killed me,
and it would,
and i'd die a saint.

a bunny?

the teacher

i wanted to be a bunny.

cuddle up like a bunny.
in a warm bunny nest.
and maybe somebody
would stroke my soft
bunny ears.
and maybe somebody
would touch my soft
bunny nose.
and maybe somebody
would love my little
bunny self, because
everybody likes bunnies.

the lover

a bunny?

i wanted to be
a rock star,
wanted to yell
HOW YOU
DOIN'
NEW YORK
CITY?

the poet

immortal
supernatural

come to me
and be saved!

a prophet,
a martyr,
loved and hated,
spit upon and
worshipped,
you can't ignore
jesus.

i wanted to be

i'd wear
sandals and
pray a lot.
i want to
save this broken
world!

the teacher

safe.
just a little bunny
in a little
bunny nest

i wanted to be
a bunny.
used to hop
around and
scrunch my nose.
i want

my own tiny
world.

the lover

and have a
thousand
million voices
yell
back at me.
immortal
supernatural

HOW YOU
DOIN'
TOKYO?

you
can't ignore
rock stars.

i wanted to be

i'd have that
easy
rock star walk.
i wanna

rock your
world!
and everyone
will know
my name!

the poet

i want to
lift my voice!
and this is what
i'd say:
blessed are
the lost
blessed are

blessed are

blessed are you,
the light of the world.
and i'd
bless
bless.
bless.
bless.
bless.
bless.
bless.
bless.
bless.

i'd
tear this world,
break rules to make
charred
humanity whole
i do not come to bring

the teacher

i want to
lift my voice!
and this is what
i'd say:
blessed are

blessed are
the meek
blessed are

and i'd
hop
nobody would
ever be angry with me,
nobody would ever
be upset. when you're
a bunny
everybody loves you.
when you're a little bunny
in a little bunny nest.
swift and silent
and snuggly.

i would never be afraid.

i'd
hop.
hop.

hop.
hop

the lover
HOW YOU
DOIN'
MANCHESTER

i want to
lift my voice!
and this is what
i'd say:
blessed are

blessed are

blessed are
the rolling
stones.

and i'd
sing
sing.
sing.
sing.
sing.
sing.
sing.
sing.
sing.

i'd
sing.
sing.

sing.
sing.

the poet

peace but a sword!
a frantic call to action.
a clarion note
of confidence.
because of me,
death would die.

i'd
bless
bless
bless
bless
bless
bless
bless

i would

i would
give hope

i would
give
and the world
would not be whole
without me in it.

the teacher

hop.
hop.
hop.
hop.

i'd
hop
hop
hop
hop
hop
hop
hop

i would
dream of fields
wide and gentle
and of forests,
green and gold.

i would
be peace

i would
be
and the world
would not be whole
without me in it.

the lover

sing.
sing.
sing.
sing.

i'd
live on and on
a celebrity –
a legend –
a goddess!
love me or
hate me,
i won't
go away.
i would
hold the
masses
in the palm
of my hand.
i would

i would
break rules

i would
break
and the world
would not be whole
without me in it.

the poet

the world

i would
be a light --
and the light
shineth
in the
darkness, and
the darkness
comprehendeth
it not.

if i
were a
savior
then someone would
listen to me.

blessed are
the omnipotent.
blessed are

blessed are

the peaceful.
we'd be
a promise fulfilled.

the teacher

would not be whole

i would
be a light
and a softness and
and everywhere rainbow
there would
be peace
and calm
and quiet
shining!

if i
were a bunny,

then someone...
listen to me!
i want to know
what it is
to be blessed!

blessed are

blessed are
the in-control.
blessed are

the peaceful.
we'd be
a promise fulfilled.

the lover

without me in it

i would
be a light --
like a

in the dark!
the light inside
is burning bright
the light makes
everything all right!

if i
were a
rock star
then someone
would
listen to me.

blessed are
the omnipotent.
blessed are
the in-control.
blessed are

we'd be
a promise fulfilled.

the poet

if i was a savior,
i'd be hope.

if i was
a savior
i'd be whole.

if i was
a savior.

the teacher

if i was a bunny,
i'd be peace.

if i was
a bunny
i'd be whole.

if i was
a bunny.

the lover

if I was
a rock star,
i'd be whole.
if i was
a rock star,
i'd be whole.

if i was
a rock star.

Student Biographies

Adams, Rebecca:

Rebecca is a junior English major in the Honors Degree Program. She is a founding member of Quills Poetry Society and a contributor to the e-zine *Pulp Explosion*. She considers this year's *Brushing* proof that writers who room together get published together, and extends hearty congratulations and thanks to writer-roommate Anne Schlotterlein.

Beougher, Katie:

Katie is a freshman at Rollins. She loves reading, writing, history, and taking pictures without people in them.

Bramblett, Nik

Nik is a senior English major in the Hamilton Holt School at Rollins College. When he isn't writing political and social commentary for his popular website, NikFlorida.com, he can be found playing jazz piano (quite competently) or tennis (rather badly). Nik enjoys sharing his writing insights in local writing workshops and at TJ's Student Resource Center at Rollins, where he is a CRLA-certified peer writing consultant.

Carter, D. W.

D. W. is a graduate of Valencia Community College who currently studies English and Economics at Rollins. Born in Anaheim, California, in 1978, Carter is an avid writer and outdoorsman.

Fenton, Bill:

Bill went to high school at Waynflete, a small private school in Portland, Maine, before he graduated and moved to Florida with his family, who now live in Ft. Myers. He is a junior, majoring in English, and is a member of Phi Eta Sigma and Sigma Tau Delta. Bill is currently abroad in the London Internship program, working for Just Communications, a contract publishing company.

Finch, Darlyn:

Darlyn is a Senior in the Hamilton Holt School, pursuing a major in English and a minor in Writing. She has published poems, short stories, essays, and newspaper articles. In 2003 and 2004 she won prizes in the Mt. Dora Festival of Music and Literature for poetry and creative nonfiction, respectively. She writes *Scribbles*, an e-newsletter for Central Florida literati.

Francis, Dientje

Dientje is a graduating senior majoring in English and Psychology, who intends to study law. Born in the Commonwealth of Dominica, her experiences there inspired most of her works. Writing remains one of the greatest passions in her life, and she intends to keep at it until she has run out of things to say.

Gagliano, Ashli:

Ashli is a Senior Art Major. Her favorite mediums to work in are charcoal and acrylic paint, although she enjoys incorporating a variety of materials into her work, mainly to enhance texture. She plans to develop themes of children, creativity, and societal expectations for the Senior Art Exhibition at the end of this semester.

Gibson, Donna:

Donna is a Hamilton Holt English major. She grew up in Colombia, S.A. with her parents and five siblings. She enjoys, among many things, trying ethnic food and watching foreign films.

Greven, Maya:

Maya is a graduating Senior originally from Chicago. This is her second publication in Brushing. She is a multi-media artist who hopes to contribute to the world by merging her artistic interests and humanitarian concerns.

Harbaugh, Brooke Chapman:

Brooke is a sophomore pursuing an English major and a Spanish minor. While she hasn't had much structured experience with photography, she has spent her life exploring other art forms, including theater and literature. Brooke loves to take pictures then manipulate the images to create something striking or unusual. Her pictures were taken digitally, then altered with Microsoft Photo Editor.

Jewel, Calypso:

Calypso Jewel is an artist currently studying language who plans to graduate in Fall, 2004. Her birth in Texas in 1975, travel, and abuse suffered during childhood created her fascination with living, pain, and herself. She wants world peace and sex, that's all.

Jones, Briggs:

Briggs is a Junior, studio art major at Rollins. She paints in oil. She is from Massachusetts and is interested in gallery work in her future.

Kairys-Courech, Susan:

Susan is a senior Anthropology major combining the Writing minor at Rollins College into a love for cultural diversity with words and images. Her creative work requires intimate attention to details that talk to her – taking on a life of their own – and becoming the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Leininger, Sam:

Sam is a Junior in the Holt program. He doesn't have a sister and has never been hunting. He has plans for even more ignorant stories and poems.

Malloy, Olivia:

Olivia is a junior, political science major with a concentration in art history. She is active in Chi Omega and works as a peer writing consultant for TJ's. She began painting with oils as a hobby at age twelve. Then two summers ago she discovered her niche in watercolors, although she does plan to return to oil or tempura at some point. She's never had any formal art training, but attributes some of her techniques to Valerie Hammer, a family friend who has been gracious in sharing her gift. After graduation, Olivia plans to pursue a career in political journalism, while still making and selling art, or perhaps critiquing it.

Moore, Sara Kathryn:

Sara Kate is a sophomore Artistic Intersections major and Writing minor. She is involved in Pinehurst, Rollins Players, and Rollins Improv Players. She participates in theatre productions. Her play, *hōl*, was produced at the Fred Stone theatre last semester.

Moses, Jessica:

Jessica is a 19 year old freshman from St. Paul, Minnesota. She's an English major with career hopes in creative writing.

Murphy, Kimberly:

Kimberly graduated Rollins College Hamilton Holt School in December 2003. She did not move.

Nordstrom, Alan:

Dr. Nordstrom has been an English professor at Rollins since 1970. He teaches Shakespeare and other English Renaissance writers, from whom he learned sonneteering. And because of that addiction, he now teaches formalist poetry.

Osborn, Eliza:

Eliza comes from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, but is much happier in warm Orlando where the sun always shines. She is a sophomore and has only been creating short stories for a couple of years, but is enjoying the learning process that goes along with writing fiction. She received the award for Best Fiction from Brushing last year, and is proud to be featured again.

Perez, Stella:

Stella Perez is a Senior in the Hamilton Holt School, majoring in Psychology. She began painting in October 2003, and brushing is the first place that her work has been published. Stella works primarily in acrylic and mixed media, favoring abstract and expressionistic ways of conveying imagery.

Ramsay, Rebecca

Rebecca Ramsay's articles have appeared in a number of national publications, and her journalistic skills have led to both radio and television interview opportunities. In May she will receive her Masters in Liberal Studies from Rollins College.

Rothschild, Matt:

Matt is a graduating senior at Rollins College. Upon graduation, Matt plans to teach English at the high school level while completing his collection of short stories from which "Can I Call You Daddy?" is taken. He intends to pursue an MFA in creative writing.

Sain, Vanessa:

This is Vanessa's last year at Rollins. She is a Studio Art major, Spanish minor, and part of the 3-2 program. Her work is primarily figurative and ranges from charcoal drawings to oil paintings. She is interested in pursuing a career in art and receiving an MFA.

Schlotterlein, Anne:

Anne is a Junior at Rollins. She is a Music Major, pop culture buff, and occasionally a poet. She likes writing, singing, good friends, bad puns, and probably you.

Schultz, Rini:

Rini is a junior at Rollins, studying English and Business. She's been making poems since she was five. She previously studied at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, where she worked as a librarian, a waitress, a telescope-maker, and a shop-owner. She now lives in Orlando and attends Rollins full-time while happily caring for her ingenious 20-month-old son. "Brother" is written for Sam and Dan; "Gethsemane" is written for Tracy.

Scott, Russell:

A third-generation Floridian, and 17-year Californian; Russell has worked most of his adult life in and around all things entertainment. His career endeavors have included: working extensively in celebrity marketing, advertising, and public relations; to actor, production assistant, casting director, and Executive Producer and Director for many theatrical events. Russell has now made a renewed commitment to pursuing his long-standing desire to develop his talents as a writer, and is grateful for his expanded and enhanced education at Rollins in pursuit of this goal.

Shelton, Nancy:

Nancy was born in Detroit, Michigan and moved to Central Florida in 1978. She graduated *magna cum laude* from the Hamilton Holt School in 2000, with a bachelor's degree in English. She serves as the advancement writer and endowed report coordinator for the Division of Institutional Advancement at Rollins, is a student of the Master of Liberal Studies program at the College, and plans to complete the degree in May of 2004.

Thayer, Michael:

Michael Thayer is originally from Woodbury, Connecticut, and is currently enrolled as a sophomore at Rollins College. He is an English major and lists reading and writing among his favorite pastimes. In the future, he plans to study literature and possibly creative writing at the graduate school level. In addition to reading and writing, Michael enjoys listening to music and playing his guitar.

Throne, Geri:

Geri studies creative writing in the Hamilton Holt School. She recently retired from a career in journalism to pursue her writing interests. A New Jersey native, she has lived in the Winter Park area for 30 years. Geri wrote the poem appearing in this issue in memory of her great-aunt, Marianna Dobranowska. It was the inspiration for her non-fiction essay, "Marianna's Garden."

Trottier, Michael:

Michael is a graduate of Seminole Community College, now attending the Hamilton Holt School. He has chosen English as his major, with a minor in writing. He was born and raised in Northbridge, MA, but has lived in Central Florida for the past twenty years. He plans to continue his studies and his writing, with an eye toward future publication of his work.

Walker, R. Coleman II:

R. Coleman is a writer and student of the human condition. He's also an English major who spends his free time running The Sandspur.

Woods, Sally:

Sally is a third year honors student with a dual major in political science and studio art. She enjoys a variety of mediums and most enjoys depicting the human figure or portraits. She will attend law school after graduation and hopes to one day have a career in politics.

Colophon

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