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A black and white photograph of a large tree, likely a pecan, viewed from a low angle looking up. The trunk is thick and textured, with some dark spots or knots. The canopy is dense with many thin branches and small leaves, creating a complex web of dark lines against a bright, overcast sky. The overall mood is serene and natural.

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Volume V
Spring 2000

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St. Mary's University
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A special note of thanks to all who submitted,
and to all those students who were involved
in the very difficult process of selection.

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Y.G.

Pen & Ink by Yvette Gonzalez

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In Vino Veritas
Megan Smith

The body of wine
leaving me after hours
my thought that
courage is a word
I don't
my love

Pecan Grove Review

My love grows on vines
and my love grows on trees
all I want is to be
in your arms
and just
know the love that fills the heart tonight

So my heart to you remains
and you and that will never change
and you might say it's always
take a piece of me with you

In Vino Veritas

Meggan Smith

The poetry of wine
inspiring line after line –
my thoughts float,
struggle to breathe,
drown...
my heart rising to the surface.

My lips crave the drink
and my mind doesn't want to think.
All I want
is to feel
and peel
away the layers that hide me from myself.

So my toast to you remains
that you shall feel no more pain
and you might always, always,
take a piece of me with you.

Skinny

Amanda Benavides

Skinny...

Flaca...

Beautiful...

Synonymous.

In third grade I argued with a girl on the playground.

"I'm not fat. We're the same size."

She disagreed.

Her friends backed her up.

They jeered at me from their seats on the fire escape.

Standing below, I tried to match them shout for shout.

Them-- the hierarchy.

The beautiful kids.

How are obsessions born?

On the playground?

Born to take over--

a parasite eating at life until it implants itself

and becomes a

new life.

The old life being shed like a snakeskin...

Who determines beauty?

Laughing girls on a fire escape?

The type of girls who never worry about prom dates?

The middle-aged, lyposuctioned, bleached blond editors of
fashion mags--

writing about beauty instead of living in it?

In an old milk ad a teenage girl stood in front of a mirror

she spoke to a boy, a demi-God.

He did not notice her.
Her words, though seemingly futile,
Left an impression on my adolescent ears
"I am a beautiful person on the inside."
One commercial in a sea of flashing eyes,
capped teeth, pasted-on smiles.
One line that reoccurs when I become that
girl on the playground.
That girl who possesses
who lives in me
lives to be set free within my thoughts.
Squash her.
Break her.
Before she breaks me.

La Dulce Vita

Amanda Benavides

Hot winds
on summer nights
spent counting stars
in front yards.
Lying spread-eagle
on sidewalk,
heat seeping through
thin t-shirts and
burning bare arms.
Distant music
pulses and fades
along with voices of
frat boys on porches.
Tears, laughs, prayers, dreams
are born, then die
on cracked cement.

A Piece on Hair: The Head is Heavy that Wears the Hair

Bart Clarkson

Nature finds herself endlessly hilarious, I'm positive. One of her favorite jokes has just got to be the process of balding. I too, however, have been trying very hard to make this an opportunity for humor, for as a guy at eighteen, I could easily find the fact that I'm losing my hair about as funny as a kick in the crotch. My old Uncle Buel was another one that went bald early in life. He was a funny guy, with great big horn-rimmed glasses and a shapely, distinctive head. He told me once, before he passed away, that "God only made so many perfect heads, and the rest He covered with hair!" I smile every time I remember him saying that. It has helped keep my chin up through all my hair shedding sessions, because, truth be told, I sure would rather my hair and I weren't having such a falling out.

My love affair with my hair began about the time I was twelve. That's when I broke away from the bowl cut of younger, happier days, and replaced it with a far more stylish mop. I tended this mop like a sergeant for the next four years of my life. Crisis struck everytime hair #4,221 wandered from its appointed post, and during the day I must have clocked hours returning my hair into that perfect state of moppiness. This was a mop properly blow-dried every single day: to face the world beneath an improperly mopped mop was absolutely unthinkable! This mop was just sopping in vanity: it was a crown. Ridiculous? Of course. But no one could have told me that then.

One fine morning, though, common sense dished up a real zinger. I stepped out of the shower, looked in the mirror, and was bushwhacked with the depressing realization that I looked like a great sopping mass of slovenly stupidity. Even more depressing was the amount of time it would take me to look even worse. Moving to pick up the blow dryer, I felt pretty sheepish, knowing I wouldn't dare to go to school without the ritual mopping. That very day I went to the barbershop, and when I left I had only a nice centimeter or so of hair that cared for itself in large part. I felt like a million bucks, I was walking on air. Above all, I had dominated my vanity, and enjoyed the fact.

I had achieved a new independence of spirit. I found

people reacted to me in the same way as they had before in large part. My jokes were still as funny or as gagging as ever and my conversations, at the very least, interesting. A few people even said to me of the change something that I hadn't heard in years: You look sharp. It was all a milestone in maturity for me. It was the actualization in my life of a philosophy of simplicity, something Thoreau would have chuckled over. At 16, I was endeavoring to concentrate the whole of my efforts in bettering my personality and intellect, and streamlining my existence of the vanities to which people allow themselves to be victimized. At 16, the acne was dispersing and my body was nearly that of an adult. I had tamed the monster of vanity. I was empowered, I was energized...

And "AAAAAAAAAAAAUUGGGHHHHHHH!"— I was balding.

You see, sixteen also brought a morning when the shampoo in my hands suddenly appeared to be growing hair. I stood dripping there in horror. That my hairline was moving farther from the reach of my expressive eyebrows was a fact that I denied for as long as I could. With steadily increasing dementia, I was ready to throw all my grand schemes of simplicity out the window. The replacement? Rogaine. Thankfully now I remember that my mother, with a roll to her eyes, said I was going to do nothing of the sort, though at the time, I must admit, I thought she had the heart of some kind of reptile. And at eighteen, I don't yet look particularly bald; just undeniably thinning and balding. I've never really had the money to fight it, and have grown past the panic-driven desire to do so. I'm learning to live with it.

And I'm not about to try any ridiculous tricks, either. Toupés are standing jokes, and pullovers, when caught in the wind, look like a lid coming off. I am reminded of another wonderful old man I have known, Brother Rene, whom I met as part of my high school. He satirized the pullover perfectly one day. I come across him in the hall and he suddenly says to me "Bart, I've got this bald spot on the back of my head these days. [He bends over and points it out, for emphasis I guess]. I figure I'm going to grow my goat-tee really long and comb it over!"

There are many reasons why I refuse to play games with such organizations as Hair Club for Men or such products as Rogaine and Propecia. Rogaine has to be applied everyday -as far as I'm concerned, that's the flip side of my days of blow-drying. Am I knocking men who use artificial means to have hair? Not particularly. The dread of becoming somehow less attractive

is very powerful, something like the fear of death. Certainly not the least of my reasons for refusing to tango with Rogaine or the pill Propecia is the cost (nearly all things cosmetic are costly things). The drug, Propecia, known medically as finasteride, costs between \$95 and \$100 for a month's supply, which means an added expenditure of \$1,200 a year. Rogaine isn't cheap, either. Hey, I have books to buy!

Frankly, too, I see the word pill and get chills. Chemically speaking, Propecia inhibits the formation of a form of testosterone, a thuggish character that, when in too much supply, starts bumping off hair follicles. In women, though, Propecia has been linked to birth defects in male fetuses...and that's just what we know so far! Now, I don't even like to take aspirin, and I'll be darned if in the years to come I show up with some silly heart murmur or the drug gets linked to a seminal deficiency resulting in lack of fetal testicles, too! Hair will be nothing to me in such an event. My son probably won't be real pleased either.

My only real duty to my appearance is to be clean and neat. Getting all bent out of shape over hair has been a reality in my life that I have had to fight, and I like the person that this fight has helped me become, one who, I hope, is not only sensitive to what has real significance, but is able to act accordingly. Yes, my fellow members of Baldies Anonymous, I am going bald. And though I'd really rather it were not the case, it hasn't yet and won't ever be allowed to affect the quality of my life. Hey, with any luck, I might even look distinguished.

In that first light

H. Palmer Hall

She should have been
crafted from clay, like Adam
and in that first light
awakened naked to meet
a brand new day.

Eve on her naming day
was not the rising sun
but the setting, how odd
of God had he the naming
of her. Perhaps Adam had it—

recompense for that lost
rib, that enduring ache in
his locked up cage. Not
the morning star but
the evening star, Eve

waited for what would come.
And from her loins sprang
not Helen of Troy not
Castor and Pollux, just
people like you and me

Workhorse

Melissa Sandy Vela

Hands grasp,
yank my actions taunt.

Choking from chains
heavy in responsibilities,

I plow
through days

working towards
the mercy of sundown.

Memories of freedom sweep past,
and fall underfoot like dried leaves.

Unbalanced, fatigued,
I stumble.

Broken
by the mob that pulls the reins
to guide my way.

Renovation

Melissa Sandy Vela

Biting lips
that are not red enough,
she gapes at her reflection.
Sore legs scream as she squirms
under the limelight of the bathroom heater.
Each day at the gym,
she tears weak muscles,
to make them stronger.
Bullies her body,
to make it beautiful.
Ignores her uniqueness,
to fit in.

Yearning

Melissa Sandy Vela

A flower
stirs within,
sprouts from the heart.

It breaks surface
through fevered ground,
blooms,
standing alone
in wild vibrancy.

Ripening
at your caress,
it sways towards you,
shivering,
desirous,
of your pluck.

El Nevero

Sashua Noe Muniz

“Amá, can I have some money for if the ice cream man comes,” Noyito said looking back at his mother while the commercial interrupted his cartoons. He was sitting Indian style three feet away from the TV with his head tilted up, and asked again, “So, Amá, can I have two quarters to buy ice cream.”

“Que mijo? The TV is too loud, lower it a bit and don't sit so close to the TV, you can go blind that way,” his mother answered while she was wringing the mop.

Noyito lowered the volume from where he was sitting, and looking back at his mother asked, “I said if I could have two quarters to buy ice cream for when the ice cream man comes.”

“Does all the ice cream cost fifty cents?” his mother asked as she was mopping the floor.

“Is that the same as two quarters,” Noyito wondered, “Because the candy machines in school have a five zero in the front, and I used to think that it was five nickels for a candy, but my teacher told me it was two quarters. The soda machines also have that and it is two quarters.”

“Yes, fifty cents is equal to two quarters, but did you see the ‘c’ with the line through the middle after the five zero?” she asked.

“Yes, I asked the teacher in Spanish about that. I told her, ‘Que es eso?’ and pointing to it at the same time, but she got after me and told me that I am in an English-speaking group, so I should speak English. I then got my Sprite and some Fritos, not the ones we get at the store, because at the store they sell the big bag, but they only have the little bags in the machines, probably because the big bags won't fit.”

“Is that why you haven't spoken to us in Spanish for a while?” his mother asked.

“Yes, because my teacher told me to practice my English to get real good at it, because the teachers all speak English, and if you want to ask them something, you have to speak to them in English. Because me and my friends heard that Robert got his mouth washed out with soap for speaking Spanish.”

“I heard he got his mouth washed out with soap for calling his teacher-aide “*pinche cavorra burra*.”

"Well, I don't know, but everybody in school has been saying that it was because he used Spanish. But it was probably because he said those bad words, but maybe they wouldn't have washed out his mouth so much if he would have used English bad words," he said as he uncrossed his legs and straightened them to the front, forming an L with his body. The cartoon of the 'Thundercats' was just about to continue, and Noyito loved the 'Thundercats.'

"Mom, so can I get two quarters, please, pretty please, pretty, pretty please, with a cherry on top."

"I'll check my purse in a little while. Why'd you call me Mom, and not Amá," she now wondered, knowing it was because he was probably trying to practice his English.

"O.K. Mom, I'll call you Amá, but I was only trying to practice my English," he said with his eyes glued to the TV set.

"Are you going to practice your English with your grandmother? You know that she doesn't speak English. How are you going to speak to her?" his mother asked.

"In Spanish, Mom. I mean Amá. I can still speak Spanish, but we're not suppose to speak it in school. In grandma's house it is alright to speak in Spanish, because everybody there speaks in Spanish," Noyito replied, still with his eyes wide open staring at the TV.

"And don't your friends in school know how to speak Spanish?"

"Sí, Amá, but we'll get points taken off, and we won't get a star for the day. Some of my friends are real good in English, like Roberto is now called Robert, and Julia is now called Julie to sound more English. They get the most stars, usually," he said as he walked over to the red sofa, making sure he didn't sit in the spot where the iron had burned through. There was a blanket covering the hole, but if you weren't careful, the wires sometimes would pop out and could scratch you.

"Aren't Roberto and Julia, the principal's nephew and niece? They are more Mexicano than a cactus. Their mother went to school with me; she's from México. Why would they name their kids with beautiful Spanish names, and then have them be called something else," she replied sighing and scratching her head.

"Probably to get more stars, because at the end of the month, the persons with the most stars gets a card for a free kids meal at Pizza Hut. But we know that they will always get the most stars because they are related to the principal. Adán's older

brother said so, because when he was small like us, the principal's older nephew was in his class, and he would always get the most stars and they would hardly ever get after him. They would always get after someone else, even if it were his fault. He's really smart, so I believe him," he said still trying to get comfortable to enjoy the cartoons.

"And how many stars do you get?"

"Two less than Robert and Julia. Everyone gets a little less, because the teacher puts Julia to write names on the board and she usually puts all the boys' names, except Robert. It isn't fair, we tell the teacher, but she's just as dumb as Julia. When our name is on the board, we don't get the star for that day," he complained.

In a distance, you could barely hear the ice cream man, but Noyito could hear the ice cream truck a mile away. All he now needed was the two quarters from his mom.

"Andale, Amá, before the ice cream man leaves!" he begged.

"Let me get them from my purse." She reached into her big black purse and pulled out a small change purse. She popped it open and emptied it onto her hand, and saw she had only one quarter. Noyito's heart sank as he thought there would be no ice cream. His mother saw his expression and told him, "Don't worry, Mijo," and gave him a dollar in nickels, dimes and that one quarter.

"Will this be enough, because I know that a quarter is the biggest coin and is worth a lot more than all the smaller ones?" he asked.

"It is more than enough, I gave you for two ice creams, get me one also, and make sure there is no car coming if you cross the street," she advised him.

With that, Noyito put on his old Thundercat slippers, and went outside to wait for the ice cream man to pass by.

He stopped right in front of his house, and Noyito was the first and only one there.

"Could I please get two coconut bullets, Mr. Ice Cream Man?" Noyito said with his heavy Spanish accent.

"Qué te pasa? Ahora eres gringo," the ice cream man asked smiling with a slight English accent, "Querías dos coco bullets, verdad?"

"Yes, and I'm not gringo, I'm just practicing my English."

"No se te vaya a olvidar tu español with so much speaking English."

"I already know a lot of Spanish, that is why I'm trying to

“speak English.”

“Bueno, si sabes tanto español, como se dice ice cream man en español?”

“No sé. I don’t know.”

“No sabes? I thought you knew a lot of Spanish,” the ice cream man said while raising one eyebrow.

“I do, but I don’t know that word.”

“Yo soy el nevero, así se dice ice cream man in Spanish. You only wanted two, because con todo ese dinero, te alcanzan cuatro. Si sabes cuanto son cuatro, sí?”

“I know,” he said, “holding up his hand while folding his thumb, “cuatro is four. Yeah, I’ll have four. Anyway I’ll put them in the refrigerator for when Dad gets home.”

“Sí? is your Daddy still working at True Value?”

“Yeah, how do you know?”

“I used to work there, too. When you see him, tell him that Gerardo says hi.”

“OK.”

“Mister, you speak English, too! Just like the teachers do.”

“Si, pero me encanta hablar en español, porque mis abuelos no hablan inglés. Yo practico mi español, como tu practicas tu inglés. Quisiera hablar el español como mis abuelos.”

“My grandparents speak only Spanish also, but I want to speak English now, because I’ve been speaking Spanish all my life.”

“You’re how old, maybe seven years old. I spoke English all of my life, which is twenty-seven years, and been trying to learn Spanish for seven, so we both have the same time speaking Spanish. The only thing is that you probably speak a beautiful Spanish, but you take it for granted, while I have to really work at it.”

“Bueno, contigo hablaré español para que tu lo practiques. But I’ve got to go before the ice cream melts.”

“Le saludas a tu papi.”

“Está bueno.”

Noyito raced into his house.

“Amá, I was able to buy four, the ice cream was probably less than fifty cents. I got you one. I got Dad one. And I got two for me,” he said as he got on top of a chair to put his dad’s ice cream in the freezer. “Hey Mom, did you know the ice cream man can talk both Spanish and English? He talks his Spanish with a funny accent, but his English sounds like real English, like

the English movie stars use. He has a real English accent. He's really smart, he told me that ice cream man in Spanish is nevero. Amá, I still am going to practice English, but I'm going to talk in Spanish with him because he needs to practice his Spanish."

"Why don't you just practice both?" his mother said.

Noyito made a smile of sudden enlightenment with his eyes looking up and to the left and said, "You know what, Mom? I think I'll do just that." And he tore up the wrapper to his ice cream and took a huge bite. "This ice cream is good," he said as he got comfortable to watch TV. And so Noyito got what he asked for, and a little more (including an extra coconut bullet).

Prelim

Catherine McNichol-Jackson

In the split second I am aware
Which happens about once every other day
Or year
I see that lumbering Time, slow-witted and harmless
Just plods along
Deaf to my cries for more and
Indifferent to my pleas for less
Incapable of favoritism
Immune to bribery

Oblivious to the scalding rays we call summer
Unmoved by the blinding torrents we call grief
Unaware of luminous first cries and murky last gasps

In spite of my power, my importance, my split-second
epiphanies
Which happen about once every other day
Or year
The idiot, the moron, the machine we call Time
Puts one foot in front of the other and proceeds
Blamelessly tossing us in the wake we call life.

Am I to squeal with delight at the tumult?
Ensconce myself in a gray velvet shroud of fear?
Grab a board and mount the encroaching crests?
Rage red against the mute neutrality?

On this day,
In this year
Surf's up.

Invitation

Catherine McNichol-Jackson

Can you come out and play?
Dare you whirl and dip
Or will the varnish crack, revealing gray gusts of stagnant
sorrow?

Come.
Rouse your stone still stature
Celebrate the rhythms
Pulsing beneath the wind's startling monologue
Thrust forth your hibernating tongue
Catch the honeyed sunshine as it
Drip
Drip
Drips from Heaven

Please come.

I'll help you unzip that dense overcoat of regrets, lost years
The woolen shoulds and didn'ts, stiff and scratchy against your
dew-stained skin
Cast off your silken shroud, still and perfect, a refuge for
nothingness
Savor the bracing chill of unfettered gusts
As they astonish goosebumped flesh

Let's soar
For just a little while

We'll screech and hoot
Howl at the cage that awaits
That box stuffed with down
That box that keeps us safe and happy
Protecting us from the jagged rays
Threatening to rend the velvet veil
And leave us craving the nakedness and bubbles
Which startle lonely muscles into the welcome torture of burning
motion—

Animating the technicolor clouds of garage sale surplus
Stuffed way in the back
Crammed deep into the blackness
In the interest of space time decency
Useful no more.
Haul it all out
We'll play dress up
In the vibrant dreams of your attic palace

Come
Let's invite the dust to dance around us in golden waves
Of magnificence and mercy
Forgiving our long-awaited return
In a shower of lily-petalled caresses

Do you dare?
I dare you.
Double dare you.
With a cherry on top.

Just look me in the eye
And tell me no.

We Journey Together

Brian St. John

We journey together
And yet alone
We grasp, embrace, tug, and pull
We leap, frolic, and jump with excitement
We stumbled, grapple, falter and fall

We meet the road;
Each one of us
as it rises and curves away
Out of sight
Out of our minds

We have moments of luminous insight
and other moments of blackest despair

We journey together
And yet alone
We plant gardens with
beautiful flowers and food
tomatoes, beans and greens
We pull up weeds
and other times let them grow
Roses, marigolds, daisies, basil and thyme
Flourish together and then die
Later to renew again

We travel together
And yet alone
We walk on asphalt, rocks, and grass
Sometimes in a hurry
Sometimes just time to pass
Sometimes we step in water just for fun
feeling free with the stream as it moves ever onward
To its destination
To our destination

We journey together
And yet alone
Embracing one another
Clinging to one another
Quarrelling
with one another
Pushing one another away
only to embrace again.

Through tears we reach out
Through joy and laughter too
Each one of us on this journey together

Sometimes we rest
Other times we can't
Got to get the work done
Got to have it soon

The morning light
is now dusk
with night a whisper away

We come to our destination
that vanishing point on the horizon
where earth meets the sky
That edge so crisp
The precipice so high, so deep
We reach out merging

We journey together

Naked

Ann Dunne

Lay your heart out
like stale crackers
on a coffee shop table.

Be honest.
Strip off your overcoat,
yellow goulashes,
and vinyl hat.

Reveal
what's beneath
your polished shell.

Expose your
thoughts,
heart,
truth.

Childhood Sunday

Laura H. Tobias

What would you say to a Sunday filled with fun? My day would start with the aroma of homemade flour tortillas that you could smell a block away. I would wake up with the scent calling my name to the kitchen where I would find my mother hard at work. I often offered to rush in and lend her a helping hand just so that I could sample a warm tortilla with butter.

Our mornings were always filled with talk of what we were to plan for the day. After breakfast I would bathe and get ready for our big day. I would dress in my best dress usually one loose fitting but with a touch of lace at the collar. My mother would let me help her choose a two-piece suit or a one-piece dress made of silk or fine cotton.

It would take us three blocks to reach the bus stop where we would wait for what seemed for hours (it actually took only about fifteen minutes.) Once at the bus stop, my mother and I would stand there with anticipation for the bus to arrive. My mother would have to stand because there was no bench just a long cement pillar with the words BUS STOP deeply engraved with dark green color. My mother would pass the time with me telling jokes or stories about when she was a child. Many times she would scold me because at the bus stop where we waited there were railroad tracks only a few feet away. I would run up and down the tracks even though it was filthy with black and green oil from the steel metal wheels of the train. Also, there was broken glass because the kids from our local junior high school would walk home and throw soda bottles to see who could throw the farthest. We boarded the bus, which always seemed to be very cold in the winter and hot in the summer. I often asked myself if they felt as excited as I did to be heading downtown. My mother and I would always sit in the front seats, next to the bus driver, so that we could be the first to exit once we arrived downtown.

One thing was for sure. No matter what the weather was like, we would make this journey every Sunday. Our first stop would be at a church with stones so old that you could see the age of each stone with cracks and black spots around the corners and the ceilings were so high that I really never made out the design above. This beautiful church was named San Fernando Cathedral.

Our next stop would be a Spanish movie theater where all

the actors and actresses in the movie did not speak a word of English. The theater was dark and always crowded with people waiting for the movie to begin. The theater had beautiful red drapes to cover the screen and what looked like cement pillars carved in designs casting midnight blue and dim green light around the pillars.

The theater had butter and soda spilled on the floor; it would have seemed more appetizing if it had been in my popcorn box and soda cup. I really didn't mind so much when I would look over to see my mother's beautiful face and notice that she was really enjoying the movie. After all, she did work hard all week around the house scrubbing the blue tiles that filled the bathroom and the living room with hardwood floors that were always difficult to clean. My mother worked hard to make what little we had clean and safe for me.

Sitting quietly in the theater chair eating my hot buttered popcorn and ice filled soda, I tried not to drop on the floor. It was hard not to add to the already sticky environment I was in. I looked over to see my mother enjoying this movie, however, I just didn't understand the language. The movie would finally end and I often found myself to be feeling drowsy from the red velvet seat cushions that I sat in for so long that my body felt lifeless until my mother would say, "Vamos a Coney Island para comer," and in an instant my body came alive with excitement again!

You could smell the spicy hot chili from blocks away as we headed toward the restaurant. The cook from Coney Island knew my mother and me by name. There were all sorts of hot dogs to choose from, so I would let the cook decide for me since he was a "chef" as he stated to me once in a conversation. Our day was coming to an end when my mother would start picking up our trays.

Our journey back home would be an exhausting one because of the hours of walking. We always tried to visit as many places as possible such as San Fernando, Kress, Travis Park, and Walgreen's, all in one day.

The bus driver would drop us off a few feet up and across the street from the original bus stop where we boarded with smiles. The exhaustion would show in our face and in our swollen feet. The three blocks that in the beginning seemed so short now felt like we were walking miles. On the second block my mother would pull out her house keys and let me run ahead to unlock the doors.

We would undress and hang our good Sunday clothes up for another day of excitement only to be six days away.

Lucid

Yvette Marie Gonzalez

I relaxed and enjoyed the beautiful
puffiness that complements the morning after a good cry.

I had missed that puffy soreness.

A state I seldom visited
had traveled far to me.
Valleys leapt over mountains
in search of my warm, fertile heart
that used to nurture their needs.

Oceans overcame lands in an attempt
to drown my rotten ways and unveil the other me,
the loving me,
the old me...

...Flowing fountains of tears that for years
had never seen the light of day,
nor the darkness of my pillow.

They were set free
and my eyes were new to that action – or
maybe just rested from their rest.

My caged feelings are set free
for the first time
in a long time,
and now I'm tranquil
Now understandable,
Now functional,
Now, now, now...
Exhaustion overcomes a long night.

The Howling

Cynthia Harper

You had been gone two months
when the wild dogs came.

They walked single file down
the quiet street at midnight.

Mixed breeds, large shadows
of Boxers, German Shepherds, Chows.

Their eyes glittered with hunger
and pain under the pale street light.

Wary they circled the pan
of food on the driveway careful
not to come within touching distance.

As I sat cross legged
in the grass
wrapped in the damp,
tattered blanket you
left on my porch
I threw back my head and
howled one more dog alone
in the darkness.

The Forest

Steve Calogero

I've always been one to walk in the forest.
When I was a boy—whether from human neglect,
or divine remembrance—I found myself drawn to the solitary
exploration
of hidden places, discovering the wondrous for the first time.
Absorbed in the secrets of a wooded creek, the hallows of a
fallen tree,
and my hungry imagination, time slipped away and I was
forgetful of loneliness.

The forest calls to me still.
I go to it instinctively, as a place to pursue the present moment
with a great zeal.
I love the smell of it, the pines and birches, the black mud,
the soothing greens and browns and vague wisps of brighter
colors.
I imagine all the countless years it has been standing there,
growing, dying, living as host to wayfarers like myself.

The trails go deep, but reveal little of themselves.
You walk on and on; free from the babble of the city,
just yourself and your restless ignorance, on and on,
anticipating an encounter with truth ahead in the clearing.
You feel at home in the depths of the silent pursuit of the forest.
How I've always loved to be suckled by it.

The rhythm of my walking, the quickness of my breath,
the trickle of sweat—
body and soul striving in, into the thick of its green and brown
life,
and up, up, some peak for a vision of what has cradled me.
Just then, in that moment out of time, I know myself gladly,
freely me in the bosom of a beauty which holds all of me.

Light is Freedom

Steve Calogero

Light is freedom in which to dwell;
In the broad light of summer afternoons,
We stretch out and take off our shoes,
But when summer wanes and darkness encroaches on day,
We squeeze under the narrow beams of winter lamps,
To live like monks in cells—
Our freedom changed, wrapped in scarves and woolen things.

Fall's light dims and we collect ourselves;
Its invitation to go inside to restful dens,
inducing self-friendship in tired summer-people,
sighing into the warm ease of quilt and hearth,
is strangely welcome.

Winter desolate has small lit places,
encased in blackness, to repose waiting,
dreaming, conceiving naked under heavy blankets
for another, roomier time.

Spring dawns, glittering, stretching, pushing out;
liquid thawing, trickling, rushing into wider places,
Everything anew bold, and swollen with the arrogance of birth.

Summer is full-out, with days roomy enough for even the young,
It grows outrageously, delightfully, like garden weeds,
As absorbed in living as children,
who shriek for joy at butterflies and waterspouts.

Life dwells free in these confines;
Yes, fall retreats into winter death,
Where first mysteriously stirs swelling, groaning
Spring, birthing summer.

Yes, life is compelled by the light,
To grieve what is passing,
To await birth in the deep death,
To cry and strain like women in labor,
Yielding up that soft, diffuse, breezy place,
Where hearts are bare feet in cool grass.

Yes, life is free to travel the seasons,
on the way to bright green destiny,
That forever fades into barren, dark readiness.

Dancing There

Steve Calogero

Heather field purple good for romantic thoughts,
sorrowed hearts, hopes and sighs of all varieties
and colors, blooming in full array becomes my longing
to be in it and have it in me,
filling me full so to change me
and let me change.

And though I've stood in one more than once,
even running about or rolling as children do,
I find it does not remain in me,
except for the longing.

Trying to forget, its memory washes over me,
and returning, I find my longing all the greater,
and wonder if this is the lasting difference
that comes of being there.

But strange that desire is its imprint in me,
since field-kingdoms of grasses and wild flowers
have by all appearances a stark contentment:
Don't I return just for the heath's simple completeness?

Or am I deceived by its obedience to time and place and itself?
Could there be a greater desire in this surrender
than in my cautious self-possession?

Well the dancing frolicking greens, yellows, browns,
purples work some desire in me, and strangely
I will always return for the peace of being there.

Golden Arches

Michael Kelly

My world was coming to an end. Today, as I left the community house for work, my friend Joe told me the news. "Hey big Ron! Don't forget that tomorrow is moving day! Turn in your uniform to the manager before you come home tonight." If I didn't find someone to take care of me in the city, I would have to move to another community house.

My name is Ronald, but most people just call me Ron. I just turned thirty-three and a half last week and can't wait for my thirty-third and three-fourths birthday. All my life people have called me names. I can never do things quick enough or neat enough or nice enough to make anyone happy. When I was nineteen, I was beat up at school for being weird (that is always their excuse "he's just weird") and my parents decided that I needed to try something different. And that's how I came to live at the community house. I have my own room and eat meals with the group. Life was going great until I got too old. The directors told me that I needed to move to a new house for older people. Young people from all over the city were moving in, and there just wasn't any more room. So I have to find a new place to live.

The best part about my life is working. Out of everyone at the house, I have the coolest job. I work at McDonalds. Sure, the social workers tried to get me to work at Goodwill or Salvation Army, but who would want to do that when you could get the happy meal toys before anyone else. I have "connections". Sally, the assistant manager, always gives me first pick on the new toys. I like this place so much that one day, I am going to own my own McDonalds. Mr. Wallace, the manager, told me that a hard worker could own a place like this.

Every morning I leave the community house at 4 am to catch bus number eighty-eight, the first bus going downtown. Then I rush across the street, jump over the bus bench for fun and cross the HEB parking lot. I'm at the front door just as my Power Ranger watch beeps 5am. Usually Mr. Wallace doesn't get there until 5:30, but I start working anyway. I leave a bottle of window cleaner and a clean rag near the dumpster. This way I can start cleaning the windows before anyone shows up. Once

the manager gets there, we prepare breakfast. I couldn't believe how grumpy people get without their breakfast. Sometimes, if they get busy behind the counter, Mr. Wallace puts me on the drive-thru service line. I don't get to take to orders, but I can get the food and put it in the bags. Always remember that I need creamer and sugar for the coffee, and put extra ketchup, salt, pepper and napkins for everything else.

I'm an expert at sweeping floors, cleaning up spills and filling orders. I was just learning how to use the register and count change. Just when I found something I'm good at, my life changed. The new community house is fifty miles away. It is so far that the buses don't even go out there. I know because I asked Henry, my bus driver. I offered to pay fifty cents more in bus fare for him to drive out there and pick me up in the morning. He said that his boss wouldn't let him. I want to keep my job, but there just doesn't seem to be a way.

After breakfast, I clean the tables and get ready for the lunchtime crowd. My friend John pulls out the burgers while Theresa starts the french fries. I love eating the first batch of fries because they taste like the hash browns and apple pie we serve at breakfast. Josie, my girlfriend, is on the burger assembly line. She isn't actually my girlfriend, but I like her a lot. John says she has a lot of spunk. Mr. Wallace says she's a menace to society. When I met her for the first time, I learned to get on her good side. Stay to her right, because she has a rose tattooed to her forearm. The other forearm has a skull and crossbones, and if I get too close, I'll get clobbered. When we talk, it is usually about motorcycles or her real boyfriend, Jude. He's a rough guy and always gives me wedgies when he comes by the restaurant. She should just leave him for me.

John is my best friend at work. I usually help him out when things get busy.

"Hey Ron, get some more burgers from the freezer," he'll say or "Slow down there, buddy! I think I see smoke coming from those Nikes!" He always takes the time to make sure I'm having fun.

Cooking burgers is easy for John, so he talks to me while he flips three at a time. "Did you watch the basketball game last night Ron?"

"Oh yeah. The Jazz won another game. I think that team is going to make it all the way!"

"Yeah, but didn't you say that about San Antonio last week. I don't think either team has a good chance."

Sports have always been a common interest, and today, it takes my mind off moving. When we finished cooking lunch, John told me that he had a problem. We share our problems so that the other one can help work it out. Today he got an eviction notice. I don't know exactly what that means, but I do know is that he has to pay the rent or he has to move out. That's when I told him about my problem.

"John, I have to move tomorrow. Today is my last day working here. Joe at the house says that I have to move tomorrow unless I find someone to take care of me."

"Why do you need someone to take care of you? You're a smart guy and I think you could make it!"

"Well, the social workers don't think I can live by my self, and they are usually right."

Why couldn't I live on my own? I have a good job and I could find an apartment as well as the next guy. But then where would I eat my dinners? And who would leave the hall light on so I didn't get scared at night? Maybe those social workers are right. I need someone to watch over me.

"Ron, how much do you make a week?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly... probably one hundred eleven dollars and seventy-one cents."

"Hey that's not bad! I bet that if we lived together, we could make ends meet and you wouldn't have to move away."

Why hadn't I thought of that! John has always looked out for me at work, so why couldn't he do the same at home?

"Do you want to come to the apartment to see what it looks like? I live across the street, at the Sienna Vista Apartments."

"Sure, right after I clean up and clock out."

Five minutes later, we ran across the street to his place. He lives on the fourth floor of the building closest to the road. I was out of breath by the second floor. When we reached the door, John took out his key and unlocked room four thirty-four. We walked in the small apartment and I looked around. The place was well kept and on every wall hung pictures of people. John said he had never met them, but they came with the frame. When he showed me my room, I knew I'd found the right place. Boxes filled with happy meal toys lined the walls. The window looked out onto the street and the restaurant below. The golden arches of the big sign were at my eye level. The yellow light gave the room a warm feeling.

"We can cover up the windows if the light bothers you,"

John said.

"No, I love the view. I have never had a room with a sign outside the window."

This may turn out to be the beginning of a wonderful friendship. I can't wait to get home and tell Joe all the good news. I know he didn't want to see me give up my job and my friends. I don't know what the future has in store for me, but I think things might just work out.

Prisms

Sandra L. Kennison

Sunlight
Beams in the window
Bending and twisting
Into magnitudes of
Little rainbows
On the stark white wall

Bringing little smiles
To Mr. McKenzie and
Alda Jackson as they
Gaze at the wall
From their worn
Wheelchairs

Hungering for laughter
Delighting in the
Young hearts
That crawl onto their
Blanket-covered knees

Together they watch the
Refracting colors
And marvel at the simple
Beauty of daylight
Through a window.

Tell Me a Story

Helen Montoya

"Tell me a story," I say to my mother
whose childhood
was filled with adventure.
I am seven years old
sitting in the kitchen
watching her make tortillas
unable to help
because mine don't come
come out in circles.

"Tell me a story," I tell my mother
as I climb into
bed with her and my father
I curl up next to my
Mama, eight years old,
afraid of the shadows
in my room.

"Tell me a story," I whisper to my mother
as she tucks me into my bed.

Each time she begins
in Spanish, in her thick accent
I never knew existed, until it was pointed out to me.
Each time she begins
With the adventures
of her childhood, sharing
jawbreakers with her sisters
reveling in the pan dulce.

"Tell me a story," my six-year old nephew whispers,
this time to me.

I begin, in English, the story of a little girl
searching for a way to
split a jawbreaker evenly.

"Tell me a story," my mother says to me
after Thanksgiving dinner.

Then on this cold autumn afternoon
I, in my broken spanish,
begin to tell a story.

"Tell me a story," I whisper as my mother and I
lay in bed

and my mother begins to tell as story

I've heard so many times before,

but even now, 22 years old,

I still find interesting

because it is a part of my mother

and she is a part

of me.

The Old Couch

Michelle P. Pina

The old couch,
Worn in, a gold green color
Soft and losing stuffing in the arms,
On which the young man sat.
Chewing his pen
Waiting for his muse to come
And inspire him.
The blank sheets of paper before him,
Waiting to be magically filled.
Sipping on a long cooled
Cup of coffee
Waiting to be finished.
Set back on a low table
In front of,
The old couch.
Worn in, a gold green color
Soft and losing stuffing in the arms.
On which the young man sat
Waiting
Always waiting.

Serendipity

Andrés Ramón

Crossing, coming down the foyer stairs, once
accepted scrapes from Holy breeze-blown blonde hair.
Reciprocating eyes came quickly shared, as
osculating hearts absorbed two soft, sweet dares.
Looking, longing, a ghost lingers through the room,
your smile endures forever, flowered, full in bloom.
Never had I dreamt such beauty till I tripped all over you.

Diluvium

Andrés Ramón

Memory reigns the Diluvium down,
enduring diaphanous hourglass clouds.
Gannets soar over diamond eyes of sand,
glistening sea lips wash top two clasped hands.
Anonymous footprints shadow wet ground, while
nirvana's song soughs slowly cross the sound.

Sand dollars pave a soul's migration home,
marooned by its mirror's echoing ghost...
In under waves –an undulating well–
two tranquil lungs fill up fossilling shells.
Hell's hypnotic gyres spin Samsara's spell.

Deadbolts

Becca MacLean Lyman

Diane was eleven when she visited the True Value with her mom and first noticed the deadbolts for sale. The clunky gilded lock flashed reflections of the yellow fluorescents above, and the words "EASY INSTALLATION" seized her. A deadbolt, of course, was just what was needed. Diane saved her allowance for three weeks to buy one.

The "easy installation" only required a little drilling, which she was quite unable to do. She wished like crazy Mom could do it, but she had never seen Mom so much as look at a power tool. Mom was never much help with these things. She asked her brother to do it. "Drill holes in your bedroom door? Are you nuts? Dad'll kill me!" He looked at the deadbolt suspiciously. "What do you need that for, anyway?"

"Nothing, forget it."

He forgot it.

She'd have to ask Daddy to do it and risk his temper. She thought about abandoning the whole idea, but she already opened the package, and she couldn't take it back to the store with it all ripped open. Three weeks allowance...

As Diane approached her father, she imagined the eruption that would occur. "WHAT?!" he'd scream, turning on her like a beer-scented fire-breathing dragon. "You spent \$30 on a deadbolt for your bedroom door?! Are you nuts?! You dumb bunny..." He always called her that – dumb bunny – spitting as he got in her face. When she was very little she used to think that he called her that because she had grown long floppy ears whenever she had done something wrong. She would shy away from mirrors, fearing her ears, like Pinocchio's nose, was showing the world her worthlessness. But the floppy ears never showed up. She soon realized her father was full of it.

So he'd probably call her a dumb bunny, deride her for wasting her money on a deadbolt. Whatever... she could handle that. But she was deathly afraid of what else might happen, what issues and arguments she would be instigating. You never knew with Daddy, it sort of depended on how many empty beer cans were already on the table beside him.

She was braced for the worst, but to her amazement, when she gingerly asked her father to install the lock, he agreed

with a silent nod, his eyes distant. And when she came home from school the next day, it was already done. No explanations necessary, no prolonged begging required, and no grand shows of appreciation that children perform with such theatrics. No, she just walked into her room and closed the door, giving her new lock a turn with a resolute "kachunk."

That was fifteen years ago. Diane now lives in a charming little cottage house in Encino, tastefully decorated in contemporary Pier One stylishness. It's neat and clean and almost eerie in its un-lived-in looking impeccability, like a page from a catalog. She has only one rather glaring eccentricity: her front door has about a dozen clunky old deadbolts running down its left side. It's her collection, she says perhaps a bit sheepishly. She points out to curious guests that each of the locks has a memory attached. She secretly snatched this one from her dorm when she was an exchange student in Japan. This one she bought with her first paycheck as an attorney.

"What an... interesting... thing to collect..."

"Well, what should I collect, teacups?" she would reply with a sophisticated chuckle. "Besides, this is L.A.!" Enough said.

Eventually the guests would leave, and sophistication would be set aside for the evening, removed, folded, put neatly away. When she's finally alone every night, Diane methodically locks every single deadbolt on that door, saving for last the once gilded but now greenish-gray deadbolt that was her first. It has a place of honor just above the doorknob, just where it was when she was eleven and it was on her bedroom door, turned every night with a resolute "kachunk" to keep out the drunken predator she called Daddy.

Emily

Deborah Rankin

Down the narrow dirt path,
skirts sweeping bilberry leaves,
she escapes stone and slabs,
into the freedom of the moor.
Chasing a spark, she finds fire
gathering on the knoll.

Fire. In the wind swallowing her world
she loses sense of everything
but her own body,
feeling the soft, solid shape
from the outside,
outlined in the wind's keen grasp.

Silence, when the wind deserts her
and she is alone with the strange
stir in her veins. Alone, with her body
missing the buffet and the sting.

Running back,
skirts lifted to her knees, through
the parsonage door, into the dining room,
pen and paper waiting
by the dim oil lamp, sisters
exchanging smiles,
she captures her precious moors—
and Catherine, the wind.

The Iris

Cynthia Harper

The iris bloom in the spring
dark purple with nearly
imperceptible streaks
of yellow light near
the base of the flowers.
It is here death begins
petals fold inward
clutch hard against
the stem
transparent as the wings
of fireflies.
They float off
to reveal dry green pods
that feed dark bulbs in the earth.

It isn't an easy death
this natural turning back
into the ground, but
a kind of blindness
to beauty
that buries a dark
impenetrable secret of the heart.

You can't believe the blossom.
It is only part of the story.

Walk careful in the garden
hold your petals tight
once stripped away you
can never bring them back.

Summer is another season.

Absence

Rick Benavides

There are only tears in your absence.

The night is much more cruel without her guardian.
An empty heart on the table of life.

There is more absence here than I've ever known.

Tomorrow brings hope, veiled and shackled, shouting
obscenities like truth, like poetry, and giving
birth to mountains of want—the purest danger.

Loneliness has no definition, no time,
no place here—he is the enemy I converse
with in my eternal rest.

And no one could be so forgiving as to give you
to me: without distance and without time.
My patience seeks the heartfelt cry of your longing;
vast insanity in the street of your regard.

You will meet me there, naked, like
hope; beautiful, like truth. And the dream
of a child will end in life; the eternity
to which we dance the song of this love.

Here and now, I will leave you with the absolute
belief that you will finally be mine; that
judgment will have mercy on this love and
the purity with which I look at you
from 2000 miles away.

But for now, there is only the smell of your absence...

You are rebirth

Rick Benavidez

You are rebirth...

the absolute concentration of love's new foundation.
Truth left with you: the 'word made flesh' left to its immortality,
that some 2000 years later is yet misunderstood.

Or what lies in truth as much as untruth, seek blind
Re-creation of nature's forced habit to find death among
unlife, a thought as uncomfortable as fantasy, sings like
the sinful innovation of a nation to bury the depths of
intricacy in religion.

Will they ever understand that you are rebirth?

Exerpt from "The Snake in Paradise"

Jeremy Koontz

In the northern periphery of the forest, a small brown dog playfully dug about in the dirt beneath a large bush. He had been drawn to this particular shrub by the dark purple berries that invitingly decorated its entanglement of limbs, and so he had decided to dig there beneath it. To his delight, he discovered that the deeper he exhumed into the earth, the more soft and moist the materials therein felt to his paws. Crouching intently over his hole, the dedicated animal became completely indwelled with the joy of his endeavor, as the light of the midday warmed the fur on his back and the pleasant aroma of unearthed soil caressed his nose. Above him, something began to move in the bush. Still digging frantically deeper, he tilted his head upward to see what was there. As he did so, the bush ceased in its stirring, then, began to speak in a soft voice.

"Dearest fellow, it would please me greatly to become released from my entrapment here." The voice startled the dog who had stopped digging. He knew the animals of had been blessed with communication, but the voice of the plants that kindly provided fruit, his ears had never witnessed. Surely this was yet another incomprehensible act of The Creator. The dog stared up in bewilderment, his paws resting beside the shallow hole now draped brown in mud.

"That is a fine hole thou hast dug. Thy paws are perfect tools for the task. Perhaps now thou couldst use them and release me from this here bush." As the voice echoed in the ears of the confused dog, a pair of small green eyes emerged from under a gathering of leaves in the bush.

"I apologize friend. Here indwelled in my task, I had thought the bush was speaking unto me." the dog admitted as he watched the end of a small gray tail emerge from somewhere in the bush.

"How novel!" The voice remarked chuckling. "If thou canst see it, that there is my tail. Give it a fine tug and I shall be released." The dog, anxious to see what type of creature had become entangled in the limbs of the bush, wrapped his soil-

covered paws around the exposed portion of the tail.

"Art thou prepared friend?" The dog called into the bush. The eyes blinked and the soft voice responded.

"Fully. Have at it." And the dog gave the tail a valiant pull, falling back on his hind legs and releasing the creature from the binding arms of the bush. The dog stood, happy that he had completed the task with such ease, and observed the small gray serpent standing, on two lanky legs and having two slender arms, before him.

"Kind fellow, I am forever in thy debt. Lucky I that thou hast journeyed here this day, lest I would find myself trapped within that bush for an eternity." The serpent reached out one of his two slender arms and patted his rescuer amiably on the head. The dog began wagging his tail, happy to make a new friend.

"I apologize, friend, for I know not of eternity or debt. Regardless, I have taken great joy in extracting thee from the bush, for the Creator shines upon our deeds of love. I must now ask thee then, how didst thou fall within its grasp?"

The serpent removed his hand and placed it gently at his side. "It is an awkward tale. It would please me well to reveal it for thee." replied the serpent. The dog sat to listen, his tail still wagging uncontrollably behind him for he was writhing in curiosity.

"It was the glorious day that preceded this one," started the serpent, who was now sitting upon a large stone. "I was journeying about the base of the mountains when a small creature crossed my eye – a butterfly! She waved and smiled as she passed, then fluttered lightly into the dense wood. Her bright and colorful wings had captured my every thought. Never had I seen a creature that so displayed the great beauty and magnificence of creation! I stretched my limbs then dashed into the wood after her.

Inevitably, the forest was full of life. In all directions, the creatures ran, skipped, flew, and crawled, distracting my vision. I thought then that I would have to wait yet another day for that colorful creature to cross my path, for never would I locate her in such lively calamity. As I turned to exit the forest, the hint of an array of colors danced about the corner of my sight, and I spun about to see her resting upon the great toe of an elephant, slowly fanning her wings in an ephemeral breeze. I rushed to greet her, but the elephant motioned, and she fled his ponderous extremity.

This time, however, I released not my eyes from her. I

followed her with each rise and fall of her lovely wings. Despite her small build, she moved quite quickly. I chased her for some distance— betwixt the trees of this dense wood, across the surface of shallow streams, and in and out of the tall grasses of the fields. At long last, she acknowledged and greeted me.

“Dearest serpent, wast thou trying to greet me? All this time I have been flying about, and knew not of thy pursuit!” She said to me in a small voice, coming to rest upon the low branch of a pecan tree.

“Be not concerned with it, for I saw thee about the base of mountains and merely ventured to greet thee.” I reached out and stroked one of her efflorescent wings, then kissed her lightly upon her forehead because I loved her dearly.

“And whence comest thou, serpent?” She asked as I withdrew.

“From journeying to and fro in the earth and traveling up and down in it.” This I said as she raised those glorious wings above her.

“How grand! Wouldst thou like to feast with me this day?” This she asked me and I answered immediately.

“Fully! Perhaps we can feast upon the luscious purple berries of that bush there.” I suggested, pointing at the very same bush from which thou hast just released me. And unto it we journeyed, I walking across the earth, and she flying gracefully and silently above it. As we came upon the bush, she smiled at me and quickly dove into the thick of it. For a moment I stood, then, began eating from the berries hanging neatly from the outer limbs.

“Oh, serpent! Surely the juicier fruit lies here within the heart of the bush! Journey herein and taste thereof.” I stood there for a moment, her tiny voice resonating in my ears, then did as she had suggested. And truly! That fruit deeper within the bush pleased my palette greatly! And there I remained and ate, reaching about here and there in the heart of the bush, not realizing that with each motion I was entrapping myself further and further in its limbs. And after a slight passing of the day, I heard the voice of the butterfly somewhere without the bush.

“Serpent? Serpent? To where hast thou gone?” she thoughtfully called. Unfortunately, I was unable to respond for my mouth was filled with the succulent berries. For a moment I

heard her flying about the midst of the bush, but never did she cross me for I was so entangled in the limbs. Then, I heard her voice slowly fading.

"It seems my friend the serpent hath already departed. I shall do the same being quite filled with eat, and perhaps shall see him yet another day." And a gentle silence followed her departure, and I was there still, fixed within the bush. And there I remained until thou came to rescue me."

"How delightfully humorous!" The dog chortled, rolling over playfully near the hole. "Dost thou have any more tales to reveal this day?" And the serpent leapt off of the rock and sat, legs crossed, next to the dog.

"Indeed. But the details of this particular tale I cannot fully disclose, for I have no full recollection of the events that transpired. It is a fine tale, nonetheless." As the serpent said this, the dog leaned comfortably upon his hind legs and stared eagerly in anticipation.

"It must have been quite some time ago, before this place, and all things herein. A place and era infinitely greater and more beautiful than this realm." The dog tilted his head slightly and smiled with amusement, for surely the serpent was creating this story as he told it.

"In this beautiful place," continued the serpent, "I, and all the multitudes of essences of the Creator journeyed about in the very same manner in which ye creatures do here in the valley; singing, praising, journeying happily about without the slightest concern. And there were no lights above us, for the Creator and we established glorious light from within us. And His light was greater than the rest.

So, when in His presence, which always we were for He is everywhere, we praised Him; sometimes in choirs of harmonic voices, sometimes in simple deeds, and forever did we praise Him from the midst of our spirits. And He ruled over us with infinite love and understanding, and smiled warmly upon us when we praised His omnipotent name.

But alas, a time came when I felt great trouble within me. Dost thou not understand "trouble"? Surely not in thine innocence, but thou shalt know it some day. Nonetheless, it is essential to my tale. And I approached Him with great love, though encumbered by this trouble.

And He asked me, though He knew all, "What is with thee, my son? Thou art greatly troubled."

"Father," I addressed Him, "shall we here forever dwell,

to sing praises unto thee, and forever supplicate ourselves unto thee? When, Father, shall we, thy glorious sons, be praised? Do we not also possess the light?"

And he answered, "Turn from thy thoughts, blessed essence, for all things are great and perfect in time." And I left Him, though I was still greatly troubled. And the thoughts remained, for I could not rid myself of them through His understanding. In time, I returned unto Him; upon this occasion, however, I was followed by a great multitude of my brethren. And we presented ourselves with a great deal of passion and conflict, of which thou canst not understand. I asked yet again,

"Father, shall we forever here dwell, to sing praises unto thee, and forever supplicate ourselves unto thee? When, Father, shall we be praised? Do we not all possess the light, though Thine is the greater?" And my brethren remained steadfast behind me, for the same thoughts did trouble them.

But the Creator turned from us His glorified visage, for we had been disgraceful in His sight. Yet, we continued in our atrocious accusations, for He did not, no, would not, understand us. Futilely pleading for recognition, we were turned away and commanded to depart. But still indwelt in our intentions, we stayed ourselves. How could He not understand our plight?

Suddenly, we found ourselves in the midst of a great multitude of our faithful brethren, who choose to side with the Creator in faith. And those brethren cast us from the glorious infinity, into the nebulous void beneath it."

The serpent tilted his head and looked intently up at the dog to indicate his tale was complete. The dog raised himself on all fours, then, still wagging his tail and smiling, said,

"Twas a fine tale, serpent, though much of it was quite new and odd to me. I shall think upon it as I journey back to my dwelling place in the light of this fine day." Slowly, he began walking away, the sun still high above, lighting the ambiance of the forest.

"Dost thou wish to be praised, dog?" The serpent asked as his audience began jogging into the distance. The question did not reach the ears of the dog, who, now fully reflecting upon the nature of the beautiful day, had already forgotten the tale. The serpent returned unto the rock, and sat in profound contemplation.

Reconciliation

Yvette Gonzales

Where do I take this pain?
Where do I lay my hurt?
There is no resting-place,
No sacred spot.
I am wanderer -
Foreign even to myself.

Who do I trust my tears to?
Who do I give my heart to?
Who will hold my back when I quiver?
Who will shelter me in the cold storms of my distress?

Do I block him wantonly?
Am I so blind?
He holds me like a baby
and wipes the tears with his blood stained hands.
He takes my pain and liquefies its ugliness into wine
and my hurt to loaves of bread.
And his arms my resting place,
his heart my sacred spot...

I am familiar to Him, He to me.
He soaks my tears with His cloth of love,
Massages my heart with the warmth of His eyes,

And my candle burns in the darkness of what I call my fear.
Near the window a flame dances for someone else's freedom.

He is beautiful. He is powerful. He is hope and promise.
He is Love – Unconditional. Unbelievable.

Chaos in Salem

Sandra L. Kennison

Heathen.
You will suffer
For your evil witchcraft,

Your satanic blasphemy.
We know the darkness
Of your heart.

Did you sign away
Your soul as you
Danced in the moonless night?

Stand on the scaffold.
Proclaim the dark,
Hateful deeds you've committed

As the noose tightens around your neck.

* * * *

Fools.
You take the word of treacherous children
Over that of a God-fearing woman?

You wallow in your self-righteousness
Judging me, tormenting me
For crimes I've not committed.

Persecuting me for ideals
I don't believe in.
I prostrate myself before the Lord.

He knows my heart.
Let me be.
Sanctify yourself
Before throwing your stones.

Untitled

Jeremy Koontz

In this bed I lay here sleeping,
Dreaming, of a silver moonlight gleaming,
High within a blackened starless sky;
A picture, perfect picture of serenity.
And within a dense wood beneath did I awake,
Of fateful excursions to partake.
About the silhouettes of swaying limbs and leaves, whispers,
Voices, of hostile nightly zephyrs.
Above, dark flocks of winged nocturnal creatures take flight,
Horrid flight, ascending black figures into the night,
And I, there alone amidst the dismal wood, was wondering,
Pondering, if something bestial there was watching,
Observing, searching me with sunken time spent eyes, lurking,
And woe! Felt I that stygian hunter was there working,
For surely 'twas that dark messenger that dwelled,
That horrid scythe was wielding, of heaven and hell.
And with this thought my feet did move,
For Death thought I in the wood could loose.
And with each step, each stumbling step,
Over each stone and fallen branch I leapt,
Screaming, limbs flailing, fearing my soul'd been judged,
condemned!
For now was I relentlessly stalked by Him,
That journeys, throughout eternity, to and fro,
Betwixt the gates of heaven and the conflagration below.
And through the labyrinthine wood I scurried, haunted,
Haunted! for that darkest creature hungered, wanted,
With quenchless thirsts to steal of life and light,
But unto Death will I not my soul relinquish without a fight.
And in time, do blessed angels to my enraptured sight bring,
Home! auspiciously upon the crest of a hill, calling,
Beckoning, for there did sweet reprieve await,
To free me of this frightened state.
Frantically, up the declivity I did climb, weeping,
Felt I that creature still my soul was seeking.

But alas, exhausted, Victorious! I arrive,
And as home I approach so thankfully alive,
The door did open, silently, and 'twas my fate,
That accursed messenger of heaven and hell, Death, did me
await.

The New Orleans Saturday Night

Cynthia Harper

Loneliness is a strange taxi driver, takes you to places you
would never think to go.

Wandering streets with no names.

Leaves you in smoky bars shooting pool in a tight red dress.

The driver with no name stands in the doorway waiting,
always waiting.

Men without eyes kiss your neck. Buy you straight glasses of
whisky hoping to slip into your skin.

A sad dog howls in the night. You hear the sounds of distant
parties where men caress the bodies of strangers.

Night slips away as the color of your dress fades to gray. You
wake up in an old hotel dreaming of home.

A Choice

Glenn Hughes

First there came a rebellion, but you were not in the rebellion.
Next there came a salary, but you were not in the salary.
Then there came a statistic, but you were not in the statistic.

At last there came a choice, and quiet in which
to choose. And you were in the choice.

You have made us for yourself, and you are a choice,

so we find no rest until we rest
in the motion of that choice,

like a wave that breaks and vanishes
but is the next wave too,
and so on.

You are details, and margins—

not only wide smoky cedars, formal as temples,
or fabulous towers of polished bronze and glass,
or seas of incense, or plankton night,

but creases, interstices,
unseen seeds,

and hunger, depression, fatigue, envy,
because you are a choice,
these are your ministers.

And the dice come out, and boxcars are coupled,
daily, hourly.

The Least Of These

Glenn Hughes

In all the opportunities of days
when did I comfort you in your fear?

When your voice was burred with pain, did I ever not
turn somewhat away? Or offer you more
than platitudinous praise?

When you woke
in the prison of time, inconsolable,
did I visit? When and where did I come to you?

In book after book, I read about
your grieving look, I study maps
for exotic place-names suggesting
your hunger and thirst.

But have I ever once not pretended
to have already found and helped you?—

*These questions that drag you around: there is something
they orbit. You will find it
in face after face.*

Trust

Glenn Hughes

is a deep faith in the fact of the body,
the fact to be entered and known

until body and impulse
are coherent for love,

and steadfast breathing a word
of permission, to tell and tell

of a sweetness that passes understanding,
made ours and kissable.

Ms. X

Eric J. Cruz

Sweet, demure princess; boundless vivacity
Chocolate-drop eyes savor every moment consumed by their
gaze

A purely, pious porcelain exterior
Gently deflects the light's hungering embrace

Mysteriously, perpetually cloaked in ebony's persuasion
A mourning widow, yet an ebullient maiden.
Both brine and wine flowing
ever quenching *because* of the bitter sweetness.

Lithe kitten enrapturing the most frigid hearts
Sweaty, enamored fools clamor
"Which is most adored?"

Slithering, calculating, svelte side to side sways
Mouths dampening,
throats struggling to swallow.

Two obsidian dots conferring;
With an upward creasing, delicate lips and brow beseech
"Look for more."

Oasis of parched deserts, unemptying
Sinfully satisfying; known without partaking.
Giggly gushes tempered by an invisible damn burst,
begetting a wellspring of admiration.
Contentment in only *imagining*
cool, refreshing water.

Windows inflamed by tears
The cold streams of God's lament parallels mine
Pelting, quaking the shell and its essence
Perches oftentimes show too much.

A gaping chest wound still throbs
Though it has been blanketed by Balm—
Daily errands must be attended to.
Sloshes down a dank, dreary road beckon
Taking one last look over the shoulder
In gratitude.

Pageant

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Disappointment doesn't wear a crown.
She holds a trophy for Second Place.

Don't blame her mother
who didn't ask the right questions
or her father who
forgot her feelings
inside a bag of sight gags.

They left her to smile
as people tsked and tacked,
then crowned the one
who laughed behind the curtain

in purple satin and lavender net skirts;
the slight stumble just
at the perfect second during a bow
to make the judges sympathize

She sticks the trophy far
back into her closet.
Drops her smoky-blue gown,
shakes the spray from her hair.
Rubs off the lipstick,

And tosses tonight's dreams
into a half-empty can.

Amadeus

Lisa Kean

Where for art thou Mozart?

With your beautiful women,
Tight as curls around your neck?
Are you privy to your pretty little wife
Listening for the creak in the stairs
You tread each night?

A bottle laced between your fingers.
Dainty fingers which made you famous.
Bleeding excitement, longing,
Beauty and sadness.
Did you go insane from the
Symphony playing in your head?
Replaying over again like a carousel goes round.
Or was it your genius that
Drove you to the grave?

Not you lay six feet under.
No one warned you at an early age.
How were you to know all the great ones die young?
Made miracles from ivory.
Left a blushing bride in black.
Dozens more waiting in the wings.
Dozens crying for your poor soul.

Did you think you could cheat death?
That your existence would go on forever?
With whiskey on your breath,
Whistling a happy tune as you stumble
Down the stairs your wife listened for each night.
Still, you remain immortal in our heads
As the ivories trickle on.

El Matador

Lisa Kean

Surrounded by thousands we stand facing one another,
Our tormented marriage never kept from
Public scrutiny.

You stare into my eyes,
Yours black, welling with machismo.
Even now you still try to lure me with your charm.
Eyes with a million personalities, how could I ignore?

Handsome and graceful you stand,
Your bolero outlining your muscular frame.
As I am the overgrown beast you ridiculed;
My imperfections, my weight,
My person.
How could I stand next to your expectations?

I look down at the dirt,
Allowing your ugly words to roll off my back.
But the crowd is loud.
Mean men want a fight,
They yell, *queremos sangre*.

You pull out your cape, that fancy piece
Of nothing, you would shield over my eyes
When you wanted something,
Blinding my intelligence,
Making me stupid in your grasp.

Traeme una cerveza, you would tell me.
The children, food, anything but me.
Whispering words dripping with honey into my ear,
Tu eres la reina,
In return for sex.

Red flashes before my eyes,
As anger spills out of my heart,
Until I can no longer control my emotions.
That's what you want isn't it?

You want a relationship that kills.
You want my blood.
Passion drips from your tongue, as you tell me,
I love to hate you.

Idiota.

Spit your disgusting words at me,
You cannot break me this time.
Slowly I walk towards the one who I thought I married for love.
No weapons do I bare but my intelligence,
And my strength as an angry woman.

You can knock me black and blue,
Sleep around with other women,
Drink until you are a sleeping baby,
And wake up obnoxious, loud, and ugly.
But never, never lay a finger on my children.

I realize you hold all the cards.
Yet with every step I take
I begin to pick up confidence as you begin to look smaller.
Your weapons can only draw blood,
But can't kill a spirit.

I am no longer scared.
You should be scared of me, I tell him.
El Matador laughs and whips his cape to draw me near.
And for one tiny moment I realize what it is like to win.
I see blood that could have been,
Anger pumping in my ears,
And then I know.

You are not worth the fight.

Non-existent Lines

Lisa Kean

Where are you tonight?

I question out loud with no response in return.
I trace my finger over the map we hung together.
Pink Texas, green Idaho, purple New York.
Somewhere you are driving alone between
Two yellow lines holding you in, guiding your existence.
I search the map for my trip.

This trip becomes more complicated with every mile
You drive and I can almost feel the steady tread of tires on
pavement.
You used to drive me, you drove our relationship
As I took backseat in your life.
As thick and as long as those lines would go on
I realized I cannot love you anymore.

These lines, labors of love, pushed us in too hard.
Everyday we squeezed the passion out of love's embrace.
You can keep driving away from our problems
But it will never erase their existence.
You betrayed our hearts with kisses that were not real.

I searched that map and dreamed with you plans so detailed
I could feel the wind on my face, windows down.
You stole my trip and our plans then you selfishly drove away.
I don't know if you found your path,

I found mine. It's a million miles away from you.

A Dying Wish

Judy Melincoff Geelhoed

The clear moonbeam beckons me to think of her.
The nights I laid awake in hopeful prayer,
Clinging to my favorite bear,
On my big, white canopy bed.

On the anniversary of her death,
Memories toss and turn like the sea.
Images of her appear that I think belong to me,
But they are only squatters in my mind.

Turning away from the light, I wrestle with my thoughts:
The wishes made, the pennies tossed,
The dreams created, the hopes lost.
I scrunch the covers tight around my neck.

The moonlight recaptures my stare.
Through the window flows a gentle, warm breeze,
I bring myself to the windowsill with ease.
The night shimmers in its beauty.

A soft blanket wraps around me,
A warm stream runs through my veins,
The peace eases the pain.
I don't think I'll toss a penny in the fountain tomorrow.

Somewhere Right Now . . .

Sandra L. Kennison

a gray, lonely man
waits ritualistically for number 509
whose pale chipped frame and
sputtering motor will deliver him
to an empty park bench.
From his pockets will come
handfuls of tiny seeds;
yellow and white and brown
scattering over the cracked pavement.
From everywhere the pigeons will come,
emerging from rain burdened clouds
and wind blown trees.
When the morsels have been devoured,
the birds will stare expectantly
at the man. he will chuckle,
a rough, grizzly laugh, until
cold, urgent drops relieve the
sky of its burden
sending the man home to
everyone and no one
where he will be surrounded but
alone in his worn brown chair.

Pulsar

Bart Clarkson

*Blood may be thicker than water,
But silence is thicker than sound.
Death finalized the unspoken –
His second burial was in the ground.*

The watch is functional and masculine; I might have picked it out myself. It's a Pulsar. I've put a new band on it since it came in the mail awhile back, and replaced the battery once so far. It's mechanical, tells the day of the week in Spanish or English, as well as the date. It only glows in the dark for a little while at night, and there have been nights that I just laid and watched the seconds wash away from its face, until all the glow was gone. This was my grandfather's watch. Beneath a scratched crystal, its face is the only face I have for him.

The verse above came from a poem I was moved to write when a couple of tumors my grandfather had grown in his head killed him, out there in his Florida home. Like I said, I never met him, not in all the 16 years of life I had clocked at the time of his death. My strongest feeling concerning him concerns my lack of feeling for him. This terrible apathy, this flooding void of emotion taught me that action is the soul of love. It walled away the compassion born of love from the biting frost of pity. I pitied him the day he died and myself. We had missed out on love. It was such a waste.

There was no high drama in any of this; my pity for him was that of empty disappointment. For myself, it was the feeling of being deprived. It's not accurate to say we never spoke to one another. We did so exactly once. It was a short burst of communication, an intense signal from the unknown. The tumors had brought push to shove, and it was at this time that I talked to him on the phone, but he was a total stranger. The stranger wept on the phone. He wanted to make it all up to me. Riding suddenly stirred waves of hope and confusion, I lamely said this "sounds great!" A week later, my mother got a call from her sister.

Their father was dead. That instant hung for me with the intensity of a horrified hush. Then I exhaled. I felt apathy and pain. I had lost nothing of what had been, an everything that might have. So much for lost time. So much. There was nothing to be said.

It's now 9:30 in the morning. I don't know the time of day he died.

The finality of this silence is drowning. It didn't begin with me. My grandfather divorced my grandma a long time ago and the relationship between him and my mother had at some following point gone cold. I was joined by extension with that chill. Neither of them felt any particular need for the other in their lives. I cannot judge this, because I do not know what passed between them. I'm fairly convinced respect died; though I cannot speak in certain terms of their love, I certainly never saw it. All I know is that death finally caught up with all this, and as an upshot I never knew my grandfather.

What really gives me pause, though, is that I feel the same process beginning between my father and myself. He divorced my mother, and ever so slowly, I've found myself shoveling dirt on our relationship. At the time of my grandfather's death, I put a lot of blame on my mother for the fact that I never knew my grandfather. I understand more and more everyday what really happened. I could easily construe that there's no real place for my father in my life; whether or not he at the time realized the full implications of the choice, it was by a choice of his that he missed so much of the days when I really would have liked him around. That's how my mother felt in regard to her own father. My father missed out on my childhood; there have even been hair-raising times when I have felt with certainty that he doesn't know the person I am, despite the certainty he has that he does. It would be no big stretch to leave him completely out of my life's picture; he's hardly been in it for all my life, it seems. That's what happened with my mother, I'm sure of it.

In spite of this I'm hanging onto my father's relationship for a few reasons, but one in particular came to me in my grandfather's watch. Had this watch not come my way I might have unknowingly bought a watch much like it. In fact, when it came in the mail, I couldn't have been more pleased with it. I cannot help but wonder about the man who would buy such a watch, and who wore it before me. It was my birthright to know

my living grandfather; this I have come to hold as self-evident. My children will deserve no less. I don't blame my mother: her situation is largely unknown to me regarding her father. All I know is that I'm going to handle my father differently.

I wear this Pulsar now as much for time as for a reminder of time's importance. "What are you allowing to be undone, and why?" the watch sometimes asks me with the voice of a stranger, one weakened by radiation. It is the uncherished voice of a man I might have loved. His mistake will not be mine.

*Held down by suppressing fire,
Burned by metastatic growth,
Death dried the unfelt tears
That might have quenched us both.*

The Forgotten Tale

Bridget Wahne

In keeping with the theme of *The Canterbury Tales*, I have composed a fable which was left untold by a character who was over-looked by our narrator, Geoffrey Chaucer. In the caravan which went to the shrine of St. Thomas a'Becket there was also a young boy named Jack, who was going on the trip to try to make a penance with God so that he might find a reward of eternal life in heaven, rather than continue living his hellish life on earth.

Of all of the tales told
That were written so long ago,
It seems to be the lot
That this particular one was forgot.
Chaucer, dear good man,
Was ready with quill in hand
When suddenly the thought
Seemed to flutter out for naught.
So finding the story would be a waste
He decided to play it chaste,
And put his quill to another task.

But had he written of this tale
It would have gone to such avail
Because people from near and far
Would see its meaning beyond the stars.
For the story is of a deal
About a heart that would never heal.

It was a long time ago
When our young man Jack was not very old,
That with the devil he made a pack
To keep old age from creeping on his back.
It was eternal youth that he wanted,
And he knew that for Time he was the hunted.
So by this agreement confining
Jack forfeited not even a dime.
In return for youth everlasting,
He would watch his love flow past him.

For from his arms her soul would pass
To a life far better than her last.

Jack, whose wisdom was quite limited,
Did not realize what this inhibited.
So agreeing to this lot
Jack's desires were then sought.

From that point on
Jack's life was quite long,
And some would even have to say
That when he would go about the day
He would dance and he would sing
With his entire renewed being.

Then one day he came along
A woman singing a glorious song
About how she would like to find
A wonderful man with an intriguing mind.
To Jack she was an absolute wonder
For within his heart struck lightning and thunder.
And at that very instant in time
Jack fell into love divine.

When dear Rose lifted her brow,
She could not seem to imagine how
A more gorgeous man could have been made
By just mere earth and clay.
It was then her heart did flutter,
And from her lips he heard her mutter,
Whispered words just like a prayer
Hoping that this man was truly there.
When he arrived near her side,
She looked into his deep blue eyes,
And yielding what she hadn't before
Gave her heart to this man for sure.
Jack then decided to go to her father
Where there was then talk of the alter.
Marriage was the sacred vow
That the lovers did take now.

The years that past
Came frequent and fast,
And at that time no thought was given
To the life that both were living.
For the years showed well on Rose,
Who seemed just as a flower grows
To blossom and mature with age,

While Jack retained the face of a paige.
Rose simply thought that was his fate
To never have to sport the late
Signs of life that she had.

While her face deepened with wrinkles
His never seemed to crinkle,
And it was at this point that Rose wondered
If there was an element asunder.

Jack had never told his wife
Of the bargain he made with his life
Because for her he wanted, too,
To have her life somehow renewed.
But Rose had wisdom in her ways
That Jack couldn't replace no matter the days.
She would not accept his evil deal,
For death she would rather feel.

This was devastating to Jack
Who knew that he would want her back
The minute that she was taken
To God, who would not take him.

Rose one day, with age well-steeped,
Reached a point where she could no longer eat.
Her body weary, her limbs all curled,
She was then called on from this world.
And at that most wretched time
Jack lost his love divine.

He held her close then to his heart,
And felt her beautiful soul depart
As she made her way up to the gate,
Jack realized his horrible fate.
To live his life without his love
Was something he'd never ever dreamed of.
It was then that Jack could see
His deep misfortune and large folly.

Back to the devil Jack then went
To unseal the deal that had been meant
To prolong here his earthly life
Because now he was feeling strife.
Due to his love, whose life had ended,
And his heart which couldn't be mended.

At this complaining the devil laughed,
"You want those years back at last?
What do you take me for a fool?"

Don't you know I'm smarter than you!
When you made the deal with me,
It was for ALL of eternity.
Don't think that now you can renege
Or whine and squeal just like a pig
Because you seem to have lost your heart
To a woman who now shares the Arc."

At these words Jack's eyes grew wide
For the devil would never change his mind.
The years continued as he knew they would
With his heart feeling heavier than wood.
He continued to roam, but found no joy
In living life looking like a boy.

In this lesson Jack learned
That 'tis better to die than be spurned
By a death that would never arrive
And live without the joys of life.
To this day Jack still wanders
And thinks about the rewards he squandered
On a bargain that he chose
Which lost for him his beloved Rose.

Norma Jean

Meghan W. Fisher

Gracefully poised feline
Lingering somewhere between shadow and light
Innocent and lovely with just a hint of film noir sadness
Not sure of your sexuality and sitting
On the see-saw of fame
Deep, velvet crimson of your mouth
Grey-blue windows to your soul
Hair as gold as Solomon's riches
All joined to make this starlet, this woman, this girl.

Standing on the edge of the ocean of despair
But driving that red convertible of carelessness.
The crowds loved you, hated you
Thronged around your side, jellyfish with
Tentacles outstretched to sting
And kill your beauty.

Did you, could you love yourself?
No thank you's and yes please's
In a world of masculine manners.
Voice of cotton candy washed down
With a shot of vodka.
Wearing fur and diamonds as your skin.

When the hands clasping bottles of pills and
Liqueur had fed the last morsels to your mouth
Did the face of Death smile to capture such a
Lovely creature and put his mouth on yours
To take the last of the honeyed breath you were saving?

The jellyfish tentacles grasp for your still
But the strong panther in you has let you rip
Out of their poison grasp.
Happy soul, strong panther.
Not the housecat you were on earth.
Saccharine angel, requiescent in peace.

The Evening Snowfall

Matthew Landers

A blanket of snow had been pulled over the town, the streets, the houses, and shops along Grand. The chilling wind blew the light snowflakes that fluttered from the graying skies. The naked trees bore the true signs of the icy grip of winter. Few cars carved a path through the snow packed streets and even fewer people wanted to face one of God's decorations for the earth.

Matthew gazed out the window with eyes of wonder and a sightless nature, which penetrated reality. Passing people were merely shadows and the shops were the background they displayed against. Time could not have been measured but things seemed faster than perceived. The first year of college gone and even the beginning of the second year already passing. His friends remained as those he knew and those he once knew.

Matthew could barely fathom the notion of a former classmate getting married in the summer. His unblinking eyes did not focus. *I've been dating Robin for only a year and a half. Do you see us getting married? Frankly, I still don't know what I'm going to do.* He certainly didn't have his future planned like his friends did. *Danny's getting into business. Scott seems to know what's going on. Things used to be so much easier.* His blue eyes blinked and narrowed on the shop across the street. *The one thing I'm certain of is my relationship with Robin.*

"Matt."

The voice called out again.

"Hey, Matt."

"Huh?" his thoughts shattered when his ears finally recognized the sound of his name.

Danny, sitting across from him in the booth, leaned forward and enlightened him, "I said, I'm probably going back to school next week."

"Yeah," was the response from Matthew.

Danny sensed Matthew's lack of enthusiasm, "you awake?..."

Matthew shook his head, "just thinkin.'" He took a sip from his hot chocolate and settled into the cushioned seat.

The door to the diner clanged shut and soon Katrina appeared at the booth. She slid into the booth next to Matthew and asked, "where's Robin?"

"I don't know. I haven't talked to her all day." Matthew answered her question. "Such great weather we're having," Matthew commented.

"Oh, definitely," Danny's sarcastic tone complemented the tone of Matthew's voice.

Katrina stared out the window, "I think it's very beautiful."

Matthew focused on the subtle aspects, "snow certainly isn't comforting. Rather cold..." *Geez, what a mess I've made of my life.*

The snow continued to fall from its origin in the heavenly skies and replenish the ground already adorned with white. Fewer and fewer people presented themselves as the frosted night air nipped at their souls.

Matthew glanced at his watch. *Nine o'clock or close to it.* He was let out of the booth by Katrina. "I'm going to call Robin."

Matthew went to the end of the counter where the payphones hung on the wall next to the restrooms. He picked up the receiver, put the money in, and dialed the number.

"Hello?"

"Missus McCrane, this is Matt. May I talk to Robin, please?"

"She's not here right now, Matt. She may have gone to the church."

Matthew leaned against the wall. "Okay. If you see her, tell her I called. Thank you."

"I will. Bye."

"Bye." Matthew hung the phone up and returned to the booth. "Hand me my jacket."

Katrina handed him the blue jacket, which rested in his seat. Matthew put it on and was about to leave when Danny asked, "what's going on?"

"Robin wasn't there so I'm going home. I may stop and look for me." He chose not to give his friends any deeper knowledge.

"Okay." Danny nodded, "we'll see you around, then."

"I'll see you later," he told them and exited the establishment.

Matthew quickly crossed the street and pilled his jacket

tighter around him against the falling snow. He halted upon reaching the sidewalk and stood looking back across the street. Outside, he felt so aloof, so separate, from the bustle of activity that exploded inside. His friends remained inside, together, and secure from the cold, fierce winds blowing through his brown hair and blowing through his warm soul. He took one last look at the sign reading Sam's Café, then resumed his trek through the snowdrifts on the sidewalk into the growing darkness of the mysterious night.

Since he did not drive tonight, it took longer than expected to reach the one hundred twenty-six year old Saint Laurence Catholic Church.

"Should be still open," he mumbled to himself as he trudged up the front steps.

He reached out, grasped the handle, and pulled. The heavy, wooden door slowly opened in a silent ease and allowed Matthew to slip inside, unnoticed. The solemn aura of the inside was overwhelming and the tacit candles flickered in the shadows to cast a warming angle of light. The faint trickle of holy water, from the small stone pool, crept into his ears and breathed whispers of the awe-inspiring sacredness. Matthew's eyes widened at the majesty and grandeur of the building every time he stepped inside despite having worked for the church for a year. He breathed softly as he looked around. The many, wooden pews were poised and ready for the next person to partake of the church's grace.

His shining blue eyes spied her. With her sitting in the very first pew on the right side of the main aisle, the candlelight seemed to cast an aesthetic glow about her shoulder length, cinnamon colored hair. The reason for Robin's presence still escaped him but he knew not to disturb her in this amicable moment of what he felt was selfless meditation or prayer.

Suddenly, Matthew felt a hand on his shoulder. He remained stoic in his stance and watched her with rippling emotions.

"A part of her laments for others but her heart remains with you," a voice whispered behind him.

Matthew recognized the voice. It belonged to Father Grant. Then it struck him. Here she was, looking to God for guidance and relying on her faith for the strength needed to endure. He fell short in such practices in spite of his idealistic

yearnings to accomplish the feats expected of him by the Lord. He felt the hand leave his shoulder and the silent footsteps of Father Grant as he departed from the foyer.

When Matthew turned back to the front, he found himself facing Robin as she walked up the aisle toward him.

When she got up close, she immediately kissed him and asked, "what are you doing here?"

"I was going to ask you the same thing," Matthew responded as she took his hand.

She tugged at him and the instinct to go with her flooded his senses. They stepped outside into the cold, frigid night and followed the path of the sidewalk on slow, easy steps.

"On this day every year since I was told," Robin spoke softly, her voice layered by a slight Irish accent, "this was the day my father died in a car accident." She paused. "Before I was born."

Matthew squeezed her hand with affection as they continued walking. The urge to speak was quelled before she even said anything.

"I come here to remember him and seek God's help in understanding the tragedy," she said.

At that moment, he realized the greater truths beyond which he perceived. This was something he had never known before. He thought he had suffered in life by facing numerous times of unhappiness and only a few times that evoked joy in his heart. This was not suffering and only appeared as a string of negative perception of which he complained. Robin had truly suffered. She survived through the courage and strength provided by her faith. She grew up without a mother or a father and that proved her relentless courage to carry on. She had suffered greatly and he couldn't possibly understand the extent of it all.

He glanced at her beautiful, serene face and opened his mouth to speak. The words did not materialize. He never knew what to say.

"You don't need to say anything," she said as she shook her hair to knock the snowflakes off.

The snow continued to fall on the many rooftops, the trees, and even the grass. However, the snow proved adamant, even to the glorious church from where the two had come. More importantly, it was a mortal particular and never drifted over their souls. Instead, it lay drifted among the oaks, cedars, and willows

that dotted yard upon yard.

Matthew remained pensive as he searched for any words to express to Robin.

"I...that's really good of you to...to do...something like this every year," his words stumbled out hoping she would understand or accept his true intentions.

They were now approaching the house where Robin lived and surprisingly the cold winds began to calm.

"I have learned," Robin noted, "one must have faith through the tough times of life."

Ain't that the truth, Matthew thought. She slid her arms around his neck as they stood on the front porch. He held her close for a brief moment before releasing her, and smiled. She opened the front door, and disappeared into the house.

The door closed, the porch light flashed to life, and Matthew walked down the steps into the evening snowfall.

Sevens

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

(for Mom and Dad, Happy 50th)

I heard the words of faith,
saw the septuplet miracle on television.
practical worries lifted from the parents'
shoulders by diaper sponsors and cases of formula.
We'll leave it all in the Lord's hands.
I heard them say it on every channel.

What waits for seven?
Brothers and sisters, I can tell you
from my experiences of sharing
my life with six others:
One of you could be a scientist,
One could be a musician,
One could write poetry,
One could bring light to a darkened stage,
One could preach of Jesus,
One could be smart with numbers,
And one will have a room
for Mom when she's old.

Your own siblings will be your most faithful tag-a-longs.
Days of laughter, days of tears,
days of empty band-aid boxes, and Christmas wrapping
covering the entire living room floor.
There will be car trips loaded with memories
that only can happen
with seven children riding together.
In a place with one bathroom, everyone wants to go
at the same time. On a road trip, everyone
has to go at a different time.

There will always be someone to fight with.
Someone to sleep next to when the heater stops.
Someone to hold your hand. Someone else
to blame on, to borrow from, to say for you,
"Leave my sister alone!"

There will be a day of the week for each of you,
And never a day when solitude will reign supreme.

Little brothers and sisters,
I have lived with parents
who know seven ways
to say, I love you.
It is a golden life when the parents
leave it all in the Lord's hands.

Blue Ribbon Prizes

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

I had been personally invited by my daughter, Suzanne's, homeroom teacher to come to the Science Fair Awards Assembly.

"You *really* want to be there," she had whispered to me, two days before.

The day of the assembly, one of the second grade teachers, Mr. Souther, a man who had taught both my son and my daughter, smiled when he saw me and asked if I was at school for the assembly.

"Yes, I was asked to come," I said, since both of us knew that parents were usually notified if their child was one of the winners.

"Of course you're here for Nicholas," he said with a knowing grin, and then walked away.

All the teachers who had ever taught my son, Nick, remembered and still remarked about his scientific knowledge. He had been a young child who begged for a non-fiction book on amphibians or ecology before bedtime when I wanted to read a story about magic wishes. He was a boy who could tell his first grade class about the chemical reactions of copper and vinegar. He could discuss habits of different snakes with his third grade teacher and give a variety of facts about the worms' role in the fertilization of soil to his fifth grade class. Nick had always done science fair projects. Some had won and some had not. Still, none of the six science teachers who taught Nick ever doubted what area he would chose for a profession. It was his natural scientific curiosity that had influenced his little sister to care about science as much as he did.

And while I was excited for my daughter, Suzanne, I wondered how my son, Nick, would feel if she won an award and he didn't. They were loving siblings, usually supportive of each other. This year they had selected the same topic, pharaoh ants, for their Science Fair projects, although Nick's report and experiment was more sophisticated than his sister's.

I entered the assembly hall with mixed feelings that only intensified when Nick, whose sixth grade class sat in the back, saw me and waved. I sat near the edge of the row, camera in

hand, and waited for the announcement of the upper grade winners in the Science Fair.

Before the hour was over, I had snapped pictures of my daughter, Suzanne, winning a first place ribbon among the fifth grade students. When all of the sixth grade winners had been announced, my son's name wasn't on the list.

After the assembly, Nick seemed happy for his sister. School doesn't come easy for her because of a slight reading problem. He admitted to me that she had worked harder on her project and on her oral presentation for the judges. However, I could see that usual sparkle in Nick's eyes were dulled by disappointment, especially after he said, "When she got the award, I was very excited. I figured the judges would like mine too since we did it on the same topic. I guess no body liked my work."

I was suddenly filled with a mother-lion anger towards those judges, whose subjective decision had made my son doubt his own scientific abilities. I knew first hand the gifts he had and the talents that were growing inside him.

I felt such an urge to tell my son how much I loved him, how talented he was, and how stupid those judges were. But I couldn't express any of this to him with his sixth grade friends watching. Sixth grade boys just wait for something to use to cruelly tease, and I didn't want to give them anything else besides, "Hey, your sister won and you didn't."

So I found myself silent, and stayed that way as I walked to my car. As I sat inside, though, I knew if I didn't write about my son, I would melt into some laboratory experiment myself. That's when I looked inside my purse and found a long grocery receipt, flipped it over and began writing a poem for my son.

Blue Ribbon Prize

(for my son, Nick, who didn't win the Science Fair)

This poem is not a blue ribbon
with FIRST PRIZE in gold letters.
But if I had to choose a winner,
it would always be you.
Little did I know
the first time I held you
as a treasure in my hands,
you'd grow up to be
just what I wanted in my son.

I've seen you open the door
for a stranger in a wheel chair,
teach your little sister how to paint details,
and bottle-feed helpless puppies through the night.

You won't score a winning touchdown,
won't lead the choir to state competition,
or take the lead in the school play.
But you have the scientific potential
to find the cure for cancer that killed your Papaw
to discover a new way to filter polluted water,
or to develop chemicals that don't harm the soil.

A science fair ribbon says nothing
about the gifts and talents you possess.
It only means that somebody else
impressed today's judge—
just one person's decision—
like writing this poem
for the blue ribbon prize
who is my son.

Later, I typed up the poem. And I gave it to my son, Nick,
when he came home from school. He was in his room and had
just tossed his backpack on his bed.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Just read it, Son," I said, and left him alone in his room.

When my husband got home from work, my daughter
ran outside to show off her first place ribbon. When my husband
came inside the house, my son was smiling too.

"Look, Dad," he said in a playful, musical voice. "My
mommy loves me. She wrote me a poem." He grinned at me,
and I knew he was making fun, and at the same time, I saw the
sparkle of happiness in his eyes.

My son listened patiently while his sister told her father
about her feelings about winning the first place award for fifth
graders. Then Suzanne listened eagerly to her brother when he
read his father the poem that I wrote for him.

"Oh, Nick, that's so cool," she said.

And his smile was just as big as his sister's had been at
the assembly.

Today the blue ribbon and the poem are part of the

children's scrapbooks. They served their purpose and may become one of the things they will remember as adults and treasure, much like the mementos I've kept in my scrapbook.

However, on that day, my husband and I agreed that we were the real winners, because we were given two blue ribbon prizes, our children, Nick and Suzanne.

Zeno* to His Lover

Debra Innocenti

One cannot complete this race.
There is half that cruel vault,
then half that. It stretches farther
than I can swim in thought.

Half that cruel vault swells
between our lips, more delight
than I can swim in thought,
so that pomegranates weep

between my lips: no more delight.
For in between us lay the fields,
the red pomegranates that weep,
and all the distances that nest

in between. Say the fields
grow large in the dark,
say all the distances that nest
inside, hidden, suddenly start,

and grow large. In the mind's dark
you and I are ends of time.
Inside us, hidden, that sudden start
of flesh's meager charms,

you and I will end in time.
And still I want this, the close
of flesh, its meager charms enough
to sap our clear griefs, in ways

* Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea, famed for his riddle about the impossibility of motion: one must cross half the distance (and half that, ad infinitum) to reach one's destination.

we want. And still, to close
the space between hands, mouths,
to sap these clear griefs, the days'
blunt blades, the dried lees: will you?

The spaces between mouths, hands,
are wet with sweetness, green in the thought.
The blunt blades, the dried lees, will you
on gentle whim, occupy,

wet with sweetness, make green? My thought
can span only half that. It stretches farther
buoyed by your gentle whim.
One cannot complete the race.

Eschatology*

Debra Innocenti

1.

The little dog started barking. The clothes on the line swooped in the wind, like the coat of a man dashing down an alley. She kept pinning the laundry, one small shoulder, then the next.

The sky was a bruised blue when she looked up, but she didn't remember

it darkening. Another small wind. The dog was gone, and the tulips in the garden looked so bright; they were yellow like a row of shiny raincoats. The laundry dripped

and dripped. The back door kept pulling itself open and slamming. And all the disjointed light starting a reaction in her body, conjuring one new electron at a time.

2.

the woman would go home after this. She couldn't stand watching

him wring his hands, his right thumb rubbing his left knuckle over and over, and his not knowing it. He wore the blue jacket they bought before boarding the ferry. How cold.

She hadn't expected that. The blue nylon mirrored the ocean that stayed so still and quiet, like a frightened cat.

She thought, *Something is trying to close in me. It is not death, it is before death, before birth. Completeness. Atoms lodging together so tight,*

there are not fragments, only energy. Before distances, before light.

The cars lined up row by row to return from the island, crowded even in winter. People sat on car roofs.

A plastic bag blew, beat against an antenna and the wide rails, then rested on the water. He looked up to see who released it, his hair blowing, cheeks chapped. The air stunk of salt.

And she watched his hands again, fingers swollen, palms pink,

* Study of the of the end of time.

and faintly scratched. The cells in her womb divided and divided as the space between each of them stretched and pulled, widening more than gravity could hold.

3.

There was brown wood paneling. The red curtains glowed from the sun like the plastic glasses in restaurants, ice cubes melting to the bubbles, a scream of air escaping.

The air conditioner made the room cold, and some loose mechanical piece rattled in there. The moth the child found, the one whose wings collapsed

on the asphalt in town, rested on a pillow in the dim room.

The television gleamed like a hot coal, a fire almost out or just starting. The floor was brown, cork like, with black specks that made pictures when the child stared at them.

The moth was powdery and got well in the dark.

The moth quivered under the child's hands. *Alive, alive, oh.*

They went together into the daylight, into the bushes of brief pink roses. The moth settled into the flower, far from asphalt, far from the city. The child thought they both could bloom there, made of pollen, breath and something wiry and dark, feeding.

**Pecan Grove Review
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Submissions in poetry, short fiction, and personal essays are now being accepted from the St. Mary's University students and faculty for the next issue of *Pecan Grove Review*.

Each writer may submit up to three typed pieces. There is a limit of six pages of prose (per piece) and each poem should be no longer than 40 lines.

Deadline: October 1, 2000

Each entry must include: Name
Title of Work
Category
Address
Daytime phone #

Selected writers should be prepared to submit an IBM disk (Word 97 only) within ten days of notification. Word 97 is available in the Academic Library Computer Lab.

Submit writing to:
Mrs. Diane Bertrand, Faculty Advisor
Office: CH 401
Phone: 431-2003

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