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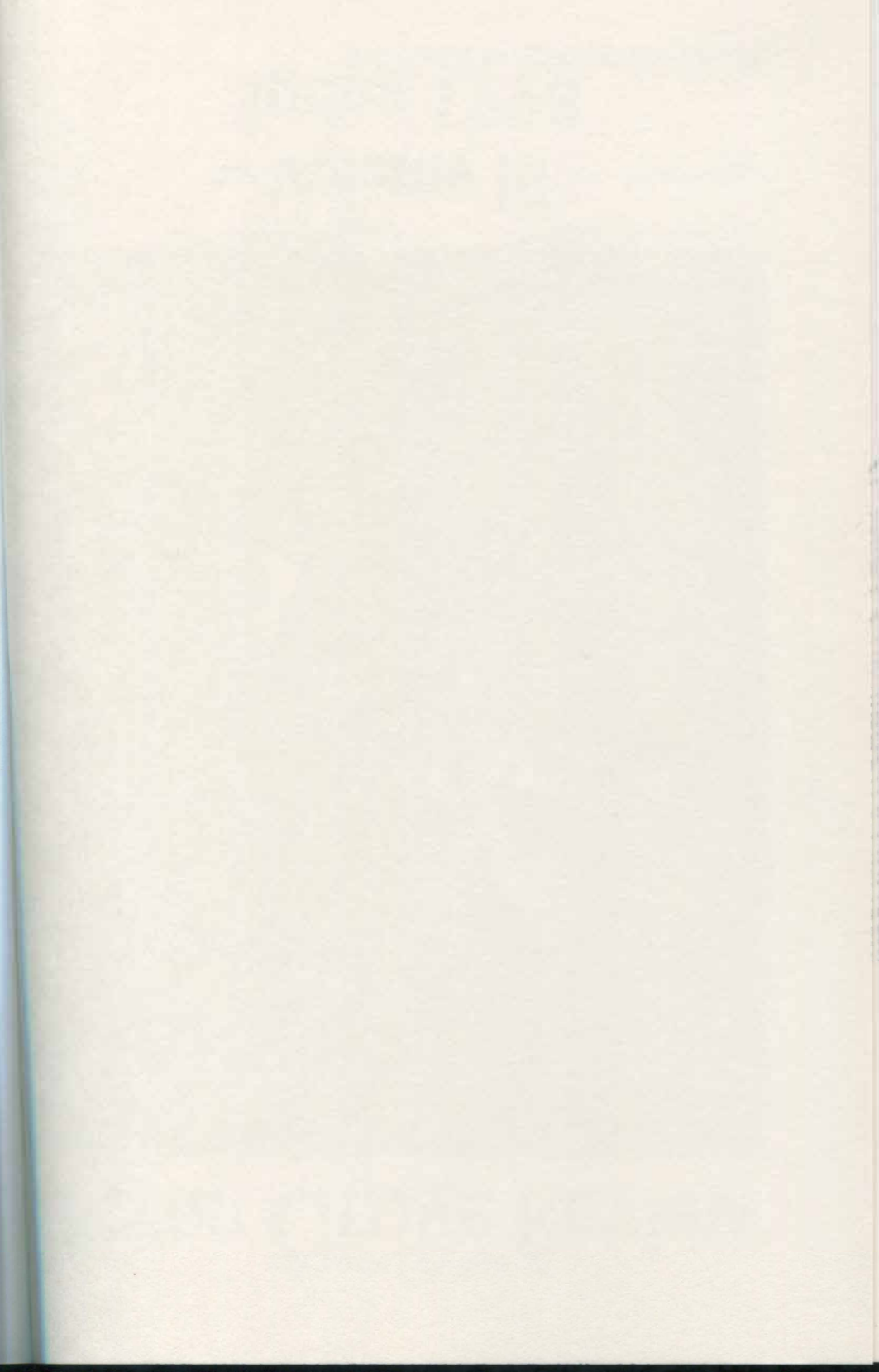
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Pecan Grove Review

own my dreampat
ng color shifts i
wait for here, Y
burns soul
calling to you, Yes, y
e broad, bright s
nto your heartb



Volume III
Spring 1998



Pecan Grove Review

St. Mary's University
San Antonio, TX

Volume III
Spring 1998



Pecan Grove
Review

St. Mary's University
San Antonio, TX

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Pecan Grove Review

EDITORS

Christina Alexander
Kelly Bateson
Amy Jocius
Lynnette Gonzales
Barbara Muller
Amy Niebling
Carlos Peña
Carol Schliesinger
Sara Schurtz
Meggan Smith
Maggie Solomon

COVER ART

Barbara Muller

FACULTY ADVISOR

Diane G. Bertrand

Pecan Grove Review is published each spring by students and faculty of St. Mary's University. This publication is sponsored by the English Communications Department. Submissions of poetry, short fiction, and essays are accepted during the fall semester. Selected writers should be prepared to submit an IBM compatible disk (Word 97—available in computer lab). Payment is one copy, and all rights revert to the individual writer after publication.

Pecan Grove Review
1998

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EDITORS

Christina Alexander
Kelly Batson
Amy Jocus
Lynette Gonzales
Barbara Fuller
Amy Harding
Cathy Pugh
Carol Schreiner
Dana Schutz
Megan Smith
Maggie Solomon

COVER ART

Barbara Fuller

FACULTY ADVISOR

Dana G. Bernard

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POETRY

Johny Arnold

There is no much to say
For time and time again my words are
...
The authors of my world are
...
My words are for
...

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...
The great world of
...
I am the one who

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POETRY

Johnny Arnold

There is so much to say.

I sit here and pummel my computer keys,
only to give birth to a glorious anthem.

The anthem of my world where I am both king and slave.

I make my on laws, and I judge whether I am just.

My creations go forever unchanged, never altered to impress
anyone.

No one can tell me I am right or wrong, I am king.

I will find myself, unlock the dungeon inside my soul,
let my emotional river run free.

The raging rivers current will erode all difficulties,
proving therapeutic.

I as king will free the slave.

Nature's Lover

Meghan Fisher

i've come to find myself
in the quiet solitude
of the twilight night
and sing my song to the
lonely barren trees
their branches an altar
the sky burning with stars
and cooled by the deep velvet
voice of blue-black sky
i've come to breathe in
the soft silky sound of
wind as it caresses my face
and floats on my lips
here is the proper place for prayers
here in the tumultuous peace of
night
i'm roused from mundane life
with my brain pulsing and quivering
at thoughts and passions left too
long pushed back into my soul
and i wonder will love ever come
or will the smooth embrace of night
capture me selfishly and
hide me away to be her lover

Closet Poet

Diane Bertrand

(for S.S.)

Sara sits in her closet and writes out bits of poetry with colored markers on the walls around her.

She started writing poetry in her closet on a rainy day when she was eight. Sara found a royal purple marker in her closet. She turned to the wall and wrote,

*My purple thoughts are round and sour like grape gum
they fit upon my head like a queen's crown.
Purple thoughts are Lenten sad and sound like
purple songs of funerals.*

*Purple is the eggplant that sits alone among the carrots
because some kid had once picked it up for its weird shape
then left it behind to head for the Oreo cookie aisle.*

Inside her closet, Sara printed red poems to celebrate the day Roxy had kittens. She wrote navy blue poems on the day Tanya Michaels won the spelling award. Sara scribbled in browns when she left seventh grade behind her, and found the coolest shade of green to decorate her poem about Vinny San Marco.

A magenta poem for her parents' divorce,
a sea blue poem for her drama club;
a touch of fusia and gold for a dog named Hamlet;
only zebra lines would do when her mother
started talking about some guy named Phil.

She wrote lavender poems when Nana died,
evergreen words on college life.
Cherry-red poems on office politics, and
rainbow poems on god, natural disasters,

the taste of banana-split cake.
When her daughter was born, Sara wrote in
blueberry and tangerine scented markers,
and on her thirtieth birthday,
covered the last bits of wall with glow-in-the-dark poetry.

And on the day that her mother said
the house had been sold,
Sara tossed all the markers into a box.
She bought a paintbrush and just
whitewashed her poems away.

Five Rings

Christina Alexander

As a rule, Philip let the phone ring at least five times before answering it. He didn't want the people who called him to think he was just sitting around his apartment waiting for his phone to ring, although he usually was. He was a fairly successful stock broker who had few friends and a big ego. Somehow he never realized that one caused the other.

3:00 p.m. Philip waited by the phone for it to reach the fifth ring. He silently rehearsed whether he should say he was getting ready to go out or working on his novel. When he finally picked up the phone he said hello in his breezy, salesman-like voice. He heard his mother's voice on the other line. He told her he was just heading out the door, then hung up.

Strolling through his apartment like he did every Saturday afternoon, he straightened picture frames and dusted his cherry oak furniture. He expected someone to drop by at any moment, so he wanted to be prepared. Philip switched on the television, and watched golf for a few minutes. It bored him, but he always remembered the weekend's spectacular shots so he could mention it to his boss, who loved golf.

5:30 p.m. A woman named Ellen from Philip's office called to ask him out and patiently waited until he answered on the fifth ring. She was cute but not as good-looking as Becky, that girl from down the hall. He turned Ellen down, saying he already had plans for the evening, although he didn't. She hung up and he continued to stroll and admire his decor.

Flipping open a copy of "Life Magazine," he decided to look for interesting facts to mention during a dinner to which he was not invited. Philip decided to take his dog, Torpedo, for a walk in the park across the street, trying to set up a chance meeting with Becky from down the hall. Torpedo wasn't in the mood to be used and just sat there, so Philip did, too.

10:15 p.m. Philip was sleeping on the sofa still dressed in pressed khaki's and a polo shirt when the phone rang. He woke up immediately but waited his usual few rings, allowing himself to

wake up before answering. He yawned and checked his hair in one of the mirrors lined up on the living room wall as the phone rang. But the caller hung up before five rings.

As a rule, Becky from down the hall always hung up before the fifth ring and never called a man more than once.

To--

Rick Benavidez

If by human perception I were willed you,
then hearts, once saddened, would find comfort in the thought.

Dreams within breathe like the bladed fire, the victory of thorns
which grace
your head in honor of *la belleza... Ud -*

You move me.

In the molded clay that dances about your body, arising
in colors never conceived by anyone but God herself.

Such hues behoove you - delight the sight-
this night-

to someone *solo recordando* the thought of you, *entre suenos y visiones, extasis*, lifted upon wings of angels, light to the touch;
Iqual como su piel, the supple outer layers of your body.

You move me.

With a voice that mimics the ocean's air, or, rather, rides my body
like an

effervescent sea wind, cleansing the who of me all along the way-
and the why, while laughter lifts the heart to heights heretofore
unknown...

You move me.

With lips that seem to be in constant blush, effortlessly giving birth
to words

that had dwelling places in me long before conception...and I see
the innocence of eyes - searching, speaking quietly to self...while
thoughts of their

humble attention drive me inexorably forward, walking the water's
edge in

reflection; finding fluidity in your movement *y la poesia en tu ser...*

You move me.

Too Close
Roland Suarez

We Lie
side by side
uncomfortable silences-
stretch out between us,
we toss and turn
aware of ambient heat
lying like a blanket
smothering us, our breath
shallow, we keep our distance
fragile like spun glass
the unasked questions,
unknown desire

Tidal Pull

Maggie Solomon

She is washed in from sleep, whole and unbroken before the day. I gather her up like a sand dollar, treasured in my too rough hands. I run my fingers over the sandy surface and note the delicate tracings and purity of her color. Her eyes open.

Morning flows over her, first settling in green eyes that reveal the depths of the ocean, below even the blue reflections of the sky. Light settles on her skin, pink and translucent as a jellyfish in a tidal pool of sunlight.

Her voice rests in the troughs between towering waves that break and rush madly until they are past and I float in silence. With a final gasp for breath, she breaks again, words pouring and tumbling with an unexpected undertow I allow to overwhelm me.

She carries me in her surprising strength, hidden like gravity, with an inevitable force. The moon pulls on the ocean as I climb into her damp, wood-solid softness, and we follow on those mysterious tides.

Toy Doctor
Barbara Muller

I want to gather you
like a limp ragdoll
into my arms.
I will search--
Where?
Under the bed,
the rug,
on the
very
top
shelf,
to find your missing button eye,
now slick with dust,
rub it
black and shiny,
stitch it back on.
And

oh!

With each prick of the needle
I wince,
pull the thread
through,
give you back your sight.

Lover

Servando Pena

The sky darkened, the clouds gathered,
as you fell to my empty earth;
I looked up at you; a thousand angels
all shinning from within;
gently you caressed my face
washing the tears from my eyes
you wrapped your warm rain round me
embracing me, touching me;
you cleansed my soul of it's pain
you walked my barren field of dreams,
bringing life to where you stepped,
hope where none had taken fruit
I wanted to hold you
but you were too fluid for my hands;
you slipped away
I loved you
and then you were gone

The Inferno

Carol Schliesinger

Essence is thin.
The nether world is warm.
My spirit overflows with
hedonist values: things!

Hearts are born purple;
strangled by precious jewelry.
Beating like dying fish on the rusty ground.
Longing to breathe the trail of the moist forest
Far, far away
Rays shine.

While they light the shadows
every lost bird burns.
Fire blossoms,
every sinner cries joy!

In time, the crepuscule's eyes,
thrilled by its blindness
stand strong
alone
in the middle of

nothing.

Reaching for Trust

Penny A. McCulloch

Deep in the dank, clouded forest, Fearful ducked behind another onslaught of memories. That was a tough one.

It will be a while before Love comes. He visits most every day. Fearful liked Love. He always made her feel so safe. But Love lives in the meadow and Fearful hides in the forest. So Love only visits for a while.

What was that? Confusion is sneaking up behind her. To Helper quickly. Thank goodness there is Helper. She was going to make it through this forest yet.

Fearful wondered what it would be like in the meadow beyond the forest's edge. She had heard that Laughing and Joy dance with you there.

One time, she peaked through some tears and she saw Peace and Happiness. She had heard about Peace and Happiness. She wished they could be her friends.

Looking up, Fearful saw the air darkening again. Here comes another cloud of Despair. Fearful cried out to Logic to help her fight Despair. It worked. It was quiet again.

Fearful had heard of Trust. Trust rescues people from the forest. And helps them to the meadow.

But the problem is that somehow you have to get Trust and then give him to Helper. Then Helper can lead you through all the pits and canyons and storms. And you have to depend on Trust to protect you.

That's hard. So very hard. Fearful wanted trust, but didn't know where to find him.

Sneaking under some low branches so as not to be seen, Fearful found Helper and asked where to find Trust. Helper said the strangest thing. Helper said she just needed to ask. Fearful crawled to her hiding place, wishing it could be easier.

Fearful cried softly. How can she give Trust to someone if she doesn't even know what Trust looks like? As evening settled in, she prayed for Trust. Oh how much she wanted him. All night she cried and prayed for Trust. She had been hurting for so long.

The next morning, Fearful woke up, expecting to hide and hurt again. But there was something different this time. This time when she found Helper she took his hand, without hesitating. And slowly, carefully, Helper and Trust guided her through the ugly memories. She even walked past Despair and Confusion!

The black forest ended and the green meadow beckoned. Fearful put one foot, then two, into the soft, fresh crisp grass. She breathed in the perfumed breeze. Then she ran to the flowers and sprawled into their pedals. She reached for Peace and Happiness and danced with Laughing and Joy.

And Love stayed forever, and never left again.

Identity

Kelly Bateson

Mother suggested a viewing of memories
The old albums contain dusty sheets
Saturated with color,
Glossy rainbows of times past.
It is easy to focus on the faces of the 4 small children
In the photograph
But harder to divine perception
Of their thoughts
To guess at the weather conditions
Within their minds, their hearts
Stormy of calm?
The little girl in blue,
Grin exposing gaps
That he toothfairy rewards—
This is me.
My smile is ironic,
For the benefit of the lens only.
Mom told me the story:
I was angry that day.
Against my will, I wore the sky blue button-up
That I, the 5 year-old found repulsive
Though Mother pronounced it adorable.
We laugh together now,
It seems so inconsequential, this clash of wills.
I lost then,
But I am satisfied that
I have triumphed in many battles since,
Skirmishes really.
Yes, she admits,
Your stubbornness
(I prefer determination)

has remained with you.
You are a blow-up of that tiny gap-tooth.
I smile and reach up to feel my teeth,
Just to make sure
Yes, all here.
I am glad
This is me.

Intertwine

Francisco A. Gonzales

The same mist that kisses me will rain on you, my love.
when it reaches, you will know that it has touched me
and when I receive yours, I will know.

The water used to dance on you then try to become you,
remember the rain?

I have used your rain and have become a strong oak and you a
cypress,
Let us meet under the earth and intertwine our roots together
Let us be one, may nobody find out whose root is whose.
When the woodsmen come to tear one of us from our earth
we both depart.
We are one.

To Joshua
Meggan Smith

An empty aching envelopes my very being –
my thoughts are scattered,
my words are few,
only my tears make clear what I am seeing.

What I had always thought to be understood,
what had remained safe in my heart,
now haunts me in your absence.
I have so much to tell you, if only I could.

Life is said to exhaust pure souls quickly –
for you, this couldn't be more true.
Your smile graced my life a short while,
but your memory will live forever in me.

My soul wants to flee, but I can't escape you friend.
In the company of midnight stars
you watch from above and wait.
Please wait patiently for my earthly stay to end –

For now I must live as I have only dreamed –
I have waited much too long.

Only why did you have to die
for me to know how to live.

Infidelity

Maggie Solomon

The computer screen kept scrolling, although Nadia had left her chat room to pace around the bedroom. Now Julie sat and watched the conversation scroll down the screen. Nadia tried to meet Julie's eyes, but couldn't as Julie studied the unintelligible code of shortened words, allusions, and computer jargon that made her feel like she was watching a talk show in Cantonese.

"I wish you'd look at me, Julie." Nadia folded her arms over her chest and settled into her chair, waiting for their eyes to meet.

"Why? When did you last look at me? It's always that computer." The lines were old, she knew. But if she repeated them that many times, why didn't Nadia ever hear them? She stubbornly held her chin in her hand as she concentrated on the back and forth jokes she didn't understand.

Nadia continued the script, "You're jealous of the computer, and it's ridiculous. Computers aren't alive, and they can't threaten our relationship. It's crazy." She sounded calm and self-controlled, as always, the rational one, in contrast to Julie's emotional outbursts.

Julie stopped herself from saying her line in the routine, something about Nadia not hearing what she was trying to say, and continued to watch the screen. If she watched long enough, she could start to figure out the pattern of the conversation. Somebody ranting about legalizing drugs stopped sending and a new person entered into the mass of voices.

Lil: Spider? Are you there? Come back soon!

Julie knew that "Spider" was Nadia's screen name. Only she knew that it was *her* petname for Nadia, because of her long arms and legs. An inside joke as old as their relationship. She kept watching and "Lil" came back.

Lil tells you, "I miss you, hon. Love ya"

Julie's eyes darted to Nadia, who almost backed away from the sudden change from sullenness to anger. She'd never seen Julie that angry.

"How could you? How?" Julie rose from the desk and walked toward the window. "Answer me! How?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

Shaking, Julie turned and allowed her eyes to focus on the computer screen again while Nadia followed her eyes. She swallowed the air she was holding. "Oh."

"Not two minutes ago," Julie started, "two minutes ago you couldn't understand why I was upset, and now I know I have every reason to be jealous. What's going on? Who's Lil?"

"Someone I should have told you about a while back. Have a seat Julie. Stop pacing."

"I want to pace. You talk. I'll pace. Start." Unsure where the assertiveness was coming from, Julie was almost enjoying the way it confused Nadia.

*

*

*

*

A few minutes later, Nadia concluded her story saying, "So, you see, it's not real. It's all pretend. I've never met her, so it can't mean anything. It's nothing like *us*, Julie. You have to understand that. Please."

Julie continued to stare out the window where she'd paused about the time that Julie was telling her how being in the chat was like being a different person, and so when she flirted it wasn't really *her* flirting, but this pretend person, a character really. Or some such bullshit. She didn't know how much to believe. The window was getting cold where her fingers rested.

"So, how many hours a day do you talk to this girl?" she interrupted, needing some details.

Stuttering some, Nadia finally settled on, "a couple of hours every couple of days. I guess."

Julie watched the streetlights outside blinking on slowly. What should she say? What could she say? It was almost dark and she remembered being a kid, when the streetlights coming on meant she had to be coming in. "She says she loves you. Do you tell her that too?"

She continued before Nadia could answer, she didn't really want to know the answer. "It took you months to tell *me*, did it

take your *'character'* that long to tell her? Despite knowing it was the weapon of the weak, the sarcasm seeped out.

"It must be nice having a girlfriend you only have to describe things to without ever having to follow through. You just tell her you're a good dancer, then tell her you'd go out with her 'if only we could.' You never have to prove yourself. You never have to really be there.

"Do you cancel dates with *her* to go out with me? Or is it just me you tell you 'have to do homework.' I see it clearly now, homework is some sort of code word for chatting with Lil."

Confused, Nadia looked at her. "I don't understand. I thought you'd understand that it's pretend. That it means nothing. Sure I say stuff to her, but it's not like us. I can't put my arm around her. I can't smell her perfume while I'm dancing with her."

Julie was ready now. She was prepared for this fight. "Who do you talk to when you have a hard day? Who do you go to when you can't sleep? Who do you listen to when you need advice about your mom? It hasn't been me for weeks. We've been having that same fight over and over. And you'd tell me I was crazy being jealous of a computer."

It was fully dark. The streetlamp cast a round yellow circle and dust swirled in the light. It was time to come in. "You tell me whatever you have with Lil isn't real. But I can't imagine what could be more real than having someone who cares, who I care about as well. Whether I can touch that person or not, whether I can see that person or not. If all that makes something real to you is that person's physical presence, then, why do you need this alternate lover? It's clear to me that you need more than that. How, how, how, could you say she's not your real thing?"

Kiss Betrayed

Sara Schurtz

I have killed a man today –
crucified him with my blood,
I sit below his feet
 head bowed
 and weep.

I weep for shame
 for self hatred
 for disgust
 but more for his pain.

His heart is beside him,
bloody and torn.
My hands have done this.
I have killed a man today,
but it is I who am not alive...

Inner Sanctum

Alex Musatov

If I was ever to touch your soul,
How would it feel ?
Would it be warm, and flow
With radiance that comes from peace ?
Would it palpitate
And never cease ?

Or would it be cold like dead man's eyes;
And crude and rude
And filled with lies
That will do anything to fight
When your private mess
Is touched by light ?

Or would my hand pass through emptiness ?

If I ever wanted to touch your soul,
Would you grant my wish?
Or would a blow
Much stronger than one that causes pain
Throw me away?

And if again
I tried, Would my hands be scorched
By burning flames
Of your soul's torch?

But maybe it would welcome me instead
And offer more than
It has ever had.
Because no soul is clearly real before
Foreigner's hands
Have felt its outer core.

But can I ever hope to touch
Your soul, when you
Have tried so much
To keep it still
Under human lid?
Maybe I never will.

Or maybe I just did.

Reticent Rain

Debrah Fox

Dedicated to Dad

Prism anchored in a vow
bears bold spectrum asking how.

Inner strife and values framed
mirrored through united rain.

Nourished with light mists of praise
flourish in their sun's vague rays.

Desire to please shadow needs
emit dance beyond mere dreams.

When the Crabs Cry

Christina Ramirez

I never heard anything scream like that before. I can still hear the clanking of their claws against the metal pot, desperately trying to escape the inferno, the hell they had been dealt.

Earlier I watched the saucer-shaped, blue bugs with disgust. Reaching down to pet them brought claws snapping back at me. Not only could they not lick my face and cover me with kisses, they reeked of dead fish lacking any charm. They weren't fuzzy and cuddly.

As I played house in the next room my game was brought to an end. I heard them crying, screaming for help. A pillow over my head, I tried to block their cries, but my tears soon joined in with theirs as I begged Pappas to make them stop, to set them free.

Then the crying and clanking stopped -- the kitchen was silent. The lid was removed, allowing the steam and their spirits to fly up to heaven. Their bodies, changed to orange, were removed from the pan. The claws were limp. I clung to my Pappas, seeking the comfort of his arms.

I never heard anything scream like that before. I can still hear the clanking of their claws against the metal pot, desperately trying to escape the inferno, the hell they had been dealt.

One Rifle, Two Decisions

Ryan Canales

Nov. 22

It seems that every time I blink, my eyes seem to close for an hour and I can't help recalling the situations that have led up to this. I'm crouched in a corner of an abandoned building on a warm November day. I am looking out the window onto an abandoned road. I know who's coming, and I know he has no idea that I'm waiting for him. I've done this exact type of job over 20 times, and I had trained for this scenario for the last six months.

By now, if you've read this far, you are probably intrigued, but you have no idea what I am talking about. It all started when I dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, at the age of 14. I am a fast learner and had already skipped a couple of grades in school and found classes to be a terrible bore. After bumming around for a couple of months, I scored a fake I.D. and a fake birth certificate, in a little border town in New Mexico, that said I was 18. I used them to join the Marines, even though really I was barely 15. In the Marines, I excelled at both technical and physical tasks. The Corps noticed this, and I quickly moved up in rank. I eventually earned the opportunity to join a special military brigade made up of the best men from all the armed forces elite, even some from the Navy made it.

It was within this group that I finally discovered a place where I could feel like I found my calling. The men picked for this group were all loners, like myself, and none of us seemed to mind the reduced contact, if any, with our family and friends. The boys upstairs really knew who to pick. For months at a time we would be put out in undercover missions where we were given a goal to accomplish, a certain time to accomplish it, and no alternative except death, if we failed to do so. During these missions we were to immerse ourselves totally in our newly assigned personas. We had no backup and we reported back to no one, until the goal

of the mission was accomplished. I can't tell you what would happen if we didn't accomplish the mission goal in time, because we had a perfect record of accomplishment.

From the time I joined the Tactical Armored Group (TAG) at my true age of 16, till now at my true age of 28, I changed names over 100 times, colored my hair at least 40, and had over 15 plastic surgery changes on my face. I was a trained expert in detonation and disarmament of explosives. I could create all types of explosives from ordinary materials. I was also a certified welder, a professional carpenter, locksmith, electrician, and a computer expert. Of course, I was certified in most types of weaponry and various self-defense techniques. I could blend in anytime, anywhere, in any situation and you would never know the difference. My job would be done and I could slip out without you knowing where to look.

What were all these skills good for? Well, we weren't being made into new Renaissance men. We were trained assassins. We could kill your wife sleeping next to you and slip out with out even waking you up, or spilling any blood on you while you slept.

Most of the time we were sent into small countries throughout the world, to get the country to fall in line with our government's way of thinking. You can thank us for keeping gas prices low and grain exports up. Sometimes we were sent into cities and towns in the U.S. to keep certain up and coming hot-shots in line. Our information and mission objectives were highly classified and came from agencies like the FBI, the CIA, INS., Customs, N.S.A., NASA, and other secretive organizations, sponsored and funded by our government that you don't want to know exist.

I have killed kings, presidents, union leaders, and political opposition leaders. I have killed men, women, even children. I kill with impunity and with out prejudice, the murder of the elderly, the handicapped, even people's pets, can get a message across.

Now I am being asked...-no ORDERED to kill someone that I not only know personally, but whom I respect, have even come to like, and have taken orders from. He is the top man, head honcho. Our Commander in Chief for the past four years,

the man who has signed every one of my orders in the last four years. He is the President of the United States of America.

He also happens to be the person who introduced me to the only living creature I have ever cared about. I guess it's just bad luck that I am in love with his kid sister.

I remember the first time I ever met Emily. Em (her nickname) was at a commendation dinner held for myself and a few other members of the TAG Team who had survived ten years of service. The other guys were all at least ten years older than even my false age. I was planning to cut out early after dinner and a quick drink. As I stood out on the balcony looking out over the city, the President came up and just started talking to me. It was rare that I talked to anyone, even rarer was talking to them without having a hidden agenda behind my conversation. Admittedly, I was quite nervous at the thought of engaging in personal conversation. However, Mr. President turned out to be a really down to earth person and was easy to get along with. He wasn't talking with me just to shoot the bull; he was genuinely interested in what I had to say. It was the first time in my life that I felt I could open up and be honest with someone. We soon retreated to the game room to shoot some pool. Both of us didn't feel like sticking around the ball room and talking politics. I was having a great time, then she entered the room and lit it up.

Mrs. President walked in followed by the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. My eyes swelled with her beauty and my heart burst over with emotions I had never experienced, silencing my tongue. I barely noticed the big stupid grin I was wearing until she told me I had a nice smile. From that point on I was hers. It was Emily. She had the same striking features that on her brother made him handsome. Except on her they were more refined making her strikingly beautiful. Her eyes were ten times brighter than her brother's. Those jewel like eyes, light gray in color, that could change from light to blue to a sparkling hazel. Her silky skin was an olive complexion that showed the mixture of Latin, African, and Native Indian, in her bloodline. Her body was exquisitely toned, shaped and sultry, showing signs of strength and physical prowess. I could easily go on for ever about how beautiful and enchanting she is, but I need to tell the rest of the

story so the world will know why I must do what I have been ordered to do, and why I didn't choose the other options I have.

I spent much of my free time with Em. For the first time in my career I took my leave and didn't put in for extra assignments. Since Em worked with the First Lady, and she was the President's sister, she lived at the White House with them. We were together a year before I finally found the courage to ask her to get married, lucky for me, she accepted.

We are planning to have the wedding this Christmas, a little over a month away. Or maybe I should say, we were planning to have it this Christmas. If I want to ever see my beautiful Em again, I must kill her brother, my boss, my friend, my country's leader.

That is why I am sitting here in this building waiting for him to come down the road in his red, white, and blue jogging suit, surrounded by his mini-entourage. I hope I'm the only one they have picked for this mission, but I'm probably not. They trained me for this mission in secret, without letting me know who my target was going to be. When I finally found out who was the target, it was too late. They had already found out my weakness was Em. They made it look like she was on vacation to everyone else, but I knew that they could get to her at anytime they wanted. I was told straight out that she would die if I didn't make sure the President died. The boys upstairs really know who to pick.

Now as each minute passes, it feels like a year going by. I have two choices: Kill the President and hope that the boys upstairs let Em and me live. Or I can turn the gun on myself and hope that my death will save at least Em's life. Either way, the whole deal is out of my hands. I have absolutely no way to control what will happen, I can only hope for the best.

--To God, my country and Emily, my one and only love,

I am heartfully sorry for all that has happened and all that will happen. I wish I could do more.

He can see the group jogging through the park. They are partially obscured by the trees. He had practiced this scenario so many times and he knows their pace so perfectly that he could close his eye, point the rifle, and still hit the target. So that's what he does. He closes his eyes and that hold back his tears. He

knows he has 46 seconds till they come into view. When they are in view, there is a 60 degree angle and for 35 seconds he'll have a clear shot of the President. With his eyes closed, he reaches to pick up the rifle and his .38 revolver. He opens his eyes and aims at the point exactly 35 seconds in front of the President. His pace is exactly the same as in the training exercises. He picks up the revolver and points it at his own head with one hand, and fingers the trigger of the rifle with the other. He closes his eyes again to blink back more tears. With his eyes closed and the guns aimed and ready, he whispers his first ever prayer to a god he never believed in. The countdown continues in his head. It goes 31/30/29... At 20 seconds, he opens his teary eyes to check his target, with a hope that they took a different route. He takes a quick look at the sun, for the first time noticing how beautiful the sky can be. Especially when the bright, blue, sky is overcome by dark rain clouds and it turns to gray. Gray like his Em's eyes. A gray that picks up the colors around it and reflects them back in an even more vibrant and psychedelically vibrant color than they were before. At 10 seconds, he closes his tear laden eyes again; 9/8/7/6/5/4/3/2/1. A horribly loud sound rings OT as a gun goes off. At the same time, a clap of thunder is heard and lightning strikes down a gigantic oak tree, right in front of the President and his entourage.

Soul Searching

Kyle Gray

A vast infinity of opportunity lay before me.
Where dreams remain dreams, but a few might come to know
reality.

Where stars before guided me, but have since only shown a
single entity.

Of red roses whose stems wove the blanket,
And whose petals padded the pillows,
For the stars, who often gaze, to softly lay and passionately
embrace.

For where but in the most humble and gracious of hearts do we
find such a story of true love.

Of which a dream fulfills its reality and nothing is left for fantasy.
Maybe only comets crisscross these channels seldom reaped, or
Only from raging rivers flow emotions so deep.

For if so I am a burning comet blazing through the violet sky,
And I am the river's rapids churning the tides of life.

For stars have struck my eyes,
And thorns have drawn my blood,
And my heart will now forever know the love of one earthly beauty.

And now to awake from this majestic bed of flowers, do I
Look to the rising sun searching for my distant lover.
And as sure as my comet's fire I know will never fade,
And as sure as my river's current I know will never dry,
I long for that reality I know to reside in that of which I dream-
In the image of your dazzling finger, sparkling with my ring.

Old Shoes
Johnny Arnold

My skin,
flaccid and torn.
My soul,
trampled and glossy...
erasing my print forever.
I sit here lifeless...
my vocation
annexed.
Forsaken by you for a mistress,
soft and new.
I've carried you for miles,
through
rain, snow, blistering hot pavement.
I've forfeited my body and soul for
you,
only to be caste to this morbid
closet like a leper.
I will hold forever the memories of
your every step,
hoping only to be burdened once more.

Love is
Meghan Fisher

love is

love is the first bite into an apple
store-bought, crisp crunchety fresh
new and white on the inside

love is

love is the smell of air in the morning
after a dark, dreary night's rain cool,
cavorting on the skin like faerie dust

love is

love is the water gently lapping at the sides of a rocky beach
and maybe it's even the hard crashing of
break, boom, bang against a weathered cliff

love is

love is the feel of old photos, black and white
venetian lace and plush velvet
and a book you haven't read since college with manuscript pages

love is

love is seeing you "no make-up, no shave, no shower, do you
really love me even though I look like this, disheveled hair,
bad breath and all"

love is

love is me in love with you
love is you in love with me

love is...

Soldero

Kelly Bateson

A Mexican Army soldier begins to remove
A child's body
From the mud in an Acapulco neighborhood
All that can be seen
Is one small limp hand
It looks lonely without the company of
Arms, legs, feet
The soldier is determined,
He purses his lips as he attempts
To tear off the leafy branches
Caked with mud.
Could it be her?
Terror permeates the soldier
Though he wears a disguise
Of nonchalance and professionalism.
His favorite niece is missing,
She was lost in the panic of the mudslide.
The hurrican warnings in the pit of his stomach
Have grown into full-fledged twisters.
As he pulls away debris,
Dirty flying into his eyes and mouth,
He is horrified to feel the smile breaking
Onto his face.
The features of the child are male,
It is no one he knows.
He walks away quickly
For he has done his job.
With the weight of 5 tons pressing on his heart
He rushed home
To tell the good news.

River of Thought

Sara Schurtz

I dip my toe into the crystal blue stream
and I'm disturbed by my reflection
rippling out to the dark edges –
beyond your shadow and
into my soul.

I am not my ownmaking,
merely a figment of your creation.

Silent echoes,

unsung songs ,

tears falling back into the stream
where all life returns to its source,
but not mine...

for I unwillingly belong to you.

MARTIN GREEN'S LIFE OF REPOSE

Alan Cirlin

Martin Green awoke feeling like a dead cat had taken up residence in his mouth. This had to be the great grandmother of all hangovers. He lay quietly in his contorted sleeping posture and tried hard not to move. Every individual muscle ached. One eye started to cautiously flutter open, got blinded with a vague splash of dim morning light, and snapped shut. Martin groaned.

'Oh man,' he thought, 'I sure hope I enjoyed myself.' He couldn't remember the bender that had led to this ruined state. The last thing he remembered was going to bed with his classroom speech on the French Revolution still unwritten. He'd been putting it off for two weeks and time had finally run out. Oh well, it didn't really matter. He would somehow bull his way through the assignment and then it would be clear sailing to the end of the semester. No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks. Wasn't that how the song went? He started to smile. The dead feline objected. He relaxed his mouth and tried to marshal his strength. 'Got to get it done,' he thought. He was barely passing as it was -- skittering as he always had along the delicate edge of failure. If he had one special talent it was the brilliant ability to just barely make the grade. One more lousy assignment and a few stupid tests and then it would be summer. A whole summer to hang out, get down, drink up, and sleep in. He'd be free until the start of his senior year. Of course, he'd have to start thinking about college. But that could wait too. Plenty of time to worry about that in the Fall.

A terrible thought ran through him like an electric spark. As far as he knew this was Friday -- speech day. But here he was with yet another hangover which he couldn't remember acquiring. Had he somehow blown the speech and gone to drink it off? It wouldn't be the first time. Was this actually Saturday morning? Or maybe even Sunday? Despite his body's protests he opened his eyes and started to pull himself together. He smacked his lips and immediately wished he hadn't. Then he froze again.

This wasn't his bedroom. It was much bigger and full of expensive looking furnishings. And it was clean. Where the hell was he? He tried hard to think.

There was a movement behind him in the bed. 'Oh god.' It was a girl. Or rather a woman. A rather good looking woman, judging by the backside of her. But she seemed much too old for him. Martin beat a guarded retreat to the bathroom. He was wearing strange silk pajamas.

Quietly closing the door he flicked on the lights. For a brief couple of moments he squinted at the lustrous patch over the sink and then his eyes popped. The reflection wasn't him. Or maybe it was. But it was definitely a much older version of him. It looked almost like his father. The skin tried to crawl off his body in several different directions at once.

After a long while he began to get cleaned up. He brushed his teeth twice and even flossed which wasn't his style. He quietly gargled and performed a few other ablutions. In a vague disconcerting way he seemed to know where things were. The sink had looked pristine before he started. He left it looking martyred. He zigzagged over to the shower shedding and scattering his bedclothes and fetching a large bath towel as he went. He turned some knobs, waited until the warm moisture hit his gooseflesh and stepped in. He washed mechanically and then stood directly under the running water, leaning on the tiled wall for support. He tried hard to remember. Nothing came.

A little puff of cool air hit Martin's legs and almost immediately he felt delicate hands on his skin. He backed warily out of the water and wiped his eyes.

"Tough night, honey?" The light touch of hands never left his body as he turned to look at the owner of the voice. The woman from the bed was standing naked before him. She was smiling impishly as if sharing some private joke.

Another shock. Martin recognized Crystal O'Neal, captain of the cheerleaders and the most desired piece of female flesh on campus. Or maybe it was Crystal's mother. This woman had to be in her mid-30's at least. He was about to say something when he remembered his situation and remained silent.

Martin had a lot of questions, but he was afraid they might put him in a soft sided room if he started asking them. So he faked

normality as best he could and tried to get by until answers would come.

Somehow the morning passed. He seemed to know where his clothes were and how he was supposed to dress. The image which stared back at him in the door of the chifforobe was actually quite impressive. The suit he was wearing must have cost at least \$300 and the hangers were full of them.

It didn't take long to confirm that this Crystal was in fact the Crystal he remembered. But by this time he was only vaguely shocked to discover she was his wife. His happily married wife. They had two kids, a big house in the suburbs, and a dog.

The family became quickly aware that something was wrong with dad. Mom quietly told the kids that father just had a hard night and would be better later. The kids were dubious but accepted her assurances as they left for school. Mom was even more dubious. Her husband had been such a slob all morning and that just wasn't like him. The dog wasn't fooled at all. On first sight of Martin he growled and slunk away.

Then it was time to leave for work. He started to panic, but something in the back of his head reassured him. So he left the house, got into his bright new BMW and drove. The car seemed to know the way. During the ride, little bits of information filtered through. He was vice president of a large national accounting firm. He was, in fact, the primary spokesperson for the firm. He did contract negotiations for the company and was also responsible for many of the big presentations. The car pulled into an underground garage and parked itself. Martin wandered out and found his way into a large office building.

Everyone knew him. They all smiled and called him Mr. Green. He politely acknowledged greetings without saying anything and headed for the elevator. He found he knew names without remembering people. What he needed to know, he seemed to know. Otherwise everything after he went to bed on the night before the speech was still a big void.

Martin left the elevator. A secretary, his secretary, grinned as he walked up and made some polite reference to the big reception the night before. She handed him a sheaf of papers and a large mug of hot coffee. He trekked into the big corner office with his

name on the door and plumped down into an impressive executive chair. Then carefully setting everything down he started to tremble.

A quiet masculine voice cleared itself. He looked up at a friendly face in the door. Another polite greeting, a relayed message from one of the clients, and a cryptic reference to some philosophic discussion about free will from the night before. The man in the doorway left.

Something clicked. The discussion at the party. That was it! The little presence in the back of his mind became a voice. He could actually hear it. The tiny, apologetic voice which belonged to some alter-ego deep within Martin's psyche. It was the speech on the French Revolution which had triggered things. The alter-ego was afraid that Martin was going to fail his course and get held back a year if he didn't do well on that speech. So after Martin fell asleep the alter-ego took over. It stayed up most of the night researching, writing, and quietly practicing. It went to school in the morning and aced the speech. His teacher was shocked. Then the alter-ego thought it better stick around for another week and get Martin through his final exams. More shock. It was just about to retreat into his subconscious when Martin's uncle offered him a summer job at his accounting firm. It could tell the uncle wasn't enthusiastic; he was merely humoring Martin's mom. But the opportunity was great and the alter-ego knew he needed the money. So it took the job and made such an excellent impression that uncle gave Martin a permanent part-time job and offered to pay his college tuition as long as he continued with the firm. The alter-ego didn't know what to do. It was as reliable, industrious and charming as Martin was irresponsible, lazy and morose. The fall semester began and the alter-ego hung in to think things over and get Martin off to a good start.

And it kept hanging in. First just to keep things running smoothly. Then because it was achieving tremendous success in Martin's name. Everyone from his family to his teachers were pleasantly surprised. His closest friends thought he was turning into a dweeb. The alter-ego made new friends. It joined clubs and committees. It took charge and made things happen. It worked on a special fundraising project for the cheerleading squad. And it fell in love with Crystal.

After that there was another summer of working for his uncle; then college, marriage, graduate school, full-time employment with the firm, the big merger which he negotiated, and eventually a vice presidency. And where had Martin been all this time? Quite literally asleep. The alter-ego had simply let him sleepwalk through his life while it kept putting off returning control. It was the one area in which it was as weak and rationalizing as Martin. Until the curious discussion about free will at the party. The alter-ego had always felt a little guilty. Suddenly it had been made to feel very guilty indeed.

The little voice apologized and promised to give Martin all the help he would need in adjusting to his wonderful new life. Then the voice fell still.

Martin sat in stunned silence. He wasn't given long to reflect.

The phone rang; a fax arrived; his secretary brought him a copy of a prospectus to revise; a salesman showed up for a meeting; lights flashed, buzzers buzzed, paper piled up.

He toughed it out for a week. The little voice kept him informed and offered advice, but the stresses of this life were enormous. There were meetings and schedules and clients, family pressures and expectations, repairmen and more clients, reports to be written and speeches to be made. Even with all the help his alter-ego could muster, this life was just so much work. And Martin hated work with a passion. He found himself seriously thinking about running away or committing suicide.

Crystal had also toughed it out for the week. She had seen this tremendous change in the loving man she had married and had no idea where it was coming from. Maybe he was sick? Maybe something had happened at work which he wasn't sharing with her? Whatever it was, it was time for a showdown. After the kids were well asleep she made her way to her husband's study to confront him. She found him passed out on a leather sofa surrounded with clutter -- snoring raggedly and cradling an empty bottle of booze. Tearfully she retreated to their bedroom and cried herself to sleep.

Yet the next morning everything seemed to be back to normal. And within a week the episode was almost forgotten. Crystal was convinced he must have been sick after all.

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Years later on his death bed, with his concerned wife and loving family all around, the alter-ego again considered waking Martin, if briefly, just so that he could see how well his life had turned out and so that he could say goodbye. There would be, after all, no more expectations or pressures. The vague feelings of guilt which he had learned to live with were flaring up. But who was he trying to comfort anyway -- Martin or himself? Martin had peacefully and happily snoozed his entire life away. It would be a shame to disturb him again.

Falling Castle

Mark David

Searching for love--a heart waiting to fall
Like the seashore's lonely castle of sand
That washes away at the ocean's call
Or that crumbles at the touch of a hand.
This love becomes someone left to wallow
In dark, endless nights with only the rain
Playing its loneliest song of sorrow
Of the greatest love as the greatest pain.
Still he builds the sand into crystal dreams
Filled with pledges that never dawn
From the many, who as worthy, he deems,
But will always become forever gone.
He says, "Forget it now; let sleep begin.
There's always tomorrow to love again."

Goodbye

Diana Gonzalez

At ten years old, I was old enough
To feel the pain, but too young to say
Goodbye.

“You’re not old enough to visit,”
Said the nurse. The words blew out of
Her mouth like an icy arctic breeze.

My vivacious aunt confined to a cold,
Lifeless room.
Grey walls, that sterile hospital scent,
Death lingering around me.

Battling among the
Sick, helpless, tired and weak.
She was none of those things to me.

Why? What does death mean?
Does it hurt? Where will you go?
Why are you leaving?

Questions unanswered.
I was not even allowed a hug,
A kiss, or a reassuring word from her.

At ten years old, I was old enough
To feel the pain, but too young to say
Goodbye.

La Voz del Padre

Erica Tenniswood

Look at the people around you,
Love them as yourself
In loving them you'll know my peace,
An everlasting wealth.

Accept the hope I give you,
Take a step of faith
Tomorrow's cares are hid today,
So daily seek my face.

Leave your sin behind you,
Shake off earthly cares
Enter into prayer with me,
Ignore the world's stares.

Make a covenant with me,
I will take away your shame
I love with a love that is stronger than death,
With my grace you can do the same.

Prince Charming

Esther Epiphane

Oh prince, that didst beguile me
From the bottom of the well
Thou didst call my soul towards thee
Thou didst call my soul to hell

From thy darkness I was blinded
For in thee a light didst shine
As Thou called towards the tempest
"Thou art safe if thou art mine"

Then I slowly fell towards thee
And I started to let go
It was then I saw more clearly
It was then I came to know

That the light on thee was not thine
'Twas a reflection from the sun
Thou was not what I expected
Thy benevolence was gone

I had put thee on a pedastal
While I staggered in the smog
'Twas when the light didst shine upon thee
That I saw you were a frog.

Leave A Message

Christina Alexander

It's been a long time since I heard her voice. I miss it. It wasn't a singers voice, although it could have been. It was just the perfect voice: not too Minnie Mouse but not too throaty. I loved it. Her voice was what first attracted me to her. If you can believe it, I dialed the wrong number one Thursday in May trying to get my mother and I got Sylvie's machine. Instead of hanging up immediately, I listened to her simple words: "This is Sylvie, I'm away from my desk. Leave a message and I'll get back to you. Don't forget those instructions. Bye, now."

I hung up after I heard that, then hit re-dial and saved it on my phone's memory. I knew I had to hear that voice again. Even though I was at work, I called and heard the machine play four times. I was actually going to leave a message the last time but Sylvie picked up and started yelling at me. She thought I was her ex-boyfriend and she screamed that I didn't know when to give up. She was right about that.

I calmly explained that I wasn't who she thought I was. I told her I was a lawyer just out of school and that I accidentally got her number mixed up with my mother's. I told her that I was in love with her voice, that I had to meet her, and that my mother could come if she didn't trust me. She giggled, although I sensed she was trying not too. I sent one of the firm's couriers to her office with my resume and picture. That convinced her and she agreed to go out with me.

I went to her apartment building on 53rd street and she buzzed me up. The building had been recently renovated and it smelled new, but looked old-fashioned. I envied her because apartment buildings like that were hard to find in New York. Mine isn't nearly as nice, and I pay a fortune for it. As I climbed to the second floor, I wondered just how much she made as an assistant for that fashion designer she mentioned. Must be a lot. But, I wasn't worried. I make out pretty well for just graduating from law school. I was worried about how I looked, though. I took

advantage of the mirrors lined up along the second floor to check myself out. Everything seemed in order. I just ran my fingers through my hair quickly to straighten it out a bit. My blond hair can get a little too fluffy sometimes. My red and blue tie looked straight and my khaki pants were still mostly un-wrinkled.

With my heart in my throat, I knocked on door number 214. Immediately I heard her voice say hold on, then seconds later she opened the door. When she appeared from behind the door, I was amazed she agreed to see me. She was beautiful. She had light brown hair, hazel eyes and she dressed like the models she designed for. She wore this lovely white, flowing dress and sandals. She was an angel. I'm a brick wall compared to her.

We stood awkwardly in her doorway for a moment, face to face. I'm six feet tall and Sylvie stood where her forehead was just the right height for me to lean slightly forward to kiss her. The thought crossed my mind, but I didn't want to give her a reason to reject me so soon.

Thankfully, I got us a cab fairly easily. I always worry that I won't be able to flag one down, looking ridiculous waving and flapping around on the sidewalk in the process. The driver took us to Little Italy, where I had made reservations at this little hole in the roof place with excellent wine and pasta. It wasn't raining, so the hole didn't bother us much.

We talked about old lovers, our families, our dreams. She was more intelligent and charming than my sister Sarah, and I never thought I'd dare compare anyone to my sister. We never reached an agreement on the purpose of mime and body art, but she laughed at my "trapped in a box" impression. The hospitality of the restaurant ran out at eleven and so did we.

On the way home, we walked a few blocks and she let me hold her hand. We took a cab the rest of the way and I walked her up to her apartment. I stroked her soft cheek, then left. I didn't want to ruin the best night of my life by trying to kiss her before she was ready.

During the next month we saw each other nearly every day. We were in love, or so I thought. I was so sure of our relationship, I invited her to move in with me. I suspected nothing when she told me that she couldn't get out of her apartment lease, but made no similar offer to me. I even introduced her to my

mother, who liked her. Still, when Mom failed to muster up the same enthusiasm that I felt for Sylvie, I got mad and threw a fit. Mom apologized, but warned me not to go too fast with her. She told me that Sylvie just got out of a relationship and I might be her "rebound" guy. I didn't believe her and spent every moment, every dollar, every emotion on her happiness.

One morning Sylvie left my apartment earlier than usual. I woke up and she was gone, although I thought nothing of it. She usually went home to get ready for work. She said she needed time to "recover" and get back in work mode. But then, she didn't return my phone call at work and no one answered at her apartment. Worried, I called her secretary, who told me Sylvie was at work, but was too busy to get to the phone. So, I went to work thinking nothing was wrong. I got her message when I got home.

It was Sylvie's sweet voice: "Paul, its me. I hate to- look, I've really enjoyed the time we've spent together, but I sense that you want to get more serious than I'm ready for right now, so let's take some time to step back and cool off a little, okay? I'll call you when I'm ready for that. Take care."

And that was it. She broke up with me the same way she ensnared me in the first place, on an answering machine. She never called, so I tried to call her and went by her apartment a few times. Every day. For four weeks. What can I say? I was a man in love and she destroyed what I thought to be the beginning of something spectacular. I fell for her like Humpty Dumpty and when I broke, I couldn't get myself back together again.

The last time I heard her voice was four weeks after she broke up with me. I called her apartment to hear her voice on the machine. It's all I had left. Only this time it said: "Paul, if this is you again, know that there's a restraining order against you, so if you come within a hundred yards from me I'll have you arrested. If you come to my apartment again I'll have you arrested. NOW BACK OFF and get over it! If you're anyone else, leave a message."

Now, that kind of surprised me. I mean, a restraining order is a bit harsh. It's not like I would ever hurt her or anything. I just missed her.

Anyway, the idiot that I am, I didn't believe it so I went to her apartment again at five in the afternoon, like I always did. The door man hadn't let me in the building since the second day I showed up there. So, as usual, I just waited on the bench outside. Minutes later, I saw a police car pull up to the curb, from which Sylvie and a rather large cop emerged. As they walked toward me, she stared at me with anger that I never thought I'd see. She pointed at me as they passed. She walked into the building and he arrested me.

I'm in jail right now, writing down our love story during what the officer called a "cooling-off period." If these few nights in the slammer don't do the trick then she'll press charges and I'll be here for a lot longer. I don't think I'm quite cool enough yet, but I'm determined to stay here until I get her out of my head. It's been three days since I heard her gorgeous voice. I miss it.

Eulogy of a Willow Tree

Dan Knickrehm

Born only God knows when, you grew fast and strong as your kind will. By the time I knew what a tree was, you were already in your midlife. As a child I remember your long hair sweeping the ground gently with the breezes; your slender leaves oscillating back and forth: green gray, green gray, green gray. Your arms were always a little too high to reach even when I jumped my highest, but that didn't matter. I did my climbing in other trees and preferred to swing from your low-hanging hair. For hours it seemed I would hang from your locks swinging back and forth or sometimes in circles; you never complained. I remember hiding behind your green skirt as mother called me for something I didn't want to do; we had many secrets together. I napped resting my head on your knees; peaceful worry-free slumber; your protective enclosure all about me.

I recall swinging one day when the branch I was holding broke off. I didn't understand what had happened. I sat on the ground with your whip-like tendril wrapped around my feet. "Am I getting too big? Am I too heavy?" I interrogated myself. I could not believe I had outgrown our playfulness. I still longed to play under your watchful care.

I asked my mother "Mommy, why did the branch break?" She replied "Honey, your willow tree grew fast and strong so she could play with you in the yard; she played hard and enjoyed your company. But things that grow this way and play so hard get tired easily. That is what has happened to your willow tree; she is old and tired."

"NO!" I cried "She can't die, I love her too much, I still want to play with her!" Then quietly I sobbed "How much longer will she live Mommy" Her reply: "I don't know."

After that day I didn't swing on you any more; no one did, I made sure of that. No one was going to hurt you. I laid down at your feet and we had long soft conversations. Your wrinkled,

cracked skin reminded me of your frailty. In the winds of springtime you lost branches, some small, some big, and each time a piece of my heart broke.

In the last years we were together I often thought you wouldn't make another summer but you proved your love and held on to life long past your intended years.

When I left home for college, I told you goodbye. No one saw me pass through your thinning hair and hug you with gentle arms. "I love you" was all I could think to say; that was probably unnecessary; I think you knew that.

A year or so after I left, you finally gave out. I got the call from Mom. "She finally gave out honey. She was creaking so loud in the storm, it was painful to hear." I thanked her and hung up hoping it had happened quickly.

I went back to that place afterwards. Everything was different with you gone. No more soft rustling leaves, no more shaded hiding place, no more You. All that was left to know that you had been there was a little bump almost completely overgrown with grass. Like a scar from some tragic accident, it mirrors the pain in my heart. Maybe someday the bump will be worn down to nothing; maybe someday it won't hurt to remember.

The Man Falleth In Love

Jozette Maxwell

Oh no! Here it comes! He thought...this is not the time, nor the person I sought!

Too Short, too fat, too skinny, too tall

Two legs, two arms, two lips and that's not all!

Too much, too little, oh when will it end!-All I ever wanted was to be her friend.

How dare she capture me in her spell, those eyes, that smile-she knows me too well!

It's time to end this ridiculous affair!

I'm great all by myself, there's no need for her hair, her lips, that smile that melts away my sorrow. Oh, I'll be just fine tomorrow!

Those flowers, that dress, those shoes, her smell. I can't live without them, so I'm going to lift the veil.

Call me crazy, call me slow, call me husband.

But when the man falleth in love, he is welcomed into a life of great joy!

Numb

Diana Gonzalez

The heat from the curb seeps
through my dusty, weathered jeans
in the hot summer months.
It used to bother me, but now
I'm numb.

Fine dining is at my fingertips
thanks to the shelter. When there is
enough, soup and crackers ease
my burning stomach. I don't have
anyone to invite over for dinner.
My friends have been taken from me.
My wife, my son.
It used to bother me, but now
I'm numb.

Winter is coming. I feel the cool breeze
caressing my sun-burned face. Passers-by
are excited, the summer's been too hot.
I'm worried, because I don't have a winter
wardrobe but no one thinks of that.
That's all right.
It used to bother me, but now
I'm numb.

I don't think I'll last much longer.
My days are being counted.
No one notices but me. I won't have to
see the ignoring eyes, the condescending
looks, the intolerable remarks.
I'm human too,
but no one sees that.
It used to bother me, but now
I'm numb.

Words

Aquanetta Hicks Pleasant

Exhaust

ed

Get up

read

write

re

read

re

write

not enuf

w o r d s

too

manee

erors

Exhaust

ed

got to lay

down

Now my eyes are wide open behind closed lids

Looking for sleep

Seeing words

NO REGRET

Carla Gine' Lujan

He allowed the audacity of ignorance,
From those who condemned him.
He allowed them to gouge his sides,
With spears, though it was done by closed eyes.
No regret? No regret?

The blasphemers lied to themselves,
When the truth stood humbly in their faces.
Saying He was the image of only tales,
Their evil hearts only devilish races.
No regret? No regret?

Blood overfloweth from his body,
While thorns pierced his skull.
They nailed his hands and feet to wood, rabidly,
Though dying, the angels would again sing:
No regret. No regret.

His father sat watching his only son die,
Still he said nothing.
Though tears were in his eyes,
There's a reason...this is done for something.
No regret. No regret.

His father allowed this to happen.
For the whole world's sake.
Though he had more than enough strength to stop it,
It was our debt that he did take.
With: No regret. No regret.

Penny's Black Sunshine

Sara Schurtz

I

"Momma," Penny whispered in her delicate eight year old voice, "Momma, it's already 9:00. I think we should go now. What if daddy's home, what if...."

"Shh, baby. Daddy won't be home until late tonight, probably not until midnight. Don't worry, momma will take care of everything. Go get some more coke- I'll be back..."

With that annoyed response, Penny's mom was whisked off by a man with dark, hairy arms that wasn't her dad. Confused, Penny swallowed the tears in her throat and looked for something to keep her busy. She hated going to these grown up parties. They were always full of loud men who stank of alcohol and pretty women who stank of cheap perfume. There were never any kids her age, so she was always forced to entertain herself- the story of her life. She was the only child and she lived in a neighborhood saturated with rich, old, white people. She could never play in the front yard because the old people were constantly complaining about the noise. She spent most of her time playing in her back with her best friend, her black dog, Sunshine.

Penny slowly walked through the kitchen, asked a lady with a big nose to hand her a coke and headed out to the backyard. If she couldn't be with her mother, she might as well go play with any pets that might be outside. Even with her mother's half-hearted response, she couldn't shake the fear that was racing through her body. She knew that everything wasn't going to be alright. She began to cry. She was so scared of her dad. No, not scared, but terrified. No matter what soothing words her mother tried to dish out, in the end they really didn't matter. She knew what would await them if they arrived home after their dad. First would come the harsh words. Although she didn't understand half of them, she knew that they weren't nice. Penny figured that it probably had something to do with mommy's other boy friends. Her mom yelled, cried, begged and pleaded with Penny not to mention these other men to daddy. She never did, even though

she wanted to, but somehow, daddy always seemed to find out. Her parents fought all of the time; they would start their arguments by screaming vulgar words and then the same thing would always happen. Mommy would say that she's had enough of his crap and try to leave. When she did this, daddy would grab her (sometimes by the wrist, other times by the throat) and do terrible things to her. Last time they fought, mommy had to go to the hospital because daddy broke her nose.

Penny cringed at those memories. On more than one occasion, she had seen her parents throw things at each other, punch each other, and once, her mom had a long knife in her hand that she waved in front of her dad. She knew that their behavior wasn't normal because her friend Janey told her so, but she knew that she couldn't do anything about it. Every time she would try to stop their endless arguments, she would get a spanking from her dad and would be sent to bed early. She really hated her dad, especially when he would come home smelling like alcohol. Sometimes though, he would bring her cute little gifts from his store. Grownups were so complicated.

Unable to find any pets in the backyard, Penny curled up into a tight ball on the cool patio floor. She sipped her coke and looked up at the clear starless sky. Hanging heavily above her was the most beautiful full moon she had ever seen. It was a brilliant fiery-orange and seemed to be grinning at her, mocking her pain. The moon reminded her of the spooky story that her teacher read to her class earlier that day. Although she wasn't a scaredy cat, she had watched enough movies to know what could happen on Friday the 13th. Now all she needed was for a stupid black cat to cross her path.

She glanced at everyone outside and saw a few people she recognized. Over by the pool was Brian and Natalie. Penny liked them a lot. They were so nice to Penny. Brian had long wavy hair, an earring in his nose and a huge tattoo on his arm that said 'Mom'. Natalie was beautiful. She had long, beautiful red curls that were constantly brushing against her face. Some day, Penny hoped that she could look like Natalie. Natalie was thin and tall and she also had a nosering. The young couple liked to spoil Penny with Hershey's bars and Cherry Cokes, two of her

favorite things. She wanted to go over and talk to them, but they seemed to be arguing. Maybe her family wasn't too weird after all.

Suddenly, Penny was overcome with tiredness. She and her mom had been shopping since late afternoon and had gone to two other parties before coming to this one. She closed her eyes and began to think about Sunshine. She hoped that her dad had fed him before going to work. Sunshine was really the only one who understood what she was going through. But before she could worry any more about her dog, the sweet nothingness of sleep invaded her body.

II

"Pumpkin, wake up now. Baby, we need to go" Penny heard her mother whisper. "Let's go baby. It's late."

There was a bit of a slur in her mother's words, but it was overshadowed by the fear and panic that was riding in her voice.

"Mommy, what's wrong?" Penny asked. She wanted to cry but was embarrassed because the man with hairy arms was standing next to her mom. She got up off the ground, stretched, and frowned when she heard her bones pop.

"Baby, let's go now." Penny detected an immediate sense of urgency in her mother's voice, so she knew that her mother's request was serious. She walked in front of her mother and the hairy man, pretending not to listen to their conversation.

"Pam, when are you going to tell him? I'm sick of all of these games. Look, I'm not scared of that bastard anymore. He's full of empty threats. He's not going to hurt you..."

"Who cares about me, I'm worried about Penny! He gets crazier as the days go on. Last night he was ranting and raving about how he was going to sell his store and move with Penny up to his parent's ranch in Montana. There is no way that I'm letting that bastard take away my daughter. No telling what he'd do to her if it was just the two of them living together."

"Maybe that wouldn't be so bad," the hairy man said. "If Penny wasn't in the picture, then we could get a place together..."

"You bastard! You just don't get it, do you?"

Penny drowned out the rest of their conversation. She was sick of the way adults talked; if they didn't agree on something,

they thought that if they raised their voice and said bad words that things would somehow become clearer. *I never want to grow up*, she said to herself.

As she approached her mom's red car she was terrified to see a large black cat sitting on top of the hood. For a brief second, she became paralyzed with a blinding fear. She looked up at the full moon and understood that tonight wasn't going to be a good night.

On their way home, Penny tried to fall back asleep but strange thoughts invaded her head. She tried to imagine what her life would be like if her parents got along, what it would be like if her parents didn't drink, or even better, what it would be like to have a sister. She desperately yearned for someone to play with. She loved Sunshine to death and couldn't think of living without her dog, but she couldn't help wondering what it would be like if Sunshine were her older sister.

They pulled into the circular driveway and parked the car. But instead of getting out right away, Penny's mom sat in her seat and took several deep breaths. She turned her dulled blue eyes towards Penny and said, "Tell daddy that we were out shopping and afterwards we went to go see a movie."

"What movie? Which theatre were we at? Who did we go with?" Penny always made sure she got everything straight before she went in the house because she didn't want to get her mom into any more trouble than she would already be in.

"Baby, don't worry so much. It's very late, so just try to go straight to your bedroom and get some sleep. Don't forget that you have school in the morning. Rest well, my pumpkin."

They stepped out of the Honda and were stung by the cool night air. Penny realized just how tired she was once she looked at her watch and saw that it was past 1:30. She said a quick and desperate prayer that her dad would be asleep and wouldn't hear them come in.

To her disappointment, she was greeted by her father, whose bulky figure was blocking the doorway. He said nothing, but in his silence he said everything. His glare pierced through her skin, sending goose bumps up and down her body.

"Where have you and your mother been?" But before Penny could even answer, he lashed out his hand and caught her directly on her left cheekbone. Pain ripped through her body, sending her to her knees. Immediately her mother jumped to her defense and began to curse aloud. However, in the middle of one of her mother's profanities, Penny heard her mother let out the most guttural, bone shattering scream. Confused, Penny looked up at her dad and was met by the most wicked, evil smile imaginable. For the first time, she had noticed that her father had thick smears of blood clinging to his cream colored jacket. Her mother grabbed Penny's arm and screamed for her to go outside.

"Now, baby, go outside now. Go! Now! Don't look back, just go."

But those magic words, cursed from the moment they were spoken, opened up the curiosity chamber within Penny. While scrambling off the floor, Penny glanced over towards the den. Vomit instantly came to her lips. There, somewhat to the left of the couch lay Sunshine's body. Sunshine, whose coat was usually so black, so shiny, was matted with thick, dried blood. As if that wasn't enough for her to see, she noticed that his head wasn't attached- daddy had cut it off and propped it up on the couch next to Penny's favorite doll. Purple haze swam in and out of her head. She wasn't sure if she was going to throw up or faint.

"Answer me, you little bitch. Where did you and your mother go?"

Her father's words dripped with nonsense. She couldn't respond, didn't know how. She dropped back to her knees and asked God why. She felt like she was being sucked up into a vacuum. Her insides felt like lava; she was sure that she was going to erupt.

"That will teach you not to lie for your mother. And don't think that I haven't caught on yet. I know all about you and your mother's plot to destroy me. But when will you stupid girls ever learn that I'm superhuman? I give you an inch and you take a mile. Pathetic- both of you. I'm leaving. Have this mess cleaned up when I get back." He continued his psychotic babble as he stepped over Penny, slammed the door, and left.

Penny could hear her mother crying hysterically, but it seemed so distant, so far away.

"If only I had been a good girl," she thought to herself as she crumpled to the ground like a lifeless rag doll.

Failing at Art

Michelle Laborde

Notecards scattered all around
xeroxed images of David,
Monet,
and Frida glares at me from beneath those
bushy eyebrows.
All those eyes from the notecards glare,
straight at me,
for not understanding their history.

Did it just rain?
No, that was yesterday
one day mixed with the other.
And the drizzle grew
with the anxiety that filled
my stomach with pain,
my legs so that I could not stand,
my arms that refused to light that
one last cigarette.
Mona was there.
Ah, my good recognizable friend Mona.
Nothing to fear said she
as her smile grew sly and her eyes flirted,
you always remember me.

Remember me.
The xeroxed images could glare no longer.
I looked up and out,
the raindrops were glittering
like crystals on the window panes.
The sun was out and it was raining.
The rain cleans up the mess
on the streets
and the sun dries the pavement
like new.
God, I love the way that looks.
With the sun picking up the raindrops
as they fell
I got up
lit a cigarette
and stepping all over those

scattered notecards, I
walked out into the bright rain
waiting to be freed

I Met This Girl

Barbara Muller

It always seems like she's sneaking up on me when she arrives, but that's ok. I like the way she sneaks. After I stand up, smile and hug her, we go to the conference room. I don't know why they haven't turned the room to another use but I'm not complaining. Sure, it's not a very romantic room, but no one ever has meetings here, so we're almost guaranteed a little privacy.

Not that we really *do* anything while we're together. We mostly just talk. She likes it that way and if she's happy, I'm happy. Besides, we can't lock the door to the room. Sometimes people come by to join in our conversation. I think they also come by to see if they can catch us *doing* something, but they never get satisfaction. I guess they figure if a guy and a girl go off together to be alone with each other, they must be up to something more than a talk over a cup of joe. Ironically, we both like tea better but that's beside the fact.

So we sit here and we talk about her day and then about mine. I like to try to offer her solutions to whatever's bugging her and she gives me insights to myself that blow my mind. I think it's nice to have her to share what's on my mind because she's outside the situation. Well, most of the time she is, because sometimes what's on my mind involves her. She's my girl, after all.

A couple of people come in and say hi to us. I guess she knows them because she gives both of them hugs. She introduces them to me and tells me briefly how she knows them. The one guy is a computer science major, about to graduate. The other guy just began high school last year. I smile at both of them and they start talking to her about some new album that just came out. Eventually they pick up on the hint that we want to talk alone and they make excuses to leave--not without teasing us about why we want to be alone. I will admit that it's a little tiresome to be teased about that by a fourteen-year-old. He is her friend, though, so I don't say anything. I just roll my eyes after they leave.

She giggles at my expression and we talk for a little longer before she sighs and says it's time for her to go. We're always sorry to see our time together come to an end, but that's what you have to deal with.

We stand up and hug each other. After a quick scan around, we give each other a kiss and smile at each other. She tells me to take care of myself just before she leaves. I nod and say, "Of course I will."

I wait a minute after she leaves, savoring the feeling that she was just there. Then I leave too, and log off, and turn off my computer.

Maybe some day we'll meet in real life. We could talk about our day over a cup of tea.

The Seed Remains

Christina Ramirez

my face is stained with salt,
the river from my eyes never seeming to end.
a cadaver is inside me
my soul has fled, never to mend.

 a roach crawls across my bare foot,
 its antennae and legs cleanse my skin.
 unlike the man who corroded my being
 and stole everything I had been.

that fiend, my friend
who manipulated my trust one night
stripping me of my beauty.
my muffled screams lost to the moonlight.

 he slithered into my life.
 my guard was never up.
 how was i to know of the
 evil seeking my innocent spirit.

i know monsters are real.

i danced with the devil,
a demon in disguise
who will forever haunt my dreams
my security gone because of his lies.

 like a gardener gone sadistic
 he does not nurture the fresh blossom.
 instead he tears the petals away
 and crushes the bloom under his boot,

but
he can't
kill the Seed

Great Scales

Kelly Bateson

Great Scales

He must have been lying
I hate those scales
The notes pound in my brain,
Onto my skin
They bound and rebound
Off of bones
I can feel the vibration
In my teeth, my toes.

Liberace—more musical than I
And more tolerant
Of rampant scales
Piano notes.
Those musicians share a world
Unknown of writers
And scientist and sisters
Two blocks away, he was
And still Katie's vigorous playing
Beckoned.
He said that
He was just in the neighborhood
It was a visit to a long-lost friend.

She did not notice him
He snuck up undetected
Though not purposely stealthy.
His bright garments
Loud
But still drowned out
By the A sharp and B minor.

Apparently the open door
Of the kitchen invited him in.
Such musical beauty should never go
Unappreciated by expert ears,
He claimed—
She was a prodigy,
A veritable master of the scales.

Katie smiled
She did not wax surprised
Confident
She expected such fame.
A talent awaiting discovery
Ripe
A future virtuoso

Great scales
Liberace said so.

I Have Watched You

Lynnette Gonzales

I have watched you
stand there hugging yourself
with a huge innocent smile hiding your true intentions,

and I have watched
conversations with you
become ceaseless
streams of self-centered
anecdotes coming from
your mouth and flailing
gestures with your hands,

I have watched you
pick friends like
someone picks a
heating pad,

and I have watched you
find one
when you need one
turn one on
make one work for you
and once one works
you are content,

and I have watched people
try to heat up
your cold heart,

I have watched your
well-timed bribes
buy your way into all
these friendships
built on use and abuse,
and I have watched others
as truthful as you
are selfish
become your friends,

and I have watched myself
play the dancing dog
in your side-show circus,

I have watched my
excuses to avoid you
come back and haunt me,
and I have watched my
fake illnesses
family engagements
and piles of homework
do nothing
but postpone your
inevitable visit,

and I have watched your
visits blow in like
thick black smoke that
suffocates everyone
around it,

I have watched myself
walk into any
confrontation with you
like I walk into a fog
with cautious steps
and wide-open eyes,

and I have watched your
"friendship" destroy my
trust in truth,

and I have watched you
live a true white lie.

The Road to Gulu

Stephen M. Ramirez

Father John lay motionless along the banks of Lake Kyoga. The ground was uncomfortably wet and small biting ants crawled onto his hands and legs. He could still hear the whining of the bullets as they passed overhead and occasionally one would smack into the soil next to him. He wondered if it were soldiers of the Uganda People's Defense Force of L.R.A. rebels who were shooting at him. It didn't really matter to him since he would be just as dead if struck by a bullet from Sudan as one from Kampala.

In a short time that seemed to be a long time, the shooting ceased. The young priest rose to brush the red clay from his black clothing. He pushed through the heavy brush that only moments before he had been running through and stepped back out onto the empty and open road to Gulu. The heat was oppressive with only the slightest of breezes to bend the savanna grasses. As he walked along the burning road he recalled his dreams of pristine Africa. 'I have been so naïve,' he thought. The dreams had been replaced by visions of fields poached free of game and the sight of whole villages laying dead, the children rotting alongside their elders. The horror of it all was at times more than he could bare. Only his faith sustained him. At times, it was his faith that troubled him most.

The road to Gulu began to wind down into a wooded valley and the sounds of birds could be heard for the first time in a long time. The canopy of the acacia trees offered the first shade of the long day. He began to quicken his pace until he rounded the bend in the forest road and found the soldiers in front of him. For a moment he stood motionless as his eyes met with the emotionless gaze of the soldiers. There was nowhere for him to go but forward. He stepped toward them, into an uncertain future. He felt fear well up inside of him and prayed a silent wish for deliverance.

"Jambo," offered the young priest, forcing a smile onto his face. A large black man in olive drab stepped forward.

"What are you doing here, Father?" he asked. The priest noticed a small cross of Jesus suspended from the soldier's neck.

"My car broke down about five miles back on the road from Kampala," he replied.

"Where are you going? Don't you know that this is a war zone?"

"I'm on the road to Gulu. I'm planning to start school there," said the priest. The other soldiers began to laugh amongst themselves and spoke quickly to each other in Swahili.

"You're too late," said the big soldier.

"What do you mean, too late?"

"They're all dead in Gulu," replied the soldier. "There is no one left for you to teach, Father."

"That's not possible," said the priest. "I was just in Gulu only a month ago."

"A month can be an eternity in Africa," said the big soldier. "The rebels entered Gulu two days ago. They killed over one hundred of our troops. When they were done they had shot all the men of Gulu and killed the others with pistols and pangas. There is no one alive in Gulu. Not even the livestock were spared."

Father John turned his face up toward the African skies that lay just beyond the forest canopy. He fought back the tears from his eyes and the memories of children playing in the streets of Gulu. The sounds of young men laughing over dark coffee and of women sifting grain in the morning sun. It was all gone now. Suddenly, brutally, needlessly, it was all gone.

"I am sorry, Father," said the soldier. "I am Colonel Akhahenda of the People's army." The big man shifted his AK-47 rifle to one side and thrust out his hand. "May I help you get home, Father?" said the colonel.

"I have no home," replied the priest. "I have made Africa my home. I have no other."

"It is not safe for you to remain here. I will drive you back to Kampala."

"There's nothing in Kampala," said the priest.

"You can't stay here, Father. The L.R.A. rebels have crossed over at Nimule. President Museveni has ordered us to defend the area of Lake Kyoga."

"You have your job to do, Colonel Akhahenda, and so do I," replied the priest. "You risk your life for your people, could I do any less for my God?"

"The children of this area are all in Lira," said Akhahenda. "I can drive you to Lira if you wish."

"I would be most grateful," replied the young priest. He had become stronger and his mind was clear of the visions of before.

The two men walked together toward the colonel's vehicle. It was a small truck that had been hand painted with splashes of brown and green paint. The top had been cut away leaving it and its occupants exposed to the African skies. As they pulled away from the outpost and onto the road to Gulu, the young priest looked back toward the soldiers whom he had feared only a moment before. They were children. One of them who was wearing a Rhodesian camouflage jacket and blue jeans could not be over twelve years old. He carried an AK-47 rifle and the stains of dried blood were flecked across his jeans.

"They're so young," said the priest. "Do they know why they are fighting?"

"They fight for many reasons," replied Akhahenda. "They fight because their tribes are from the South. They fight because they would rather kill than be killed. They fight for President Museveni. Most of all, they fight for survival."

The priest looked toward Akhahenda who had been looking down the road to Gulu as they drove.

"How about you, Colonel Akhahenda? Why do you fight?"

The soldier did not reply immediately. His face grew solid and stone-like. He turned from the road they had been traveling and onto another which led to Lira where the children had been taken. As they pulled away from the road to Gulu the young priest noticed a marker post at the junction. On top of the post a human skull had been placed as a macabre warning from the L.R.A. rebels. The colonel stopped the vehicle at the marker. A cloud of road dust drifted over them as the vehicle halted. It drifted passed the marker and over the road to Gulu. The two men sat with eyes fixed toward the skull-capped marker.

"That is why I fight," said the colonel. "I fight because this is the only home I know. I fight because I don't want this to be the Africa of forever."

"Is there any hope for Africa?" asked the priest aloud, yet to himself.

The soldier turned toward Father John and placed a large hand on his shoulder. "Father," he said. "Don't you know that Africa is full of hope? We are Africa's hope, Father. Her future lies in our hearts, our memories and our dreams."

"I pray that you are right," the priest said. He was feeling somewhat better. He felt stronger. He was thinking of the children ahead in Lira and of the broad smiles they would have when he arrived.

They lurched forward up the rutted road through fields that shimmered golden in the late half light. Ahead lay Lira and the children. The road to Gulu seemed so very far away.

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Submissions in poetry, short fiction, and personal essays are now being accepted from St. Mary's University students and faculty for the next issue of the *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, 1998

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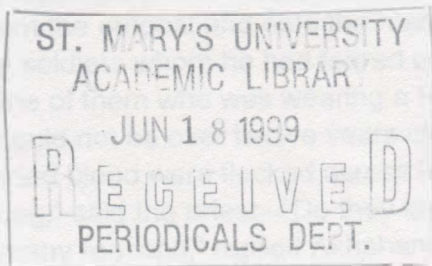
Selected writers should be prepared to submit an IBM disk (Word '97 only) within ten days of notification. Word '97 is available in the Academic Library Computer Lab.

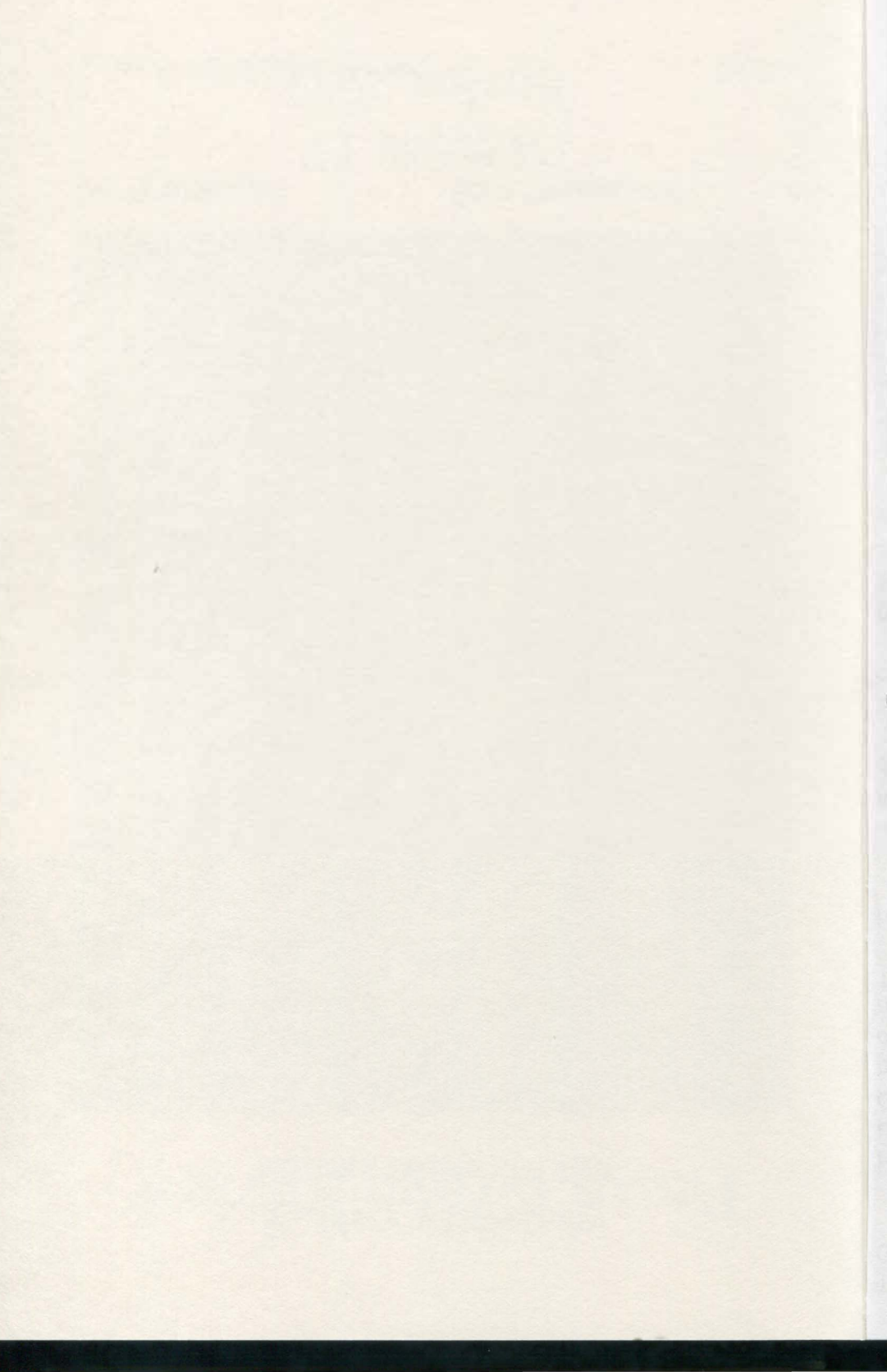
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