



**THE
GARFIELD LAKE
REVIEW**

2005

THIRTY-FOURTH EDITION

2005 GARFIELD LAKE REVIEW STAFF

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2005 Abbie Copps Judge

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Image on Previous Page

“Weekend with Dave” by Marie Gouba

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbie M. Copps Poetry Contest

2005 Winner

ELLIE'S COUNTRY RESTAURANT	8
Sophia Rivkin	

2005 Honorable Mentions

FOR SALE BY OWNER	10
Judith Goldhaber	
OUTSOURCING	12
M.L. Liebler	
OP-ED DEPARTMENT AT THE DRUG STORE	13
Connon Barclay	

Fiction

ONLY MEN MOW LAWNS	14
Katie Hudson	
HALO OF LOVE	20
Heather Boultinghouse	
TIP BOX	30
Eric Murray	
METHOD 1	38
Maria Insalata	
LEONARD COHEN SINGS A EULOGY	48
Rebecca J. Hector	
THE LAST DAY	54
Alexis Johnson	

THE BROTHERHOOD	64
Eric Martin	
GOD’S WILL	70
Yolanda Green	
REMEMBER	78
Becky Gehrman	
GOING BACK TO GRACELAND	87
Tamara Calkins	
HAROLD	94
Rebecca J. Hector	
DARK BEAUTY	111
Eric Martin	

Poetry

A MISSING CHILD	18
Dick Kaiser	
A NEW LIFE	19
Dayna Vickery	
A SOLDIER’S LONG GOODBYE	25
Dick Kaiser	
R.E.M. BOY	26
Julia Reges	
DINO’S DANCE	28
Beth Ann Flanary	
MY MESSAGE IS FOR THE PEOPLE	36
Nyakwai Taryor, Jr.	
MICHIGAN SUMMER	45
Ponja Vahs	

MY DESTINY	46
Christopher Cook	
I AM A MAN	51
Sherri Kelso	
LOOKING FOR MY MOTHER	52
Elizabeth Anne Williston	
ME	60
Darren Hamman	
UNTITLED	61
James Melvin	
DEEPRESSION	63
Jole Wells	
TOTAL DESTRUCTION	75
Amanda Green	
BITTER HEART, BROKEN SMILE	76
Julia Reges	
BED	77
Mary R. Bonato	
DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE	80
Ebony Robbs	
TEARS	83
Michael Steven Mikalakis	
TEA WITH J. ALFRED	84
Elizabeth Anne Williston	
DENIAL	90
Elizabeth Anne Williston	
THIS IS WHAT I'M ABOUT	92
Nyakwai Taryor Jr.	

THE SPACE BETWEEN	101
Joanne Williams	
ODE TO A TAMPON	103
Dayna Vickery	
IF I COULD FLY	104
Blaine Burnett	
THE DRESSER	105
Elizabeth Anne Williston	
STOLEN	109
Jaime Stenz	
PENNIES AND DIAMONDS	110
Julia Reges	

Art

BIG SIS, LIL SIS	24
Ryan Newberry	
UNTITLED	27
Tracey Fix	
NIGHT PATH	59
Jessica Pletz	
ELIZABETH	62
Stacey Willard	
CHICKADEE	82
Kelly Parker	
UNTITLED	86
Tracey Fix	
THE LONELY RABBIT	91
Ryan Newberry	

ROSE 102
Jessica Pletz

EDITOR'S NOTE 122

~2005 Abbie M. Copps Poetry Contest Winner~

ELLIE'S COUNTRY RESTAURANT

Sophia Rivkin

It takes you in, it's almost home,
the door handle opens with a metal thumbprint,
and there's the shabby gray rug,
the ten tables, the wooden booths
high as church pews--
and everything covered in plastic,
plastic wood on the walls, plastic ceiling tile
over the high old tin ceiling, plastic fans.
But the chandeliers are ornate,
four-armed swaying girls with glass fingers--
Form and Grace, it's my mother's
dining room fixture--
and now the room is a ghostly embrace
of stain, dust and memory.
And a trick of light? the waitress my dead mother,
A plastic mother I invent or adopt--
dress in the big American flag on the wall,
over the Rotarian spaghetti fund raiser,
the wrestling match with the "Toner" or
Stoner in the high school auditorium,
Mike, someone's missing cat
And the naked truth of rakes, pitchforks, oxen yokes
hung high, gray spotted dishpans,
the metal coffeepot, blue cracked crockery--
all the lost things in America on formica walls.
You could put plastic flowers in these cups,
to honor the dead.
But it is the stunned, ruined things
that speak-- the trash mounted
triumphantly under the vault
of white celutex-- the imprisoned prisms
dangling their glassy skirts
swaying like the memory of old streetcars
that go nowhere,

Oh, mother who worshiped blue velour,
who covered the couch with plastic,
then covered the plastic with old blankets,
so sitting was a sliding experience.
Oh mother, whose layered hates and loves
so enmeshed, one became the other--
now in Ellie's basement kitchen
I meet you under broken pots, rusty spoons,
truth and fabrication a stew
served on veined strained plastic,
and slowly, slowly
I eat.

~*Abbie M. Copps Honorable Mention*~

FOR SALE BY OWNER

Judith Goldhaber

i.

Three houses up for sale within a mile
perturbs the tranquil surface of our street.
Ripples of shock contort the smooth concrete
of Mrs. Plennert's driveway, the Clarks' woodpile
collapses in the night, and Spanish tile
rains off the Kamens' roof. When neighbors meet
they barter rumors, blithely indiscreet,
but some of us are deeply in denial.

How could this happen in our neighborhood?
The covenant to which we signed our name
contained a confidential shibboleth
and many safeguards (or so we understood)
to guarantee that things would stay the same,
banning divorce, infirmity, and death.

ii.

Yet now, it seems, one cannot walk a block
without encountering death's unctuous grin
or disappointment's sly and saccharine
salute. If this keeps up we'll have to lock
our doors and (if they have the gall to knock)
pretend that there is no one home within,
where we sit silent, feeling through the skin
the ticking of our biological clock.

The Pratts, it seems, made up their mind to leave
their "grand and stately 1930s home,
remodeled kitchen, hardwood floor and chrome"
because they're splitting up—nothing to grieve
about, she says, in fact, she's off to France
and he has found a glorious new romance.

iii.

Esther Edelstein, age eighty-three,
 (“prime corner lot”) most mornings could be found
 weeding the flowerbeds, nose to the ground.
 She broke a hip, and now quite sensibly
 prefers a condo, snug and trouble-free
 in Walnut Creek (although of course she’s bound
 to miss her garden and her usual round
 of errands, *shul*, and domesticity.)

She’s ready to move on: why should she stay
 except to reassure the rest of us
 that one can reach old age without a fuss,
 a spry old lady, out there on display
 managing quite well without a spouse—
 alone, but safe, still living in her house.

iv.

“Landscaped, stone fireplaces” hides behind a wall
 divided by a lavishly ornate
 and heavily curlicued wrought-iron gate
 that someone left unlatched that day last fall
 when death decided he would pay a call—
 a fact Bill Schmidt could not anticipate,
 and so he went to his untimely fate
 despite a low-fat diet and racquetball.

Three houses up for sale, three vanished lives
 along this street I’ve walked for thirty years
 pushing a stroller with the other wives,
 sometimes with poems singing in my ears.
 I guess we should have known it makes no sense
 to execute restrictive covenants.

~Abbie M. Copps Honorable Mention~

OUTSOURCING

M.L. Liebler

I had an idea recently. “Genius!”
I thought. I would disassemble the factory
Of myself, break it all down and
Ship the most valuable parts to
Some other places. To do this, I had
To carefully detach each wire
And bolt, and secretly unscrew me
From me, as not to grab anyone’s
Attention or curiosity. For example,
While my foot was asleep, I sent
All of my memories south. While
My scalp prickled with beads of sweat
I sent my love north to cool, and later
While my brain was entranced with
Commercials on television, I sent those
Mysterious 21 grams of my soul, that I
Read about in *Time Magazine*, straight
Out of this world — Way further than Mexico,
China, Pakistan or anywhere anyone has ever
Heard of. Gone — Vanished—just like that!

When all was said and done, very little
Of the old me was left. Yes, I had my
Ever growing fingernails and toenails,
The occasional annoying hidden body rashes
Here and there, and of course plenty of those
Middle-aged hairs growing in my ears and nose
But the substance? What was the substance anyway?

Suddenly it occurred to me the other day
That when I gave all of me away, what
Remained was just another abandoned factory
Of self, and that’s no way to run a life—

~Abbie M. Copps Honorable Mention~

OP-ED DEPARTMENT AT THE DRUG STORE
Connon Barclay

When older bachelor uses Sunday coupons
buying breath-strips and disposable blades
indications say his discount store life
means total savings are only heartaches.

Imagine quiet struggle when refined cashier
rings his list with a hefty undercharge
tempting visions of extra doughnut money
nevertheless, he speaks quite at ease,
“I can’t do this to you. I do believe you
have undercharged me.” His hands are
nearly steady. Eyes high with lifetime pride.

Imagine his surprise when she supplied
correct total saying, “Thanks for being
honest.” During his look of register relief
lonely shopper did sigh, summarily saying,
“Honest, but still poor.”

Surprise then completed with her quality
voice quickly recording the new memory
moment for him on his solitary way
“Honesty is something denied the rich.”

ONLY MEN MOW LAWNS

Katie Hudson

Earnest Welling was a bastard, and had been for nearly sixty years. He was not illegitimate as a dictionary might conclude, in this case the word bastard means exactly what it might mean on the street. He was also an asshole, a self-righteous cad, and a vindictive piece of shit, but the word bastard suited him best. Being now seventy-two, his cantankerous nature had only improved with age. Like the stench of Limburger cheese.

He was currently seated in his brown sofa chair. Staring out the window, watching his grass ripple in the breeze. His wife was in the kitchen clanking with the dishes. He thought about yelling at her to stop that damn racket, but through the years she had picked up his temper and would only answer back, the bitch. If only she hadn't been so good in bed he never would have married her. Damn her, she hadn't opened her legs to him months, worried about his health, or so she said. Well if he was going to die, he'd die; it would be better than living like a fucking priest.

His thin legs were up on a brown footstool. He might have been relaxed, his posture suggested it, but his face was a solid sneer. This stern sneer was pointing to the window. But surprise soon erased the scorn from his lips. A young man had walked into his yard. He was a gangly sort of boy, must be around fifteen, but he was still walking with the gait of a child. He was walking as if he had the right to be there, instead of behaving like the trespasser he was; his obscene red hair flopping in the breeze. It was the hair that goaded him the most.

"Ma, there is someone in our yard." His wife looked up from her sink, and peered out the window.

"Oh, that is the Moores' boy, Kevin. Jean sent him over to mow our lawn."

"Why would she do that?"

"Well," she paused. Turning back to the dishes, she slowly said, "you may have noticed the lawn is getting terribly long, and with your back being what it is, Jean figured you could use some help." What did his meddling daughter know about anything, he could mow his own lawn, why couldn't he? What did she think he was, feeble? Like hell he was.

He got up and stretched himself to his full height. As he was walking to the door his wife stopped him and asked.

“Where do you think you’re going.”

“To mow MY lawn.”

“Earnest I don’t know...”

“It’s my lawn I don’t need some red headed little bastard mowing MY lawn, I’ll mow it.” Over fifty years of marriage had taught her not to question him when his voice sounded like that. She turned back to her dishes, watching him out of the corner of her eye. He was fumbling into an old pair of work boots. Oh well, she thought, he’d go out for a half an hour, come in winded and then take a nap. By the time he woke up she’d have his favorite meal waiting for him. A pork chop, and some remarks on how he was still a big, strong man and he’d be back in his good humor. Or as good a humor as Earnest ever got in, the old coot.

Slipping into the sunshine, Earnest squinted his eyes at the young man who was dragging his lawn mower out of its shed.

“Wait right there.” He hurried down the stairs; his stiff legs forced him to wobble down. He might have looked comical, if not for the ferocity etched in every line of his face. “I didn’t hire you young man, my daughter did, you can just hurry on home, I mow my own damn lawn.”

“I’m sorry Mr. Welling, but Mrs. Warner, uh your daughter, she already paid me.” He turned back to the mower. Earnest felt dismissed.

“Keep the damn money, if she wants to waste her damn money she can go ahead. But you ain’t mowing my lawn.” Now most kids would have left, in fact Earnest would have left without a backwards glance. But Kevin didn’t move, he frowned at his shoes, his mother had written his name on the tips. They were too tight. Kevin looked up, into the old man’s hardened face. Earnest paused and looked at Kevin. His evaluation of the boy increased but only a little.

“Sir, I could use the money.”

“You said you already got the money, don’t swindle me.” But the boy stayed there.

“I was kinda hoping you might need me all summer, my dad lost his job and we don’t really have any money round the...”

“Cut the crap kid I don’t need to hear your tragic life story.” He paused. “Alright, if you can handle a weed-whacker I might be able to use you.”

“Wouldn’t you rather use the weed-whacker?” Kevin spoke up quickly, “It’s light and the lawn mower is a lot heavier, you...” He stopped.

Kevin was a bright kid and he knew that sometimes it was better to shut-up, before you were told. “Where’s the weed-whacker?” he asked.

Mr. Welling’s yard was a large fenced in square. Kevin’s mom had told him the Welling yard was the largest on the block; it had been the first house built in the subdivision. As a child she had always advised him to treat the Wellings respectfully; she had directed him the same way when he left today. A tall fence surrounded the yard. The fence, she said, was to keep people out. But the fence had always been secondary, what had really kept the neighborhood children away was Mr. Welling. That, and the neighborhood legend of a loaded shotgun he kept just next to the door. The mower roared to life by his side. Kevin watched as the old man shoved the lawn mower out into the yard. He seemed to have little skill in maneuvering it. Marching straight presented no problem for the man, but each corner resulted in a zigzag of miscalculations. Still he showed no signs of giving up. Kevin started up the weed whacker, easily trimming the long grass fringing the fence and the trees. Earnest would occasionally look up from his work to watch the boy. He took care to get every grass, damn it, he had half been hoping for a reason to berate him. But he couldn’t fault the boy for a job well done.

After an hour, he turned off the machine, breathing deeply and with a haggard voice, he muttered, “Le-h-ts take hu hu shorrt break. You-h sit on the bench and res-h-t young man and I’ll get us some drinks.” The old man walked to the stairs and slowly climbed them to the door of his house. His knees shook a little. When he emerged, back bent, he was carrying two cans of beer. Earnest settled his thin frame next to the boy and handed him the other can. Kevin had never tasted beer before. It tasted bitter, and spiked down his throat. He stuck his tongue out in air, flexing it to get the taste off. He took another sip.

Earnest was watching him. It was obvious the boy had never tasted booze before, but Earnest came from a time when a hard day of work required a cold beer. He cracked open his can, and the coldness wet his raw throat. His eyes chewed over the job he had done. Half ended he expected. The boy was rocking slightly, with that energy young men have. They sat in silence. Kevin was licking the beer off his lips. The bitter taste was growing on him. Both were thinking about the same thing. And it had nothing to do with the beer or the lawn, but about how to become a man, and how to stay one. But neither spoke. When his beer was gone Earnest rose to his feet.

Tapping the can with his finger he said, “Best not tell your ma

about this.” Kevin nodded and grinned. They got back to work, the old man mowing, the boy trimming. When the work was done sweat dribbled down from Earnest’s face. The heat fairly poured off of it. He should go into the house, but he decided to rest at the foot of a maple. The shade felt cool. The boy was putting away the weed-whacker. As he came out Earnest called to him.

“If you want, you can come back next week.” The boy just nodded. Kevin stopped and looked at the man beneath the tree; he was glorious. His face glowed with color and pride. He was like a man at sunset Kevin thought, but that didn’t make any sense. . Kevin turned and walked out to the driveway. Earnest watched as he walked away. The young man looked taller than he had guessed. Well, he thought, the little bastard will be all right. He ran his fingers through the newly chopped grass. It was good.

A MISSING CHILD

Dick Kaiser

The window rolled down as my little hand waved goodbye
 No one thought this trip would be so memorable
The new day brought sunshine and dew on the grass
 No one thought this day would change our lives
The birds were chirping and the horses were in the field
 No one thought we would even be just a bit late
The boats were on the lake with wind in their sails
 No one thought this might be the last time
The ducks on the river were paddling their feet
 No one thought of the problems ahead
The truck didn't see the stop sign at the crest of the hill
 No one thought to buckle me in
The world is silent as the collision has ended
 No one thought to tell me goodbye!

A NEW LIFE

Dayna Vickery

The fog plumed through the gunshot holes
in the train windows
like flying specters.

The clanking of the wheels
the ancient train rolling side to side
as it makes its way down
the rusty tracks.

Escape
Freedom
Till today those words,
were just words.

Now
it's more
it's a reality.

So many feelings
Anticipation
Excitement
A vague creeping fear

At the end of this train ride
is a new life
a new start

I can't wait to get there.

HALO OF LOVE

Heather Boultinghouse

For months I traveled with her. She was my life because without her I was just an object with no meaning. He may have bought me, but she gave me life. My main dream was to be loved after I was purchased. I stayed many long days and nights in the jewelry store-watching people as they gazed at the others and myself. Many women saw me, and I saw many women; from short to tall, thin to plump, beautiful to breathtakingly hideous, I watched them as they just looked at me.

Outside snow fell to the pavement as it devoured each flake, making the ground wet not white. I could see a small portion of the parking lot through the glass doors, as I longed to be out there with someone that needed me. The day he bought me I was so excited, life in the spotlight can be tiresome and degrading at times. He held me in his large clumsy fingers then had me packaged. I was shut in a box for days, wondering if I would ever see light again when all of a sudden there she was gazing at me with tears in her innocent eyes. I fit her finger perfectly. My thin simple band and three small emeralds seemed like they were meant for her small hand. She placed me on her ring finger of her left hand, and together we connected.

After they celebrated my arrival we all fell asleep. Their nude bodies lay limp under a warm feather comforter. The room we were in was small. Mattresses lay on the floor as a bed. There was a small refrigerator in one corner with a microwave on top of it. I wondered what kind of home I was in because this small room had enough stuff in it to fill a house, or so it seemed. A poster of Emmenim hung on one wall, and a mirror hung on the door. There were framed memories everywhere, making the relevance of her family and friends obvious to anyone who entered my owner's domain.

Light from between the cracks of the plastic blinds struck her face as to say Hello the following morning. Gracefully and quietly she slipped from under the covers. She smoothly placed some pajama pants on with a tight white tank top and made her way to the kitchen. Blissfully she made breakfast for the two of them. Eggs, bacon, and toast, his favorite morning

foods. She must be thanking him for me, I thought. The clock read noon. She carried in the food, which she had prepared. “Honey, I made you breakfast.” She whispered near his ear. “Come back to bed,” was his first reply, followed by, “Leave it on the coffee table, I will eat later.” She gently reminded him that she had to be to work in an hour so she had to eat now. “Do what you have to do,” were the last words he muttered before he threw the covers over his head and fell back asleep.

Her eyes were dark as she grabbed her robe and headed to the shower, abandoning the two plates of warm food. The first time I saw her cry was this very day. Her beautiful blonde hair wet from the shower hung to her waist. Her fit body seemed so weak as she lathered herself with her Suave body wash. One tear fell amidst the drops from the showerhead. Her eye caught a glimpse of me and she attempted a smile, but it looked more like a weak smirk. I thought to myself, he loves her or he would not have bought me.

Each day after that his eyes lit when she entered the room. I thought so highly of him, not just for giving me a perfect owner, but also for loving her. I gathered from my observations that she lived in an apartment with three other women. They each had a room, yet they shared a kitchen and a bathroom. I assumed college students would have separate appliances for convenience, but I wasn’t really sure. I became a part of her, and she was everything to me. We never separated. I loved her the most when she smiled at me. I was told when I was made that I was a symbol of love that never ends. Rings were, as I was told a never-ending circle of commitment and compassion. Life went on, no matter how romantic I thought life should have been.

Weeks later there we were in the frozen foods section at Meijer, pushing her cart along the aisles as she looked for the best deals. Her cell phone rang. It was him.

“Where the fuck are you?” He spoke sharply enough to make the hair on the back of her neck stand straight up.

“Where the Hell do you think I am?” She yelled back. Mothers with their small children quickly walked away as they gave her a harsh beating with their eyes.

“I had to go to Meijer to get groceries. Why are you in a bad mood?”

He was angry and suspicious. “I tried calling you twice and you didn’t answer earlier. Where were you?”

“I must have left my phone in car when I went to see Bubbles. I am sorry Hun. I forgot to tell you that I was going to stop there before I went

to the store.”

Bubbles was her friend; they called each other sisters. She had a lot of sisters, all with different parents yet they really loved each other. The Greek letters that they all wore was one of the only things I saw these women have in common. If I hadn't known that these women were all from different places, I would have taken their sisterly bond for blood. “You see Bubbles way more than you see me!” He barked. I knew better than anyone who spent the most time with her, and it for sure was not Bubbles. “Fuck it,” he said, “You love your damn sisters more than you love me.” With his last comment he hung up his phone. She tried to call him back but all she got was his voicemail.

I watched her posture change from confident, to angry, to something I could hardly explain. While we finished shopping there was a weakness in her movement, like a defeated soldier walking away from a battle. I had a feeling that I could not bring her joy this time. There would not be any smiles in my direction as the day progressed. He was there when we arrived at her house, sitting on the cement doorstep smoking a vanilla cigar in one hand, while holding a single red rose in the other. The smell of the cigar put a stale aroma in the air. As she walked up to her door, keys clinking in her hand, she looked at him and said, “When you screw up, you show up with things you think will make me happy.” Her face was somber, yet no tears fell. “Nate, I can't do this anymore.”

He walked over to her and hugged her tightly as he cried, “I love you so much. We need each other.”

“Nate, you know that I love you but please don't call me anymore. Do you want your ring back?” she asked as her eyes starting to redden.

“Keep it in case you change your mind. You will regret this and call me tomorrow,” he sputtered as he threw the rose to the ground. She didn't call him the next day, or days following.

She wore me for five days after I last saw Nate. It was so difficult for me to see her weep the way she did. I wanted to be of comfort, yet knew I served the opposite by the look in her eyes when she gazed in my direction. On the last day she wore me she had a different tone in her voice when she talked to Bubbles. I heard her say, “Hey girl, I have to run a few errands. Where are we going tonight for dinner?” She was so vibrant and eerie because I didn't have any recollection of the tone she was using. We walked about eight blocks that afternoon enjoying the sun while freezing from the cold. We walked to a shop called Dicker and Deal. There were dead animals mounted all over the place, guns displayed everywhere,

and an entire wall of CDs. She talked to a bald man behind a counter, and handed me to him. He looked at me very closely. The man gave her money and she left me there. If I only had tears, I would have shed them for days after watching her walk away. I knew she was not coming back for me as I sat enclosed in a glass room with bright lights pointing at me, smothering me. I knew why she had gone, I was even proud, yet my own selfishness desired to be loved.

It had been days, weeks, and maybe months. After I knew what love was, there was no life for me. “I have been looking for a ring with my birthstone in it for weeks, but I am not looking to spend a lot,” said a woman’s voice.

“Well, we have a small selection of emeralds over here,” said a voice, which I had heard try to sell things to people unsuccessfully for as long as I had been there.

“I love that ring there. Can I try it on?” I didn’t think she was talking about me so I continued to sulk but as soon as I felt the man’s fingers take hold of me I was vibrant with hope. I saw a different light for the first time in a long time as I sat on the hand of new beginnings.



BIG SIS, LIL SIS

Ryan Newberry

A SOLDIER'S LONG GOODBYE

Dick Kaiser

She sat by the window, gleefully counting the days
She had written many letters, always looking for a response
She walked to the mailbox, hoping for just a kind of word
She started calling the authorities, seeking some sort of advice
She was told to go to the train station, to find out the truth
She heard the loud whistle, as the engine drew near
She watched the car door open, as she held her breath
She looked on in horror, as the workers asked her name
She touched the pine box, as it was passed down to her
She cried as they told her, what a hero he'd been
She sat silently beside him, as the wagon pulled away
She stood tall and stared blankly, as they put him to rest
She graciously accepted, the flag that was presented
She listened intently, to the kind words that were said
She jerked so suddenly, when the guns went off
She placed the rose softly, as services were done
She waited silently, for everyone to leave
She looked at the coffin, with her only love inside
She whispered his name, so no one would hear
She prayed to the heavens, for his safe arrival there
She cried uncontrollably, as she thought of her loss
She turned to walk away, and took one last glance
She stopped and blew a kiss, having to finally say "Goodbye"

R.E.M. BOY

Julia Reges

The sun shines brightly,
But I don't have to squint.
I can feel myself walking on the orange grass
And at the same time I'm lying down.
I wonder if you'll come today.
The purple trees sway in the emerald sky,
And here you walk up,
With arms wide open
And an even wider smile.
You ask,
"Did you miss me?"

I just smile and give you a squeeze.
You know I love it when you say that.
Hand in hand we stroll
Along the oyster strewn riverbank.
You laugh whenever I wriggle my nose.
I stare as the wind plays with your hair.
Your eyes lock with mine,
I lean forward,
Our locked eyes flutter shut.
And we kiss.
Your lips are as soft as the pillow's.

My eyes open,
I see the blue sky and green trees from my window,
But not you.
I go down to the gas station to get a newspaper
And there you are
Buying gasoline and a pack of M&Ms.
I walk up,
With arms wide open
And an even wider smile.
I ask,
"Did you miss me?"



UNTITLED

Tracey Fix

DINO'S DANCE

Beth Ann Flanary

*Division A, Western Equitation, please enter the arena
at a walk.*

Leading a parade of hopeless ambition,
The princess passes the threshold.
Emerald veils her shoulders.
White radiance crowns her confidence.

Jog your horses, please jog.

Starlit midnight envelops her body,
Leather-cloaked legs drape about his velvet shadow.
Sleek and slender, he bears effortlessly
Her statue of perfection.

Lope your horses, please lope.

A single cue; a flawless transition.
The aura hypnotizes even judges' cold eyes.
With every measured stride,
Silent silver screams from her light-oil throne.

Reverse and walk please, reverse and walk.

Gentle persuasion from an outside spur
Spins her steed.
A level back, a vertical face, a gorgeous gait-
He strolls seamlessly beneath her stillness.

Lope your horses, please lope.

Seventy-five cowgirls attempt her style,
Faltering, failing, falling.
Prince and princess unite in sweet tango,
Dancing an unprecedented performance.

Jog your horses, please jog.

Diamonds seize the soft scarf about her neck,
Confirming her modesty, accenting her ability.
Responsive and attentive, her soldier marches,
Robbing the competition of center-stage.

Halt your horses, please halt.

Slowing to a standstill,
A single breath escapes her nerves.
He relaxes upon her prompt.
The judges' decision is final-
It had been upon her entrance.

In first place, back number 186.

TIP BOX

Eric Murray

As I stepped in a bitter almond smell greeted me. Somebody else's smoke sucked at the wet around my eyes. Every direction I even thought about turning, I ran into a brick wall. Worn smooth and minus any protruding mortar but still, unyielding brick and uncomfortable. Snow became glop and pooled below my shoes on the faded yellow linoleum floor. Armstrong ceiling tiles no more than a foot over my standing height finished off the Hitler's Bunker effect of the place quite nicely. The rest of the décor was nicely Going-Out-Of-Business retrograde. The tiny tables were Formica Frisbees precariously perched upon sawed off baseball bats. Ah, huh, baseball bats. Everything was decorated in earthy brickish shades. Lots of leafy green rubber plants were strewn around for the natural effect, and just perfect for ashtray dumping.

Woody, the bartender —according to the stitching on his quaint garage mechanic shirt — was a stoic or lazy, your call. Either way he was true to his name, as he stayed rooted in one spot behind the bar. After being in here now for a little over three drinks I'd become convinced he'd never moved. Woody sat with the register at his back and his arms branching out, reaching for the crème de whatever's on the one end of the bar and the beer taps on the other. Cold one's sat in a tub of ice between his legs. Woody, the stringy, black-haired Medusa and master of workaday minimalism, swiveling left, right, and around and back and never working up a sweat. All presumably while astride a swivel chair — I guess although his big "Woody" shirt, oddly long leather vest, and 5-pocket wide wale corduroy pants hid any possible mechanical help from my view. Swivel-hipped Woody was an all-shook-up Elvis with a two-drink minimum.

There were no waitresses and I was the only patron so a girl would starve anyway. A fragrant blond pine cigar box with a dark rut running from its front to its back sat prominently on the bar right in front of Woody's throne. In front of the box was a poorly hand-lettered sign "TIPS" taped to its front. The sign meant to make it clear that just because there was no service there were certainly things to be thankful for. This tip box was

so in front of Woody it was impossible to either order or take your drink from him without dripping across its top. Ergo the crease.

Way out of place in this hole, a tall, pale, willowy, girl singer in somebody else's long ivory dress tugged at a wandering shoulder strap and did her best to modulate around the inhospitable reverberations in this salute to post-nuclear decor and low-rent show business. The girl singer was hard to see, hidden as she was behind the one ceiling mounted spotlight that put a smoky film between it and her and me. She sang pretty good, though. Mostly about gone boys and whiskey nights that she was unlikely to know a hell of a lot about, but she took a healthy run at it anyway.

My throat was scratchy, like a cold was coming on, so I sauntered on up to the bar, gut in, figuring to catch the singer's eye while I was at it, and I order a Screwdriver. Orange juice. Woody handed it over wet and I heard the drips from it splash into the dark river that creased the top of the box. I meant to turn back to my seat, but Woody's eyes funneled into me with an "Evil Dead" trance thing. I smiled apologetically and flipped the lid on the tip box draining the river in the crease against the back rail and tossed in all my change without my eyes leaving his face. Good old Woody adjusted a sneer to a passable approximation of acknowledged appreciation.

"We gotta make a living," allowed the suddenly loquacious Woody, as though I were a partner in this economic development scheme of his. "I give some to the guitar guy," he nodded in what could only have been the general direction of the music, which was now into some sort of drinking song. "And the broad. And, you know, we don't get paid around here but every two weeks and so how am I supposed to make ends meet without it, right? You know a son-of-a-bitch work the life out of you, if you give him a chance."

I nodded. Who was I to argue? It looked bad for me, Woody wound up and ready to proselytize, and he might still be diagramming the class struggle between the proletariat and the pampered elite, except this tony high roller comes in from the cold wearing an honest to God cowboy hat and a gigantic mink coat. Maybe not mink, exactly, but some sort of thick road kill or another that was once a big bastard or a bunch of little ones all strung together. All I knew was this Grizzly Adams dude distracted Woody enough to allow me to get back to my table and get a little Vitamin C in me before I got caught in the throes of influenza.

I sat and watched the girl singer. She kept nodding appreciatively

towards the light and saying thanks to nobody at the end of each song. The big coat at the bar seemed to be finding the conversation riveting and kept raising his voice at the Wood Man to get over the sound of her. Declining to modulate between plaintive guitar solos, or even between songs. All of it sort of bounced around the bricks and rubber plants and through my head until I figured there was nothing worth staying around for and I got up to leave.

Except that's when the girl singer leaned around the microphone and asked me if there was anything I wanted to hear. She'd stepped out from behind the light and said it again, quiet, like we were the only two in the place.

"Brett can play just about anything you can name," she nodded back at the plaid shirt and guitar. "If there's something you'd like we'll play it."

She talked a lot softer than she sang and I could see her real good now and it was all I needed to make me crawl back onto my chair.

I said: "I like the Beatles. Anything by them would be great."

The guitar guy, Brett, was shorter than the girl singer was, and he made pissy faces and whispered something in her ear, debating I suspect. I could see that just fine. I began to figure "just about anything" must have meant since the millenium. But the two of them kicked right into "Norwegian Wood," which I don't like, but there you are, so I figured I was obligated.

They slid from that into something bubbly that was probably Wings and not the Beatles, and then went into "Eleanor Rigby" which sounded just awful without a piano. When it ended she said they were gonna take a break. She bent away from the mic and said something private to Brett and then walked my way, still hitching up at that strap in a way I was starting to like.

The girl singer came up to my little table and said: "Can I sit?"

I looked up at her but nodded towards the bar where Brett was heading and asked her how the boyfriend was gonna feel about that?

She smiled tight like she had a good secret and shook her head. "Not a boyfriend." She nodded back toward their small stand. "Guitar player. He gets our gigs and I just show up where he tells me, sing the songs and we split the money."

"Damn democratic."

Her cheeks rose. "Isn't it?" She wouldn't let that smile go and it was beginning to make me feel like I was on the wrong side of the black

jack table.

Grizzly Adams didn't stop jawing at Woody, but he turned from the bar and stood beer in hand, staring at us, like the girl singer and me had become the floorshow.

Her head moved around taking in the empty room but glossing over the giant furry staring geek. "Nobody comes in here on Thursday's. We've got a contract," She shrugged like that explained it all.

"You sing good." Laying on the sweet talk.

"I never had a lesson. Never sang in a church. That's all natural."

"Well, you're good."

"Thanks."

"I travel around a lot, so I see a lot of singers, even in L.A. you'd be very good."

"Thanks."

Good old Grizzly was still standing there like he was her dad and boring holes in me. I adjusted my seat around uncomfortably so I didn't have to look at him. It brought me closer to the wayward strap and it didn't seem to bother her any. I rotated my glass and got the ice spinning all in one direction and then spun it the other direction just taunting the hemispheres and figuring I was looking pretty cool. It only got a wide yawn from her and a she asked me if I had a cigarette.

"I gave 'em up." I told her, and in doing so found another good reason to regret it.

"Yeah, I'm gonna do that too. They're no good for my voice, but what the hell else is there to do here." It was a rhetorical question, we both pretty much knew what else there was to do here.

"Well, you are good."

"Thanks."

She pushed up from the table and went over to the bar. "I work here in the motel — days, cleaning rooms. It pays." She said back towards me, while getting what she wanted to drink and standing too close to Grizzly. I craned around to watch her. Woody handed her over a beer in a long neck. This girl was tough, not only talking as though we were the only ones in the room, but she didn't even blink at the tip box.

"Brett was working all by himself, but he knew it was missing something." She walked back with extra long strides that made her hips dip to compensate. She sat close again with old Grizz not having missed any move her ass might of thought to make.

The girl singer was still performing as she leaned against me and

took a long pull from the beer. The tall brown bottle contrasting against her long pale arms. She looked up into my eyes and said: “He wanted to fuck me so he offered me a job singing.”

Nobody would have missed what she said two counties away. My flew around towards the bar and did the once over on Brett, Woody, and the Man Mountain. “Did it work?” I asked her, a lot quieter, a mix of concern and anticipation.

“Oh yeah, we’re getting all kinds of work,” she looked around too. “This is the only shit-hole we play anymore.”

I picked at the edges of the napkin between us for awhile while she sipped at her beer and then I finally stumbled out with it, “No, I meant, the guitar guy, did it work?”

She snorted and nearly blew beer back at me. “Jesus, no. You can’t do that with people you’re gonna work with.”

What was I thinking? I nodded in agreement, pretty sure she must be right and knowing full well I didn’t want to do that kind of work with her.

The girl singer giggled behind closed lips. Her eyes bright and appraising. She was kicking my tires the way women do. This girl once told me women decide in the first five minutes. It was in that quiet time in a bed afterward and after a time good enough that nobody felt any guilt or the urge to bolt. She lay on her back with her hair splayed across my stomach and my jacket pulled over her important parts, both of us staring at the mottled ceiling. I had just told her I was glad I’d worn that leather jacket. She had commented on it at the bar over glasses of beer and let her fingers toy across it while we had danced. As she laid there, her face invisible, I could see her fingers picking at the buttons as she’d shared the insight about women and the five minutes. She told me then that it wasn’t about the jacket, as she rolled over and buried her wet face against me, holding tight like I was someone she knew.

Old Grizzly broke my memory and the mood we were working on by bellowing up to the ceiling tiles: “Came in here to have a beer and hear somebody make some music.”

He was getting mad. It was pretty clear this was his first music of the night but sure as hell not his first drink. “Come on, baby,” he said. “Get your skinny ass up there and sing some Patsy Cline, or some of that Norah Jones.” He took a step away from the bar, puffed up and reddening in the face.

Things looked like they were gonna get rough. Grizzly pushed the

hat back on his head and shrugged himself out of the big nasty coat and let it drop to the floor spoiling for the fight. We all stared at him sure the fur was fixing to fly. Except, with the coat off and half down the stool he turned out to be kind of a normal looking guy, a big head, sure, but with narrow little shoulders flaring down on a big pregnant beer gut. The Man Mountain was all coat. He kicked it back out of his way and put his arms around an imaginary girl, moving his hands up and down stroking her imaginary back, and he began humming out loud and dancing his invisible date around to a tune only they could hear.

I looked past him and saw Woody eyeballing the guitar player back up to the stage. The guitar player passed the message around to the girl singer. She nodded her understanding and she gave me a tired smile before polishing off the long neck. “I got to go sing,” she said. “You hanging around?”

I fished my pockets for money to put in the tip box.

MY MESSAGE IS FOR THE PEOPLE

Nyakwai Taryor, Jr.

I try to speak for political prisoners
And prolific ministers
In a world so sinister
That your own sister
Would get ya
Mister
In the cold n rain
Left with a stain
Over loose change
That's strange
For most
Seem victimless to approach
Topics of that choice
For the water down moist
Betty Crocker Duncan Hines
Candy coded rhymes
All about shine
And glory
But never tell a story
People can relate to
Honest and true
Focus with a clear view
To continue
Growth amongst the youth
Searching for the truth
Out behind the close walls
Leaning to fall
In a position
Out of their condition
Without any other way
To live and pay
For bills and such
Broken homes stress too much

Losing touch
Through a lot of fuss
When the noise don't hush
Dealing with a struggle
Strength through muscle
On a constant hustle
Creating schemes
For your dreams
Far from nightmares
Released without cares
Worry free
And happy
To gain liberty
In our societies
The bottom considers reality

METHOD 1

Maria Insalata



“Off the wall, whacko, silly, and unpredictable... I just won’t do it Beth! There’s no proof that it works any better than the methods that I’ve already tried. Where did you hear about it in the first place? One of your student’s ideas after smokin’ a big joint?”

“Actually, a good friend mentioned it at work. He has no reason to lie about this Taylor. He’s not just making this up. It’s been around for a while now. You’re just behind in the times with your head up your ass. What could it hurt to try it, give it a chance, at least see if there are results?”

“Nope. Not my cup o’ tea hun. Maybe in the year 3000 it will be normal but it doesn’t seem realistic now.”

“In the year 3000 there won’t be cigarettes anymore. We’ll all be dead or smarter by then. But that’s fine if you don’t want to try it. Just fine! I’ll just start refusing you sex if you can’t quit smoking. It’s just not clean, it’s unattractive, and I’m not turned on anymore by a husband that smokes. So whether its hypnosis-based help or forced abstinence you are going to quit this habit, do you hear me?!?! Do something!”

“Listen hun, if it’ll get you to leave me alone I’ll think about it. I’ll give it some good thought tonight and I’ll tell you no again in the morning, ok?” Beth shot Taylor a look, one that he knew all too well. That couch doesn’t look tempting tonight, he thought to himself. Redemption. “I’m juuuuust kidding Beth. I’ll think about it. Just stop pushing me and you’ll get better results. People my age don’t like to be shoved into new-age ‘gimmicks.’ I’d rather wait a few years to see the side effects it had on the eager beavers.”

“Just think about it Taylor. Think about the pros and cons and then if you have a legitimate excuse not to try hypnosis therapy I’ll leave you alone about it. Deal?”

“Deal.”

“I’m going to bed babe. I’ll meet ya’ in the sheets but stay on your

side stinky breath. I don't want any of your nicogermers!" She snarled at him over her shoulder as she headed towards the end of her day. He snarled right back.



Beth and Taylor had been married now for quite some time. If Beth were ever asked how long she'd been married her reply was always the same, "I'm married? I thought I was baby sitting all this time!" If Taylor were asked the same question he would quickly reply, "Too long. I stopped counting years of marriage when she started counting calories!" The couple, who had really been together a great 34 years now, was like two peas in a pod. The rudeness that was always present in their conversations was a well practiced friendly feud that they both agreed kept the honesty in and the bull shit out of their relationship. "It's an un-edited relationship," Taylor once so eloquently explained to his father-in-law. "We tell each other the good parts and the bad parts and we keep it authentic." As Beth washed her face and got ready for bed that evening she thought of all the things she hadn't had time to do today. The list was always too long. Taylor lay perched against his mountain of pillows buried behind a great Dan Brown novel on his side of the bed. The conversation of hypnosis from earlier that evening wasn't on either of their minds, that was until the lights went out and they fell asleep.



REM 1, REM 2, REM 3, REM 4, REM 3... this is where our dreams begin. This is where Taylor's dream began that night as well. He found himself at his computer, typing letters into a search engine box. The letters didn't make sense to him. He couldn't see what he was typing. The list of possible web pages appeared and his mouse clicked the first choice. Instantly, as if teleported by his decision, he was lying on a couch, not his couch, someone else's couch. There was someone else in the room, a presence, but he didn't know who, and he couldn't move his body to see who it was. Taylor realized his eyes were closed, everything was pitch black here. He tried to turn his head, but it wouldn't move. He tried to stand up but had no control. That's when he heard it. It was his wife. She was behind him, but he could also hear someone else. Taylor strained to listen because he could not speak. The person with his wife was moaning, making quiet noises, and he realized it was a man. He could distinctly hear Beth sighing in rhythm. She sounded out of breath. It struck him like

a ton of bricks, they were having sex! His wife was behind him having sex with... his eyes opened! He was in the center of a large office lying on a red leather couch. There was a pad of paper and a pencil next to him on an empty chair that faced where he was on the couch. A psychologist's office... a therapist... his wife... Before Taylor could turn to confirm what he had been hearing he sat straight up in bed, sweat dripping from his thinning hair down his nose and into his mouth. He clasped his chest to reassure he was awake and then turned to see his wife sleeping next to him. There was no office or red couch. There was no shrink bangin' Beth. "Holy shit..." he managed under his heavy breathing. "It was only a dream..."



REM 1, REM 2, REM 3, REM 4, REM 3... this is where our dreams begin. This is where Beth's dream began that night as well. She was in her bed at home. Taylor was lying next to her on his side of the bed. He reached over with one hand and rubbed her shoulder. It felt good. She leaned in on him, coming closer to where he was on the bed. She could feel his chest on hers and could feel hot breath coming out of his nose onto the top of her head. Something smelled. What was that smell? She raised herself face to face with Taylor and gave him a small kiss. Taylor's arms came behind her frame and pulled her in seductively. They kissed. Passionately she kissed him until their mouths were open. She opened her mouth wider to let his tongue touch her own, but what was that taste? Taylor was kissing her widely now, his mouth wide open and his tongue brushing against hers. There was a taste that she hated in his mouth. What was that taste? She tried to stop him but he did not stop kissing her. She panicked and pulled suddenly away from him, pushing off with both hands from his chest. With her hands cupped out in front of her she spat. She wanted the taste to come out of her mouth, and it did. Cigarette butts dropped from her tongue into her hands. More and more of them came. Just the butts of the cigarettes falling from her mouth to no end. And she coughed... She coughed as she sat straight up in bed, sighing to catch her breath. Immediately she whipped the back of her hand across her mouth, still sensing the overwhelming taste that she hated. "Oh my god," she whimpered, almost in tears. She looked at the bed next to her where Taylor was sleeping silently. "It was only a dream..."



The unusual silence at the breakfast table the next morning had both of them curious. They assumed each other's thoughts, trying to predict the morning conversation that was inevitable. Taylor felt sick. He hadn't even seen his wife and the shrink going at it and he was still disgusted this morning by the overwhelming realism of the dream. Beth just stabbed at her eggs and toast, not wanting to put anything into her mouth for fear that it would taste of cigarettes.

"I see you skipped your morning cigarette hun. Why's that?" The ice was broken. "Are you out or did you find some inner-incentive to help you quit? I know you never miss that first cigare..."

"Enough!" Taylor shouted louder than usual. She caught the drift. Mornings were usually a good time for Beth and Taylor. The coffee was always warm and the conversation usually matched, but not this morning. This morning they both had other things on their minds.

"I had a dream last night!" Both of them heard what the other had said simultaneously. Their eyes matched a look of disgust and the coincidence of the remark only heightened the left over emotion from their dreams.

"Was it a bad dream?" she asked him, hoping it wasn't.

"Hell yeah it was a bad dream! I can't get it out of my head."

"Me too. I can't stop tasting, uh, I mean thinking about it." The two sat silently rehashing last night's scare. "Listen Taylor, I need you to quit smoking, and I want you to do it now. I don't care how but you have to do it for me if not for yourself 'cause I can't handle it anymore." He looked across the table at her through the steam from his black coffee but did not say anything. "I'm getting impatient with your nasty habit. If you need more incentive I was serious about not having sex with you until you quit. Cigarettes or sex, it shouldn't be a hard decision." She had done it! She dropped the sex bomb and it landed right on Taylor's chest! It was the same feeling from the dream the night before that surged through his mind. Silence filled the room thick before he had the right words to speak.

"I know I need to quit. I'm gonna' make some calls today and, well, maybe I'll give this damn hypnosis cure a try." The smile began to form across Beth's mouth. "I said I'll give it a try! If the shrink starts touching me while I'm unconscious I'm suing for the big bucks, ya' hear me?" Instantly he felt better, as if giving in to her nagging might actually

pay off. Maybe he could get to the shrink before the shrink got to his wife.

“Here’s the number right here.” Beth pulled a torn out piece of newspaper from her purse and slid it across the table towards her husband as if it was a well wrapped Christmas present.

“It sounds like an info-mercial” he mocked while reading the advertisement. “Alcohol or Drugs a problem? It doesn’t have to be! Call now! Call now! Call now! Only 4 visits and your wife will start having sex with you again! Oh, look hun. It says there are programs for compulsive eating and obesity too!” There came that look again. How much Taylor loved evoking that look out of Beth.

“No more excuses Taylor. If you move only one finger all day, make it the one that dials that number.” She slid him the phone and waited.

“It’s a great day at Phoenix Method One, my name is Julie. How can I help you today?”

“Hi, yes, I’d like to quit smoking...”



“How long was I asleep?” Taylor asked rubbing his eyes.

“About 40 minutes. It seemed like days didn’t it?” The doctor sipped his water and went back to noting Taylor’s every move on a pad of paper.

“Yeah, it did.”

“Well,” the doctor continued, “if it felt like days then think of it like this, you just went days without a cigarette.”

“Hun, you there?” The anxiety in Taylor’s voice was overly recognizable.

“Yeah, I’m here.” A hand came from behind the leather couch and touched Taylor’s shoulder. “I’ve been here the whole time watching you drool in your sleep.” She smiled to console him. “Everything went well.”

“I don’t feel any different. I mean, I’m not craving right now, but who’s to say that I won’t want one the minute I step out of that door.” Taylor’s skepticism had managed to make it through the hypnosis. The doctor obviously didn’t have the cure for well practiced cynicism.

“What you need to do most of all is have faith in yourself. If you want to quit then you can quit. Well Taylor, I wish you the best of luck and success. My job is done so you are free to go. Please stop by the counter on your way out and my secretary will handle the billing details. Now, don’t forget what we talked about Beth.”

“I won’t. Thank you.”

“Uh... thanks. Come on hun let’s go.” Taylor jumped up from the leather sofa as if it was burning his ass.

“Thanks again.” Beth smiled at the doctor as they strolled out of the door.

“What was the Doctor talking about? What aren’t you supposed to forget?”

“I dunno... I forgot.” Now it was Taylor’s turn to give the look that kills, the look that pries unwilling information out of any subject, the look that he learned from his wife over the last 34 years. “He just told me some tips on how I could help you quit easier, stuff like keeping stress low and motivation high. I told him you already had the highest of motivating factors, sex with me.”

“You told him that?”

“No, but if I had I think he would have congratulated me on my success.”

“Here’s your bill” the secretary said behind thick glasses, without looking up. “You can make payment now, or you can mail it in to this address within 30 days. Thanks for choosing Phoenix Method One. Have a nice day.”

Taylor stared at the piece of paper that showed the charges from Dr. Domywife. “Now that makes me want to have a cigarette!”



“Do you want one?”

“One what?”

“Oh quit playing with me. Do you feel like you want one?” She needed to know. She couldn’t even think about kissing him until the words of progress came past his lips.

“No I’ll take two please.”

“Two?!?!”

“Yeah, two ear plugs.” The look of death soon followed his smart ass comment. “Well Beth, have I had one yet? Have you seen me smoking?”

“No.”

“O.K. then. It’s been four days since my therapy and I feel pretty good without one, so let’s just see where this goes. If I can make it a week without one then I might give Dr. Domy... I mean, the doctor half of that

huge bill he slapped us with. I know what I do want though.” Taylor slithered across the couch towards his wife.

“Oh yeah, what do you want?”

“A kiss. A kiss from my lovely wife that doctors everywhere envy.”

“What?”

“Nevermind. Gimme a kiss!” The smell from the dream made her hesitate. She feared the worst, but what she got was nothing like that at all. His lips were soft, and his breath was minty and cool against her own.

“This is how it should taste! I love you Taylor. Thank you for...”

“Shhhhhhh! Give me what I want or else.”

“Or else what?”

“Or else I’ll go to the kitchen and make myself a strong drink. I heard new habits are hard to break Beth.” There was a look, but not the one he expected. She looked happy, content, but most of all desirable.

“Why don’t you throw that last pack in the garbage and come to the bedroom Taylor. I remembering making a promise to you that I’d love to keep.”



MICHIGAN SUMMER

Ponja Vahs

What happened this summer? Where did it go?
It rained all through spring into June don't you know.

July came and went in the blink of an eye.
August brought fall with geese starting to fly.

As September started the leaves changed their hue.
We raked, complained and felt cheated too.

The cranes didn't wait for the festival to leave us.
They gathered and departed. It's cold here b'Jesus.

Three months of summer is what we're allotted.
We're Michiganders, we're rugged, undaunted.

But three months are due us. It's not fair to have less.
We should have had summer before having Christmas!

In our beautiful mitten with its flora and fauna,
We tighten our belts and hope for next summer.

MY DESTINY
Christopher Cook

I see it but I am
Scared
Confused and
Did I say scared... Yes
Let's talk about that word for a sec...
Fear
Unpleasant often strong emotion by anticipation or awareness of
danger.
Danger is the last thing that scares me its..
Disappointment
Failure
And letting the word in the title down

I can't fathom the greatness that he has planned
Or
Is it greatness at all is the question
Or
Does it matter because we are all a part of a bigger
Much
More Intricate Plot Masterminded
By Thee... Jehovah

Jirah –My Provider
Teacher
And Friend

Its bigger than me it's HE that makes these lines Lyrical to express my
ultra critical views of what I think I am supposed to do for HE IS

Walking down the road that points me 2 the
GREATER ME
That is
Closer to HE or maybe
SHE
FATHER, Mother, Daughter, SON, HOLY BEING
That guides me to hopefully She

That will help me make... HE or
SHE
Loving babies to praise THEE that
Created me from the sand & she from me
Eternally 2gether for the Purpose of being in his FAMILY
That makes me ... ME purposeful as the birds and bees to praise HE or
She
To be a Vessel is my destiny to uplift THEE... or SHE

LEONARD COHEN SINGS A EULOGY

Rebecca J. Hector

The sound of the bedroom door slamming brings me out of my daze as I stand in the kitchen, staring down the hallway in awe. I'm glad that Amy decided to go to our room and take a nap instead of continuing our hour long argument as to why we were out of canned pears and what we were going to eat with our dinner that night. The way in which she has recently been able to transform even the most mundane pieces of our lives into subjects for disagreement is nothing short of amazing. The cupboard is still hanging open, its inner shelves full of boxes of generic macaroni and cheese and canned soups on display for the world to see. I had searched and searched for that can of pears, hoping that finding it would somehow quiet Amy and save me from sinking.

I decide that skipping dinner that night is better than waking her up. In the living room of our tiny apartment I stretch out on the faded plaid sofa that we found at a Goodwill store. The paper-thin walls that can't block out the sounds of the city, let alone the sounds of the neighbors, almost seem as though they are closing in on me. I close my eyes and try to relax with my thoughts and block out the noise that seems to constantly flood our neighborhood. My thoughts drift back to Amy, except this time I think about the day we met. I had just moved to the city and she had just started working at a hot dog stand on the corner of Lexington Avenue and 42nd Street. The way she smiled when she handed me my hot dog and Coke and told me how much she liked my David Bowie shirt has never left my mind. I told her that I liked the blue streaks that ran through her honey-blond hair. That weekend we snuck into a Pretenders concert together. She moved in with me a month later and we've been together ever since. Five years of "shacking up" (as my mother likes to call it). When I open my eyes and float back to reality the walls start to feel as though they're closing in on me again. I can't help but think "Is this where life has taken me? Is this where life has taken us?" Five years of being in the city has given us 700 square feet of apartment in a decaying neighborhood, complete with ancient shag carpeting and furniture straight out of a thrift store. Amy is still jumping from one waitress job to the next

and I'm still working as a sales clerk in a record store. Five years have given us time to search for an ending that I don't think we're going to find. I sink into the musty couch cushions.

A noise coming through the wall interrupts my thoughts. We live next door to a middle-aged couple who can't seem to do anything together without ending up in some sort of domestic dispute. I walk over to our turntable and hit the power button without even checking to see which record I'm about to listen to. Soon the dry baritone voice of Leonard Cohen and the droning of his classical guitar fill the room. I bought Amy this record a few weeks back for her 23rd birthday. I'll never forget the happy look on her face as she kissed my cheek and then rushed to play the record. It was pouring rain that day and as we sat on the couch and listened to the music, the raindrops hit our living room window like tiny bullets. Amy looked beautiful as she talked about each song on the album and told me how she felt connected to each one. Her cobalt eyes were intense as she told me about the empathy she felt for the homeless woman Leonard describes in "Suzanne." Her voice was thick with passion as she described the remorse she felt for the tormented woman named Jane in "Famous Blue Raincoat." The last song we listened to that night was "So Long Marianne," a bittersweet melody about a man leaving a lover who has made him forget all the responsibilities he has in his life. As the end of the song drew near, I asked her what her thoughts were. She looked at me and said "I always thought that this song sounded like a eulogy." In her mind Leonard stood behind a pulpit, bidding a casual farewell to his beloved Marianne, telling her "so long" as he remembered the way she made him forget. Tonight, as I lay on the couch and Amy sleeps in the other room, I listen to Leonard Cohen sing Marianne her eulogy.

At some point during all these thoughts I hear Amy get up, go to the bathroom, and draw a bath. I fall asleep for a little while and when I awake the apartment is dark, but the record is still playing. I shut off the turntable and decide that it's safe for me to proceed to the bedroom. While walking down the hallway to our bedroom, I notice a faint light coming from under the bathroom door. In the bathroom I find Amy, sitting in the empty bathtub shivering. Her hair is damp and stringy and she's sitting with her arms wrapped around her legs, staring down at her feet. When I ask her why she's sitting in that empty bathtub, she looks at me with melancholy eyes and says "After the water drained, I just couldn't get up." I ignore this, wrap her bathrobe around her shoulders, and lift her out of the bathtub. The faint whiskers of blood that have collected near the drain are

a glaring reminder of recent events. When I lay her in our bed she looks at me and tells me that she heard the record playing earlier. Voices and lyrics had floated into the bathroom like fog and the words to Marianne's eulogy drifted into Amy's ears while she was draining the water from the tub. She describes the way she couldn't take her eyes off that churning water or the hole that seemed to pull it downward with such force. The last bit of water to swirl down that void was laced with crimson and Amy had been convinced that she was sinking along with it.

Amy burrows deep under the covers and finds a comfortable position. Her breathing soon becomes regular and I know that she is sleeping. While I'm lying there in the dark next to her, I begin to realize that part of me was in that last bit of water. Amy and I had both stood by and listened to a eulogy while that water slipped away from our lives. I have to keep reminding myself that it's better this way. Not everyone can keep their heads above water in a sea of worn shag carpeting. There are those who need lifeguards to keep them from sinking. Amy and I are not ready to be lifeguards.

The next morning I wake up before Amy does and head to the store. When I return to the apartment she's still asleep and I start to prepare breakfast. While pouring orange juice into glasses, I'm reminded of my mother and the summer we spent at the ocean's shore when I was just 6 years old. The juice is the same color as the life jacket she made me wear while I swam. She stood in the water with me like an anchor and made sure the pull of the ocean didn't carry me out to sea. I place two aspirin tablets next to Amy's glass and think about our drifting lives. I'm glad that drain couldn't have possibly pulled her down with that water. I'm glad because I'm not sure I could've saved her from sinking.

The paper napkins and plastic spoons are lying neatly on the card table that functions as our dining room table. The brightly colored labels on the two cans of pear halves I bought that morning look like rainbows against the storm that is raging outside. I hear Amy wake up and start to get dressed. She's angry because the black sweater she wanted to wear today is covered with lint. Thunder roars as I move into the living room and press the power button on the record player. The familiar baritone voice fills the room and I hope that neither one of us is going to sink this time. The surface of the card table looks dull and the walls of the apartment close in again as I sit and wait for Amy.

I AM A MAN

Sherri Kelso

I AM A MAN

I am strong, I am wise
The best thing a woman can offer me
Is what's between her thighs

I AM A MAN

No woman's strength can compare to me
There are only two things in life that matters
And that's my pride and my money

I AM A MAN

Why can't you understand?
The world was made for me
You are just a visitor in my land.

I AM A MAN

Did I make myself clear?
If it wasn't for my rib
You would not be here

I AM A MAN

You will never see me cry
This thing called love you women worship,
Is nothing when you die

I AM A MAN

And now you ought to know
All things I just told you
Take them wherever you go

Since I AM THE MAN

I make the world go 'round
So every time you see me passing
You must bow down

LOOKING FOR MY MOTHER

Elizabeth Anne Williston

I'm not looking for a poet-god
I already have the God who lives within.
I don't need another Voice to erase my own
and recreate it in the image of Her.
I may not know who I am but I do know
I Am.

I am ready to explore without limits my meaning;
to recreate and rec-re-ate language,
stretching it into the shape I seek;
to use the inadequate tool of the word
that escapes the edge of my thought;
to capture its essence before it flees
into effervescence.

I'm not looking for a poet-god but the
maternal guide who will push me to release
this moment's truth before evaporation;
to distill the moment into one clear drop.

I look too for siblings to join in communion;
with their own Word to center who they are
so that in joining together we might experience
rebirth into ourselves;
eternally creating who I am and who we are.

I look for the vagina that will squeeze and push,
enclose me in a bruising hug; prevent my return
to the blankness of the womb.

My eyes are not open. Enfolding me is the raw touch
of that ridged tunnel that is my mother's last embrace
before releasing me wearing her blood to the world.

I wait to draw that first screaming cry; to focus my eyes
on the face of the one who will suckle me; whose flesh
will feed my hunger to know who is my mother.

THE LAST DAY

Alexis Johnson

The keys jingled as the diesel engine came to a low rumble. This was it, the very last time ever to hear that engine. After 42 years I've come to know how to start and drive a yellow bus. How life altering, she said to herself with a bit of sarcasm, I've made such a huge accomplishment! Today I will walk off this bus at the end of the route and know I have not fulfilled my life long dreams, or made a huge life savings. I won't even have anything to show for it. What will I do with myself? Everyone talks about the joys of retirement. The time you get to spend with others. But who will I spend my time with? It's not like there is anyone for me at home. After Bill's death, nights have become so lonely. How will I ever survive through the day, as well?

The bus ride from the garage to the school was minutes away, although to Judy it seemed like eternity. As she drove she was reminded of old Mr. Hagg. At least I will never have to see or hear Mr. Hagg again, she thought. Every day Mr. Hagg would sit on his porch just waiting to greet Judy with his rude sarcasm and unthoughtful judgments. "You know, lady, one of these days I'm gonna report you! I'm gonna call your boss. I'll tell him how those kids of yours act. They don't need to be so loud and rowdy this early in the morning! Can't you calm them down?" he would yell. He would then add, "Why don't you go find a real job? One that you can actually succeed in!" Judy always gave him an unkind glare. She knew it was inappropriate to say anything to Mr. Hagg in front of the children. And now as she thought about it, what would she have said anyway? She knew that her job amounted to nothing. There wasn't any real great talent in driving a bus. It was just the first job she found out of high school and at the time she believed it to be temporary. Besides, the children were just being children. How was she supposed to calm them down, when they were excited to go to school? Maybe he is right though, about the job. Judy's thoughts went sour again.

Pulling into the school parking lot, Judy headed to her usual spot. Immediately she began her evening routine: checking the seats and throwing away unwanted trash.

“Hello? Hello? Judy, are you in here?” asked the school principal Mr. Wright as he entered the bus.

“Hey Mr. Wright,” answered Judy standing up from behind a seat. “How are you today?”

“Pretty good actually, with today being the last, it’s running quite smoothly!” he responded with a smile. Judy wondered if Mr. Wright even knew she was not returning for the next school year.

“Hey Judy, do you have a sec? I have something for you.” Judy headed back to the front of the bus as Mr. Wright handed her a shoe box.

“What’s this all about?” she questioned.

“Well, the students, staff, and parents here at Walnut Hill wanted to show you some appreciation for all that you’ve done. We know that it’s your last day and we wanted you to have these to remember us by,” exclaimed Mr. Wright.

Judy opened the lid to the shoe box and found it overflowing with letters. Her eyes widened. She could feel the tears welling up behind her eyes, though she knew she would have to hold them back. “Judy, I just wanted you to know how important you were to so many people,” explained Mr. Wright as he left the bus. Judy was speechless.

Judy opened a few letters while she waited for the school bell to ring.

Dear Ms. Judy,

You have been the best bus driver ever! You always get me to school on time and you seem to know the fastest route home, so I can play with my friends.

Plus, that one time when I fell down running to the bus you knew just how to fix me. You made sure all the other kids did not know I was crying, thank you. I will miss you lots.

Your Friend,

Joey

Judy looked at the handwritten letter and could remember when Joey fell down. She remembered that he tried so hard to hold back his tears, but they started to fall uncontrollably. She had taken her sleeve and wiped them away without anyone noticing and then immediately told a hilarious joke, to make him laugh. This surprised Judy. How did young Joey remember this? She didn’t know it had meant so much to him. Next

she opened a more formal, typed letter. This letter was from one of her devoted parents.

Dearest Judy,

Let me begin with saying you will be greatly missed. I can't believe that you have been escorting my Isabel and Lucas to school for all these years. I don't know what I would have done without you. Every day I would have to leave minutes before the bus came to head off to my own job. I always knew though that I could count on you. I never had to worry whether or not my children would arrive to school on time, or if they were in good hands. You were a life saver in so many ways. I can remember the few times when I was late getting home and you refused to allow my children to get off the bus. I know this may seem minute to you but the safety of my children and all the others on the bus was your number one priority. And, as a parent, I couldn't have asked for anyone better to look after my children. I appreciate all that you have done for my children and myself. You will be deeply missed.

Your Dearest Friend,
Molly Carpenter

Judy didn't know what to think about this; it was unexpected. Had she really touched this many lives? She heard the bell ringing from inside the school and knew that the rest of the letters would have to be saved for later. The high school students began to board the bus; everyone seemed to be overjoyed for the last day of school. All the stops ran as normal. As each student departed the bus a special thank you was given to Judy. Some of the girls even extended their appreciation with a hug, which touched Judy greatly. She had never felt so much love.

Judy became sad again; she knew she would yearn for their affection once she was gone. Days like this caused her to regret not having children of her own. Bill and she had made a mutual decision a long time ago not to have children. At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do. Bill had always worked in a factory and her bus driving salary had never been much. They thought having children would have been nice, but

providing for them would have been a bit tight. Besides they had always had each other, and they were satisfied with that. Bill's death had been unexpected. She knew she would be lonely, really lonely.

While she continued to drive from stop to stop, Judy thought again about all those letters. It was so unreal! She never thought her simple job had been taken seriously by so many people. As she came closer to the end of the route, she began to reminisce about the fond memories that she would never forget. She remembered the dozens of students that she had watched grow over the years. One particular student she would never forget was Nick. Judy then looked in her rearview mirror to see if Nick was occupying his normal seat. Nick had ridden on Judy's route since he had started the first grade. Everyday he would get on the bus with a grim look and stroll to the back. It was his turf, according to the other students. Nick had always been withdrawn but an opinionated boy growing up. Most of the time he would keep to himself. There were a few occasions when Nick just couldn't seem to keep his mouth shut. And those times Judy had to usually sort through the mess. Judy knew that Nick had gone through some rough times at home, though she never really knew the messy details. She could remember a time when Nick got on the bus with his hair half done and shoe laces untied. The other boys on the bus had given him a hard time. Judy stuck up for him, though. She believed that he had left home in a hurry, maybe even from an argument. Nick's behavior and quietness that lurked during that day, clearly gave away his inside emotions. Judy, at times, tired to communicate with Nick, asking him to explain. But he never seemed interested in talking.

As the bus moved along the bumps and grooves in the road, she watched Nick gather his belongings and head toward her. For a moment she felt a tight squeeze in her heart. She knew that if he just had someone to guide him, he would be so sweet. Finally arriving at his stop, Nick walked past her to the door. As he departed the bus he turned, "Judy you've been an amazing bus driver, I'll never forget you! Thanks for always being a listening ear."

"But you never took me up on my offer to talk," Judy questioned.

"Yeah, but always knowing you were there was enough," responded Nick as the door closed behind him. Nick then was gone, before she could thank him. The tears then came rolling down her face.

Arriving at the garage, Judy once again got up and proceeded with her duties, checking the seats and throwing away unwanted trash. She then departed the school bus to the garage office. When she entered

the office the garage secretary explained that a voicemail had been left for her. Judy thought it was strange but immediately went to the phone to receive it. After carefully dialing the number she heard the familiar voice of Mr. Roger Campbell, Walnut Hill's Superintendent. "Hi Judy, it's Roger Campbell, I was hoping I could catch you today before you left us. Sounds like you're still out on your route, so it might be my lucky day! Anyway, I wanted again to thank you for all you have done for the school and community. You mean so much to all of us! I also wanted to see if you were interested in continuing your involvement in the school. We're looking for classroom grandparents for next year, and we'd be honored to have you. I'm sure the children would get a kick out of it too! We can't just let you go. Let me know what you think. Talk to you later."

Judy hung up the phone. She felt delighted! It was as if Roger had been reading her mind. This would be great! She wouldn't be so lonely after all.



NIGHT PATH

Jessica Pletz

ME

Darren Hamman

I don't understand why everyone stares
When I take off my clothes and dance down the stairs.
Or when I stick carrots in both of my ears,
Then dye my hair green and go shopping at Sears.
If I were an angel, I'd tie-dye my wings!
Why can't folks accept me the way that I am?
So what if I'm different and don't act like them?
I'm not going to change and be someone I'm not.
I like who I am, and I'm all that I've got!

UNTITLED

James Melvin

Evil is his name and I admit he's captured me
He's left me under his whim
This evil makes me cry
It even makes me think what I wouldn't
I feel as I've never felt
Days pass and he grows still
Makes me go places I've never been
Give up things I never thought I would
Go days without eating
Cause spontaneous breakdowns
This evil is also known as
Love and I submit willingly
For all I've lost in control of self
I've gained in elation of the heart
I cry for not having you always near
I think about a future full of happiness
I feel as though I matter, as if it will be ok
Hours away to new places to be with you
I give up myself to gain another heart
I breakdown because of a feeling so strong
It makes the willow weep and the eagle soar
This evil is love, and I am willingly
His minion's prisoner



ELIZABETH

Stacey Willard

DEPRESSION

Jole Wells

I'm just gonna sleep
everyone just get away from me
when no one is near I weep.

why can't she just see –
me, or understand my love
will things be the way they used to be?

I can replace you, but I'm so sick of...
drinking, smoking, puking, forgetting
next I question Him above.

are You sitting there laughing?
You don't answer me, nope
You don't exist or You'd be fixing

my problems, or giving me some hope
we're through like We're through
it's over, I'll turn to the rope...

but I don't have the guts too
so instead I'll just weep
I blame this all on you, and You.

this life I wish not keep
drugs, alcohol – repeat –
I'm just gonna sleep.

THE BROTHERHOOD

Eric Martin

Immortality *[Im`mor*tal"i*ty\, (n.)1. The quality or state of being immortal; exemption from death and annihilation; unending existence; as, the immortality of the soul.*

So this is what the last laugh feels like, ‘cept I ain’t laughin’.

In fact, pretty much everybody here is crying.

I never thought that people could actually cry about a guy who was such
an
asshole.

It’s not that I didn’t have compassion for you,
but it’s all about natural selection, dude, and your number came up.

“Nothin’ feels better than survival, bro.”

Remember me saying that?

That was the night you named me ‘Immortality.’

If what the Bible says is true, we probably won’t meet on the other side.

I would say “rest in peace.”

But how can a man who didn’t live in peace, rest in peace?

“Well, I’ll be damned.” That was pretty much the going thought throughout the chapel. Some didn’t understand it. Some couldn’t believe it. The rest just wanted to verify it. Either way, the man that we’d come to know as Big Brother Sir Uncle was dead. One by one, the pageant of passing continued, as those who knew him paid their last...um... ‘respects’? There was his mother; a large woman who just seemed frail and afraid and cut to half her size by her pain. There was his father; stoic and uncomfortable. There were people of all ages and races and faces and demeanors packed into the tiny little funeral parlor. Then, filling the first two rows behind his family, were his fraternity brothers. The older brothers sat in front of us – the younger brothers, (or “new bloods.”) If there was any regret, we didn’t show it. If there was any pain, it was deep and personal. We were the last new bloods that he would ever see, (as he put it), “take up the cause of this most honorable society,” Sigma Kappa Psi. We were in the

midst of viewing the frame of what was left of him, as he lay in his casket.

“Yeah, all these people are comforting each other by fooling themselves into believing he’s in a better place ‘looking down on us.’ I’ll bet all my tips for the next year that the chances are more likely that he’s looking up at us. You seen Abe around?”

“He’s behind you. You’re up.”

Apathy \Ap"ɑ*thy\, (n.) *Lack of interest or concern, especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal; indifference.*

This has got to be one of the longest ‘short-walks’ I’ve ever taken.
I don’t do churches, I don’t do God, and I damned sure don’t do
funerals.

I gave up a hot little piece of ‘skirt’ to be here.

Damn. It’s only 1:30. Seems like I’ve been here forever.

Jesus Christ. Leah is really shitty over your whole death and all.

Did you ever tell her about that one girl, Nia?

Looks to me like she could use some ‘comforting.’

That’s my cue.

I’ve been standing here long enough.

Immaturity \Im`ma*tu"ri*ty\, (n.) *The state or quality of being immature or not fully developed; unripeness; incompleteness.*

“This is bad. This is really bad. THIS IS WORSE THAN BAD, THIS IS FUCKED UP!” I yelled. We all coulda yelled. I just did it first. All the same, it came from somewhere:

“Shut the fuck up!”

“You shut the fuck up! We gotta chop that up or throw it in the garbage or something. We gotta go now. That’s a dead body!”

It was cold as fuck outside, and now to go with being annoyed by unending streams of snot, there’s this body lying here. The previous month

between mid-terms and spring break was for pledging sororities or fraternities. We pledged Sigma Kappa Psi. A lot of it was true: We boozed. Some of the guys smoked a little herb. But pledging sucked. All of the older brothers could be real shitty with us when they wanted to, but the guy who was now lying at my feet – Big Brother Sir Uncle – was the worst of the worst. And he always had this grin on his face that almost seemed like he was trying to hide just how much he was really enjoying our torture. This was the type of guy that would make us walk through the slushy, muddy creek in nothing but boots and boxers. This was the type of guy that would make us play a game called ‘dirty little cookie,’ where we each had to reach into the cookie jar, and pull out a cookie. All of them were chocolate, chocolate chip...except one. Let’s just say the dirty little cookie wasn’t made of chocolate. Long story, short, we planned for our pledge captain to have an accident. I didn’t think it would actually happen, but –

“Check ‘em...”

“Dead”

damn

Resiliency \Re*sil"i*en*cy\ (n.) 1. *The act of resiling, springing back, or rebounding; as, the resilience of a ball, sound, or spirit.*

“Put on your game faces.” The whole time I’m on the cell with 911, I’m thinking about those cop shows where they catch people on tape and they always say something that’s gonna get them in trouble later. My job is to not do that. I didn’t want this to happen, but it needed to. Now it has.

The lady on the other end seemed to be excited just to have a call. She’s probably gonna tell all of her fat little neighbors in the coming week about the college boy who died and how she took the call.

“Ummm...I dunno....we were all just finishing up pledging for the night, and he slipped down the back stairs on some ice. He’s not moving.”

“DON’T MOVE HIM! OH MY GOD, DON’T MOVE HIM!” she yelled back through the phone. I knew that part already.

“EMS is on its way, maybe cops too. Put on your game –”

I guess he ain’t so dead. A good boot to the back of the head ought to do it. Thunk!

“What!” What the hell are they staring at me for?

Secrecy \Se"cre*cy\, (n.) 1. *The state or quality of being hidden; as, his movements were detected in spite of their secrecy; fidelity to a secret*

The older brothers all wanted us to bond as a pledge class. Staring at this recently-living dead man, we all know that we’ll have this moment in common forever. From now on, we’ll be bonded for damned sure.

How ironic that you named me ‘Secrecy,’ when you were the same one who said I couldn’t keep a secret if my life depended on it. Who knew what type of secrets I could keep? Who knew that very soon, my life would depend on my ability to keep the most delicate of secrets?

Tonight, I helped cover my brothers for an ‘accidental’ death. Wanna know a secret Big Brother Sir Uncle? It was no accident.

“He said he was going to get something out of the garage out back.” That’s what the police heard anyway. What they didn’t know was that the ‘thing’ you were going to get was a rope...to restrain your girlfriend with. I don’t get you, dude. And on top of that, you wanted us to help you?

Instead, we iced the stairs and got you first. We had to do it. People were gettin’ tired of your shit. Nobody will care, and nobody will miss you when you’re gone. Can I keep a secret that my life depends on? I don’t have a choice anymore.

*Cain and Abel – Sons of Adam and Eve.
Cain had some jealousy issues, and killed his brother Abel
by smashing his head between rocks*

It doesn't feel real.

You don't even look real lying there.

My mind is racing in a million different directions right now,

And you're probably laughing at me about that too.

I remember the night that you gave me my pledge name. You said that one day my conscience would get the best of me, and that one day good would win over evil. You were fucked-up, and I didn't think you knew what the hell you were talking about.

Maybe you weren't too far off track.

C: Look at him. The world will never know his final moments.

A: But God will.

C: Maybe, but the world – the same one that the police live in – will never know shit!

A: Don't you get it? This ain't over. Carrying the memory of this whole time will be no easier than walking around with his body strapped to our backs.

C: You're kidding me, right? It was either Leah, or him. Could you live with knowing your so-called brother killed his girlfriend? Guilt is guilt, and it would have been on your head regardless.

A: This is not right; we're better than this.

C: We're better than him. You're starting to sound a little shaky to me, Abe; a little soft. You're not thinking about anything stupid, are you? I am not goin' to prison, and you DEFINITELY are not the guy who's gonna send me there. Got it?

A: I guess we all have to make sacrifices. It just feels like I'm the only one who's already made his.

C: You'd be surprised what sacrifices I'm willing to make. Look at him, then take a look at yourself.

“In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.....Amen”

Epiphany \E*ˈpɪfəˈnɪ/, (n.) 1. *A sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something; a comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization.*

“A ha!” Everytime I figured out one of your stupid little riddles or puzzles you’d say that. I hated it. You knew it. Even in death, you still look like the smug, arrogant bastard you were the last time I saw you alive. You know, I’m a peaceful guy: I believe in God, and I call my mother.

You, I just didn’t like. There was no way we could have been brothers. This is why I didn’t argue when the plan was made.

Here’s an ‘Epiphany’ for you: I heard you talking to the older brothers. I know that you had no intention of doing anything to Leah. It was all another one of your sick fucking riddles.....a test of yours. You just wanted to see which one of us was actually capable of it.

I guess since I’m looking down on your coffin, that would be me.

“May you rest in peace, as I live in peace.”

And may this be the only secret I ever keep from my brothers.

“Amen.”

GOD'S WILL

Yolanda Green

Monday, April 1, 1968

I had to go to Mrs. Lewis house to take her these greens and cornbread momma made last night. Mrs. Lewis is a sweet old lady. We stay on the 3rd floor and she lives on the first floor of these run down apartments. My room ain't no bigger than the broom closet at school. My bed ain't no real bed with springs that used to scratch my back every night until Mrs. Lewis gave me that nice thick quilt. Our living room is very small with the kitchen in the same room. I feel so closed in because it's so small. Why can't we live over there in the nice apartments where the white people live? It's like one side is the ghetto and around the corner is a whole New World. Our buildings don't got a fresh coat of paint instead there is graffiti all over the walls and trash everywhere.

Today as usual Randy and me went half on a 10cent newspaper. Randy is my cousin who lives down the hall and our dads are brothers. He's two years younger than me, but we still close. The first sentence said, "The race is on between good will and ill will in black-white-relationships and the events of this April will no doubt provide us with a forecast of what is to come." What damn relationship? The white man ain't trying to make the relationship better.

Tuesday, April 2, 1968

I don't know what's worse, the white people treating me bad or my own people. My momma black and so is my daddy. My daddy hauls trash and momma cleans houses. We ain't got no more than other black people. My skin maybe a little light but it ain't white.

Today I had to catch the city bus to my aunt's house across town. I was sitting in front of Rasheeda and Estelle on the bus. They are in the same grade as my older brother, junior. At the next stop a white man gets on and sits right by me. Only thing I could do is hold my breath. Sweat began to drip down my forehead. I could smell his expensive perfume. Next thing I know I hear Rasheeda and Estelle whispering.

"Look at Earl Jr. little sister pretending to be white, Rasheeda said.

“I know she make me sick with her yellow self. That’s all she is, if white people look more carefully, said Estelle.

Here I am black but light enough I guess to look white but my hair is kinky like wire. That white man would have never called me a nigger bitch. If the two of them had not been whispering about me. I wouldn’t had to get off the bus feelin’ shame. I just got off at the next stop and walked 4 blocks to my aunt’s house. Maybe one day everybody will worry about other things like this stankin’ trash instead of skin color.

Wednesday, April 3, 1968

Lately all this family can talk about is the garbage strike. Daddy been hauling trash for years and his pay should show it. My momma worried about bills and how we gonna all eat.

“Look Lorraine I ain’t fin’ to talk about this now!” daddy said.

“When then? All you do is sit on your ass all day listening to that King! Well, Dr. King ain’t payin’ for shit ‘round here! This strike done lasted almost 2 months now,” momma said.

“You know what Lorraine if you learn to shut yo damn mouth sometimes you would hear the man mean good to the Negroes. We ain’t got nobody else. The white man already conspired to kill Malcolm X in ’65 and they killed that NAACP man in ’63! I can’t think of his name,” daddy said.

My life has enough worries like if I can some new kicks for my feet. My shoes is talkin’ to each other they so raggedy! But I dare not ask momma for nothin’ or daddy. I ain’t never gonna get Roger Smith attention wit raggedy shoes. I have always had a crush on him! That boy looks mighty fine. He’s in the tenth grade and plays football.

Wednesday, April 3, 1968

Today I had to ride the bus again. I didn’t have to worry about Estelle and her friend talking about me. I’m used to it though. I ain’t really got no best friend except for Randy. We both love to read and write. I want to become a journalist and we both want be one of them reporters on TV.

My English teacher Ms. Wagner, said, “Blacks do not make good journalist because no wants to see them on TV. How about becoming a secretary?”

Well I really don’t care what she say and I ain’t gonna be no secretary. Because if Dr. King can make it on TV so can I.

My dad and brother are going to hear Dr. King speak at Mason Temple. I decided to go and write my own story about. I promised Randy I would do that for him since he can't go. He wants to hear about it before the newspapers come out tomorrow.

I never saw Dr. King up close until tonight. He is a handsome man who is smart and use big words. It was so many people there some standing all round the walls to the back of the church. They even had to leave the door open so the people who didn't get there in enough time to find a seat could hear outside. I brought my notebook with me too, so I could take notes to for my story. Hopefully momma will want to read it. She think we all crazy and ain't nothing ever gonna change. I will never forget the name of his speech, "I've been to the Mountaintop." I liked when he said "I can remember when Negroes were just going around, so often, scratching where they didn't itch, and laughing when they were not tickled. But that day is all over. We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world."

Thursday, April 4, 1968

"King to ignore ban on March," that's what the paper said today. It went on to say, "A federal judge issued an order Wednesday barring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from holding a massive 6,000-man march in Memphis next Monday, but the integration leader promptly announced he would ignore it.

I really don't understand why we ain't worrying about other things. I saw the new shoes I want but I dare not ask because of the strike. I guess momma have a point about money because I can't say I don't feel it.

Thursday, April 4, 1968

They shot him!

I was sitting outside trying to write a poem for my English class when Earl Jr. came running up to me.

"They shot him," junior said.

"Shot who," I said

"Dr. King," junior said.

My hands went numb for few seconds and I began to sweat and tears just fell from my eyes. It was like losing a loved one. I can't believe it! I knew it was true when things got crazy.

First, we heard a lot of popping like fire crackers but we all knew better and ran inside. Went inside to Mrs. Lewis's house because she lived

on the first floor. It was so noisy all of a sudden. Then we heard people screaming all through out the ghetto. Momma's callin' for they little ones to come inside. People running every which way! Fires being started, home-made bombs going off, rock throwing, and fighting.

It's scary! They turning over cars! I ain't never seen people being killed in front of my eyes until today. Junior want to go outside and find momma but Mrs. Lewis ain't having it. I'm glad because he would get his self killed! I'm worried about her too but I know she wouldn't want us out in dis mess!

I'm watching Mr. Bee's corner store burn too, right now! I see Willie Lee, and Jerome Wilson throwing rocks at this white man walking by. They hit him in the head and he fell. I can't believe this! Five more boys from our complex jumpin' him! Oh! God! I think that was Johnny Smith who hit him in the face with a brick! He dead! He's got to be!

I feel bad but then again I don't! White people deserve every ass whippin' they get tonight!

Friday, April 5, 1968

I ain't never seen so many colored people mad at one time in my life. I ain't never in a million years think I would see my daddy cry. I know the killer was white and who ever it was has made a lot of colored people real mad including me. It was all over the news, in the newspaper.

“Bands of Negroes enraged over the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King. In Memphis, general rioting followed the shooting of King.”

In Chicago, they are going mad too. “The violence that swept Chicago from north to south after assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King switched late last night from looting to arson and sniping. At one point police inside a stationhouse were pinned down by sniper fire.”

The paper claim the police is doing a manhunt. But they lying and they know it. They happy he gone. The newspaper said, “A massive federal manhunt spread through the South today for the assassin who killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and plunged the nation into mourning.”

Saturday, April 6, 1968

It's still not safe to go outside. Thursday was the worse with some many colored people fighting any white person that crossed they path. Starting fires, throwing rocks or bricks, and shooting. They have issued a curfew for 6 p.m. everywhere. This is crazy! What a world to live in?

With all that's going on, I pray for Mrs. King and their children. I

couldn't imagine losing my daddy because white people don't like what he trying to do for his people. His oldest daughter Yolanda, is only a year younger than me. I'm only 14 and to think of losing my daddy breaks my heart to pieces. Today the newspaper had a statement from Mrs. King. "I do think it's the will of God," said Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr. The will of God. Was that really God's will? Or was the will of these crackas?

Friday, April 2, 2004

That took me back to a place that seems so far away but so close. Today is my daddy's funeral and I found this old box of stuff. There you were with all my old newspaper clippings and poems.

I still believe after all these years, that Dr. King's death was a conspiracy. Boy! I feel so old at 50. It seems like yesterday when it all happened! I do know that Dr. King would be happy today if he could see that his time, speeches, and marches all paid off. Even though things have changed I will never understand why there was even racism. Today it seems silly to be offended by someone's skin color. It was silly back then too. Even though there are still some people out there who discriminate because of race, religion, or sexual orientation. I'm just glad that those people are the minority and not the majority.

TOTAL DESTRUCTION

Amanda Green

Tree branches sway like a hula dancer's grass skirt
The sky turns a dark green color
Flowers are closing up and going into hiding
Birds' sweet songs now are screeches for help

People try to take cover
"Head to the basement!"
"Get all of the animals in the cellar,
Make sure you grab some food!"

The time spent in the basement will be silent
Waiting for the almighty destructor to pass over
"Stay away from the windows!"
Even the toughest man's heart is racing uncontrollably

Debris passes the window in a frenzy
Every child covers their head waiting for the worse
A waterfall of tears stream down their face
A thundering train passes over their house

"Open your eyes, child"
The sun is out, the tornado has vanished
The only thing left from the destruction is the basement they waited in
The house is lying in the field three miles away.

Now the rebuilding of the devastating mess begins
The whole town emerges from their cellars and basements
Only to find the remains of their belongings scattered
Throughout the entire town

After destruction, we start fresh
A new beginning is set in place
People join hands and forces to help one another
It is sad that destruction of our lives

BITTER HEART, BROKEN SMILE

Julia Reges

Bitter heart, angry
On my bicycle
Up and down motion
Up and down the block
Faster, go faster
This is my bike, not my sister's
Cracks in the road, I don't see them
Falling, see the cement
Tumbling down, down
Everything goes white
Screaming, tears, crying
Chipped teeth, broken smile

BED

Mary R. Bonato

This is my safe place
Where I go to hide
The covers,
They keep me all wrapped-up inside.
Having to go to sleep, my body's so tired
I hope the alarm wakes me so I won't get fired!
"This pillow's all wrong"
Just where has mine gone
I must get it just-right
Or else we will fight!

No bedtime story is read,
No lullaby that sticks in my head,
Just sheep and sugar plum fairies that dance in my bed!

Sleep, I need sleep, I just really need sleep!
Tossing and turning, moving and squirming,
No matter what I do, my eyes want to peep!
I just don't know, I just can not sleep!
What is it I wait for?
Nothing left, but to dream
Just what will I think of?
Maybe, just ice cream.

REMEMBER

Becky Gehrman

There's this lady that comes into the Cracker Barrel all the time. She's a bit weird. She likes to hang around the store for long periods of time, not always shopping. The way she talks, you can tell she's a bit different. I'm a cashier there and next to the register are these engraved stones with inspirational/meaningful words. The other day she was looking through them for the word "remember." She proceeded to tell me a story about how she always buys the "remember" stones. She leaves them around the house and in her car and other odd places. In 1997 she was in an accident of some sort (I'm not sure exactly what it was, I didn't want to pry) and had a bit of brain damage. The doctors told her that if her condition didn't become any better within a year, she was likely to stay that way. Within a year she still had a hard time comprehending things, allowing them to sink in. There were phone numbers that she'd known most of her life that just weren't there anymore. Everything was in bits and pieces. Despite what the doctors said, she regained some of her capabilities. Although things still run a bit slower than normal, things aren't nearly as bad as they were. So when she comes across one of her stones with the little word, "remember" engraved on it, it forces her to remember how she used to be. When she has bad days and gets angry at her condition she holds one of the stones and remembers how bad off she was and how, according to the doctors, she should have stayed. Such a little word like "remember" can bring up so many meanings. It's amazing.

I told her that when I think of the word "remember," I think of all the people I used to know; the people that have passed or moved away. I remember my grandpa. I miss him. I remember my childhood friends. I remember all the people who shaped me and made me who I am today. I also remember the people who are shaping me now; the beautiful people who support me everyday. She picked out a pretty yellow stone and I had a green one. She asked me to set hers behind the counter and said, "you should set the other one aside for you." I lied to her and told her I would and that I might buy it later that day. As much as I wanted it, I didn't have

money to spend on a stone. After she ate, she came back up to buy the stone and told me to ring her up for two. She then paid, handed me back the receipt and said, "There, I bought yours too." I thanked her and she had the warmest smile on her face. After she left I held the stone in my hand. It's a really pretty stone, shiny and polished. I thought about where the stone came from. Someone had to pick it out of the Earth. To polish a stone you put it in a "tumbler" with a few other stones and some water. The stones rub together and polish each other. Some of the stones never even touch one another while in the tumbler, others leave a mark. She left a mark. I'll remember her.

She reminded me of something I wrote in high school; it's called, *Who Will Remember Me?* At the time I wrote this I was 16 and working at an old-folks-home. "Remembrance is the key to immortality. When I am old and I have passed, who will ensure my life after death? Who will pass on my legacy? Who will remember me? Before I die, I will be neglected and forgotten and I will deliberately be put in that position so you won't have to worry about me. Where do you picture yourself right before death, with friends or family? Or are you alone and forgotten? If I could be so easily tossed aside, what's to say you wouldn't be too?"

I am your grandparents, your aunt, your uncle, your cousin and your friend. I am your father, your mother, your sister, your brother and most importantly I am you. If remembrance is the key to immortality, then who would remember me? Would you?"

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

Ebony Robbs

It is the early sixties and
I am a beautiful black man
Strongly built in stature
I came to bring peace and unity amongst the races
People of all cultures, ethnic groups, and color codes.
I am a Strong Man in physical and mental appearance
I have marched on many streets
Chanting old hymns and songs.
From before my time
When slavery existed
Before this time
I have turned the other cheek never striking back
Even when all odds were against me
I have been in prison both mentally and physically
For speaking what is dear to me
The Truth!
My life, children's and wife's lives have been threatened on many
occasions
I have shaken the hands with
The enemy.
Knowing that eventually they would one day try to kill me
For speaking and preaching Liberty, Justice, Peace and Equality.
"I have a dream" that the riots will stop
That racism will cease and people of races and creeds
Will hold hands and the violence will cease
That we will be unified under one nation despite our differences
I have been in bondage for being a black man who others felt threatened
and sought not to understand.
That power Black man I am
With a vision to change the mind frames and thinking patterns of
generations to come
Where justice is utilized and freedom is won
This time and place is hard on a man like me
Here preaching and teaching God's law hoping that ears and hearts

would open up to me
Men, children, and women of color together holding signs
Signifying what needs to be
Equality
The right to vote, the right to freedom of speech
The right to education, the right for peace
The right to be free
Free indeed.
The fight still goes on in spite of the trials
Justice will be served
This is a time when my voice is heard
Blacks will vote
Blacks will be educated
And we will have a choice in the matter
Simply because.....
“I have a dream”!



CHICKADEE

Kelly Parker

TEARS

Michael Steven Mikalakis

“Come here to me!”
The letter reads,
“Come to me, follow your dreams.”
She puts it down,
She cannot read,
The memory too painful to bear.
Six years ago she met a man
Who always said he loved her.
But she moved away
And could never say,
How her heart bled for him.
She proceeds reading the letter,
She couldn’t believe
That she missed out on her dreams.
“I still can’t see what went wrong.
I loved you and you know it’s true.
No matter what you say or do,
I will always love you.”
Three years earlier she met a man
Who would soon become her spouse.
She never knew how she felt
Or what was on her mind.
So this man’s letter remained closed
Until the day he died.
She realized what a mistake she made
But it was too late.
She realized that the time she spent
Will now and always be a waste.
He left her with what he wanted to say.
He knew that she would read it someday.
But he never thought on his final day
With tears falling on his grave.

TEA WITH J. ALFRED

Elizabeth Anne Williston

Shall I take tea with
J. Alfred and muse about
the mermaids in the midst
of us, as we tremble
by the sea
trading wistful fancies
of romantic temptresses

trailing long strands of
glittering sand-grit hair?

I too grow old.

Wandering melancholy woods
leaves trampled underfoot by
passing centuries
no path here left unspoken for.

I pick a speck of dust from
my sleeve, hold it to the light,
straining to hear
tiny shouting Who's
that I might
rescue them.

"Too late"
gusts the wind.

I sigh, shuffling my feet past
the gate. It is much too late,
no more important dates.

Eyelids drift down,
face painted as a clown.
No matter.

I will fit in
with the children
brightly painted
glittering gold and
silver treasures
marking the flesh
of their nose
and brow.

And even now
I forget to remember.

it is Autumn, not December.



UNTITLED

Tracey Fix

GOING BACK TO GRACELAND

Tamara Calkins

Ellen looked over at Jim as they drove down the highway, Pink Floyd blaring on the radio. Over the course of 20 years they must have listened to this song a couple thousand times. They had honeymooned in Tennessee fifteen years ago and now they were returning to Graceland to end their marriage in the place it had began. She shifted in her seat trying to get comfortable. She played out the scenes in her head of the Story of Jim and Ellen.

They had met in high school, she attended Grand Ledge and he went to Charlotte; they had hooked up after a basketball game at Charlotte High School. She was sweet sixteen and had never been kissed, well, only once or twice. Jim was a linebacker on the football team, what a catch for a band geek. At first she thought he didn't really like her that much; he didn't smile all night. When she asked him if everything was all right, he said "Yea, I'm having a great time, why?" He explained that he had been born without the ability to smile, something about the muscles in his face. At first she thought he was yanking her chain, but as she observed him more she realized he must be telling the truth. His friends had even nicknamed him "Grim" because of it. They were so young and so in love.

She felt Jim's hand on her leg, "Wanna' burn one?"

Ellen roused herself. "What?"

"You know, you wanna burn one?" he asked again. She looked at him and smiled. "Sure, why not. I think we were stoned most of our honeymoon." He pulled a joint out of his shirt pocket stuck it in his mouth and fired it up. He took a long drag and handed it to her. Ellen hit it a couple of times and handed it back. They sat in the companionable silence and smoked the joint.

"It's weird, isn't it?" he said after awhile. Ellen looked over at him. "Yes, it is."

"What happened to us?"

"A lot of things. Life's like that." She didn't look at him; she kept her eyes on the road ahead.

"I'm really sorry about everything, Ellen. I didn't mean to do this to us." He looked at her briefly, and then turned back to the highway. A sign for Graceland whizzed by. The silence was unbearable to Jim. "Would you say something, anything." Ellen looked at him and said, "What do you want me to say, Jim? We loved, lived, laughed, fought, broke up, reunited, married, had a child, and now." She broke off momentarily and then continued, "Now, now that part of our lives is over." She looked away and stared out her passenger side window at the mile markers passing quickly by.

"It was the affair that finished it for you, wasn't it?" he said.

"Yes, but not the way you think."

"What do you mean?"

Ellen sighed and took her cigarettes, shook out a smoke, put it between her lips, and lit it. Contemplatively she inhaled deeply and exhaled. "The marriage was over before the affair. The affair brought to my attention that our marriage should be made null and void as a legal matter."

"What do you mean? We still had fun together." Jim looked at her confused.

Ellen looked at him. "I realized I wasn't in love with you anymore when you took the job in St. Ignace." The commuter marriage made it easy for Ellen to imagine life without Jim. A gay divorcee, going places with their son, Tony, hanging out with friends and co-workers. When Jim came home on weekends, all of the fun left when he entered the house.

"I knew taking that job was a bad idea," he stated.

"This would have happened even if you hadn't taken the job, Jim."

"Do you hate me for having, you know, the affair," he questioned.

"I don't hate you, Jim. I just don't want to be married to you anymore, ok?"

They drifted back into silence. Ellen thought back to the night that he had confessed to her that he had cheated on her. She had been more relieved than hurt or angry. The affair gave her the excuse that she needed to terminate their marital relationship. Prior to the affair, she had believed that Jim was still very happily engaged in their marriage. They still went out to dinner, partied with friends, attended Tony's games, you know, married with children types of things. They still had sex, well kind of. Sex with Jim had become an event like, well, like eating or using the bathroom. It was reduced to a biological act. It was something to be done because it's supposed to be done. When you're married, you have sex.

Ellen looked over at Jim, his eyes straight ahead on the highway. She had been honest with him. She didn't hate him. They had too much of a history to hate each other. They had a really great kid together. She could never hate him. To be honest, she still loved him, she just wasn't "in love" with him anymore. He had progressed from lover to husband to friend. The passion had burned itself out, but the tenderness still remained.

"Almost there," he stated loudly. He looked over at her and smiled. "Ya know, since this will be our last act as man and wife," he paused briefly, "what do you say, baby, one more slam dance, Honey," in his best Elvis voice.

"Jim."

"Yes, darlin'," he drawled, still playing Elvis.

"Go to hell."

Their eyes met and they both burst out laughing. "Seriously, Ellen. Please." He face was so intense, "I want us to always be friends, okay?" he finished.

"I want that too, Jim."

Jim smiled as much of a smile as he could. Ellen had always thought that his smile looked like a grimace of pain.

They pulled up in front of Graceland where the fans leave the "King" his tributes. The flowers, cards and signs, even stuffed animals. Ellen unbuckled her belt and grabbed a toaster out of the back seat. "Well, this is it," Jim said. The toaster was the only surviving wedding present after fifteen years of marriage. Jim grabbed a black marker out of the glove box, "Hold on a minute, Ellen." In big letters he wrote on the white toaster, "Thank you, thank you, very much." Their eyes met, and they smiled; Jim looking as if he was in pain. They both got out of the car and walked over to where the flowers and cards were. They placed the toaster on the ground. "Wait," Ellen said. She picked up the toaster and turned it over. She wrote, "Love, Jim and Ellen," on the other side. She put the toaster back down and hugged Jim, "Let's go."

They walked to the car together, hand in hand. "Elvis has left the building," Jim said in his best Elvis voice. "Are you sure, baby? Don't you just want it one more time, from the King, for old times' sake?" He wiggled his eyebrows at her suggestively.

"Jim, you're an asshole."

"Yea, I know. But, you can't blame an asshole for trying."

They both laughed and got in the car.

DENIAL

Elizabeth Anne Williston

When reality needs
refraction to accept
my mind's eye
reflects distortion
almost imperceptible
keeping discomfort
from escalating
until I shatter
into multiple rainbow
shards of light
unable to become
one beam
to light the
darkened path
before me.



THE LONELY RABBIT

Ryan Newberry

THIS IS WHAT I'M ABOUT

Nyakwai Taryor Jr.

Built with a standpoint
To anoint
Papers from the point
Of a pencil
Constantly painting visual
Words to the alphabet
Out of an urban dialect
To connect
Phrases that intersect
Line for line
Under the guidance of my mind
Define
My passage on page
Perform on stage
Full of rage
Against machines
To come clean
For better means
Not the can of beans
Strapping for crumbs
In slums
Lost and dumb
From the system
Not teaching enough
Heart broken tough
Living rough
Not just in America
But uncharted areas
We might never walk
To see others and talk
About life and understanding
Our future goals and planning
To move in different directions
Not connection

That what I want try to write about
With out a doubt
Interchanging routes
Or routines
In between
To show what I mean
Or what's seen
Through my eyes
Open to the skies
Above
Preaching one love

HAROLD

Rebecca J. Hector

Harold sat in bed staring at his alarm clock, unable to understand why Jerry, his boss, insisted that he arrive at work at such an obscene hour. The clock's pesky buzzing had woken him up from one of the best dreams he'd had in months; a dream that he had no desire to trade for a day of marking prices and greeting customers. Reluctantly, he forced himself out of bed and stumbled to the bathroom in his small four room home to start his morning routine. As he stepped into the shower he began to contemplate calling in sick to work and going back to bed. Maybe he could finish the dream that he'd been having earlier. After considering several possible endings for his dream, Harold realized that he was in no position to skip work. Several bills were sitting on his kitchen table at that very moment just waiting to devour the next paycheck he brought home. Another stack would begin to collect a day or two after this had disappeared and the cycle would repeat itself. Harold sighed as he turned on the water and adjusted it to a comfortable temperature. Starting a new week was never an easy task.

The weather that morning seemed as if it were setting the scene for the rest of the day. Harold sat at his breakfast table, eating a bowl of cereal and staring out the window at the gray sky and patchy fog. Maybe I could just disappear, he thought. That way I wouldn't have to go to work or pay my bills. His eyes circled around the tiny kitchen and came to rest on the avocado green refrigerator that had come with the house. The previous owner had warned him that it was leaky and would soon need replacing but Harold couldn't bear to part with it. It was an artifact straight out of the 70s and reminded him of the kitchen in the house he had lived in when he was younger. Sometimes he imagined himself opening up the door and discovering that the refrigerator was actually a portal to another time. He would step inside the door and suddenly find himself sitting in a Dodge Charger, listening to Boston on the 8-track. I lost myself in a familiar song, I closed my eyes and I slipped away. He'd come back looking just like Ponch from CHiPS, complete with Erik Estrada's sparkling white smile. The jaws of his coworkers would drop as he walked

past them on his way back to the photo counter. The girl with the bright green eyes and the coffee colored hair would smile as he leaned over and said...

The rotary dial phone that sat on the kitchen table let loose with a loud ring, jerking Harold back into reality. He stared at the phone for a couple of seconds, trying to remember what it was he had been doing, before he picked up the receiver.

“Hello?” he said, hoping that he didn’t sound too bewildered.

“Harold? It’s Jerry at the store. Listen, Sam called and said he can’t make it in today...his kid’s sick or something. Would you mind working a couple of extra hours tonight to help cover for him? I’m trying to find a couple of other guys to help out so you won’t have to stay for his entire shift.”

Harold twisted the phone cord around his fingers and hesitated. Sam usually came to work early in the afternoon and stayed until at least 9 pm. If he said yes and Jerry wasn’t able to find any others willing to help out, he would have to work Sam’s entire shift. He wouldn’t get home until late and he would miss the first portion of the Rockford Files marathon that was showing on cable that night. Harold had been looking forward to the marathon for the past week and had even bought a bag of cheese popcorn for the occasion.

“So what do you think Harold?” Jerry’s voiced interrupted his thoughts.

“Well...gee, Jerry. I sort of have some plans for tonight but if you’re really in a bind then I guess I could...”

“Thanks Harold. I’m really glad you offered to help out.”

“Sure Jerry...I mean, it’s no problem...since you’re really in a bind and all...”

“Right Harold,” Jerry’s voiced interrupted, “we’ll see you later.”

The dial tone rang in Harold’s ear. Why did he always have to give in so quickly? He always found himself covering for his coworkers and agreeing to do the extra work that Jerry was always able to find. Sometimes the work paid off though. During last month’s inspection, Jerry had pointed him out to the store’s district manager and said Harold is a very focused worker. The comment had echoed in his ears for hours afterwards. When he arrived home from work later that day he found a piece of paper and a permanent marker. He wrote Jerry’s comment on the paper in large block letters and posted it on the door of his refrigerator. He didn’t want to forget any of those words.

Harold arrived at work a half an hour after Jerry's call. After clocking himself in he stood in the employee lounge, straightening the red polyester vest that he was required to wear as part of his work attire. The left side of the vest sported a nametag as well as a picture of a smiling cartoon bear, the store's official emblem. The little smiling bears were scattered all over the store; Harold considered them to be the most irritating symbols on the face of the planet. It was as if the store was trying to seduce its customers with cartoon faces and bright colors. Even the mirror on the back of the door to the lounge now sported one of the smiling bears. This one was larger though, close to four feet tall, and was wearing a shirt that said "It's a honey of a deal at Bargain Bear!" Anyone who wanted to look at themselves in the mirror would have to strain to get around the bear. Tired of spending the day wondering if his hair is sticking up in back or not, Harold decided it was time to move the giant cardboard cutout. He carefully removed the bear and peered at the image that the mirror now held. Harold saw a man wearing black trousers and a dingy white polo shirt. The shoes on the man's feet were black low-top running shoes with black laces; athletic shoes disguised as dress shoes. Harold smiled when he looked at the shoes. He knew this man was playing a trick on everyone; he knew this man worked for a store that only allowed its employees to wear dress shoes. When he smiled, the man smiled back at him. Harold wanted him to know that his secret was safe. Suddenly and without warning, the door to the lounge flew open and the man disappeared.

"Harold! What are you screwing around back here for? I need your ass on the floor. I have to run to the stockroom for a few minutes and then I want to see you up front. I've got a special job for you today." Jerry turned and walked swiftly out the door.

Even though he had been caught messing around, Harold felt pleased. Jerry had just said that there was a special job waiting for him today. He'd been hoping to be promoted to cashier manager for the past few months. He was certain that the extra hours he'd agreed to work that night had helped him to land Jerry's "special job."

Out on the store's main floor, Harold began the morning routine of checking all the aisles, making sure everything was in its right place. Since Jerry had informed him last week that he would be spending most of this week at the cash register, he felt that he was entitled to a couple of laps around the store before he was planted for the day. He thought he might swing by the photo counter to see if the girl with the coffee colored hair had come in to work yet. Today, he vowed to himself, today is going to be

the day I find out her name. She had been working at the store for several weeks now and for some reason had not been given a nametag. Harold had made several attempts to introduce himself but had lost his nerve at the last moment. When the counter finally came into view, he saw her immediately. She was standing behind the counter, arranging a display of photo mugs and disposable cameras. The display caught his eye as he approached the counter. He wondered if the next moment would be worth remembering, worth having plastered across the front of a ceramic coffee mug. Maybe someone will grab one of the cameras and take a picture of my grand introduction, he thought. In his mind he pictured the Six Million Dollar Man introducing himself to a woman. He would tell her his name and then scoop her up and jump high into the air as his signature sound effect played in the background. Harold considered the possibilities of having a nuclear powered body while picturing himself in the red jumpsuit that Lee Majors had always worn on that show.

“May I help you with something?” the girl behind the counter asked.

“What?” said Harold, completely forgetting his plans for a grand introduction.

“Is there something you need?”

As Harold stared at her, dumbfounded, he could swear he heard Sugarloaf singing in the background. Green eyed lady, lovely lady!

“I...I guess not...I was just making my morning rounds.”

“I see,” she said before returning to her display. “Let me know if you do need something...my name’s Julia.”

“Okay...Julia,” he stammered. “If I need anything, I’ll just let you know...no problem.”

On the way back to the front of the store Harold lectured himself for sounding like such an oaf. The Six Million Dollar Man wouldn’t have acted that way. He could practically hear Lee Majors lecturing him now. Haven’t I taught you anything? he would say. Julia probably thinks you’re a big loser now. Harold reached the cash register that he had been assigned to for the day and stood drumming his fingers on the conveyor belt. Maybe he would be more confident after he was made cashier manager. At least he finally knew her name. Suddenly, Jerry appeared from out of nowhere.

“Harold, we’re going to need you in the backroom all day today to clear out some space for some new inventory that’s coming in tonight,” he said.

“Um...well, Jerry...I guess I could do that but I thought that you needed me on the register this week. Also, I know that the cashier manager position...”

“The backroom is a mess Harold,” Jerry interrupted. “We’re starting one of the baggers on register today so they’re going to take over for you this week. We’re really counting on you to be a team player and help clear out that space in back.”

“Sure Jerry...I’ll help out wherever I’m needed...just let me know about the manager job when you get...”

“Great Harold. Run on back to the stockroom now and get to work.” Jerry took off and started tending to the other cash registers.

Back in the stockroom Harold looked around in disbelief. Now he understood why Jerry had wanted him to stay on and cover Sam’s shift. James, the man who usually managed the stockroom, had been recently let go and the store hadn’t yet bothered to replace him. For the past week many of the third shift workers had been sanctioned to help whenever a new shipment came in. Unfortunately, this task was often performed without the supervision of a manager and was often completed as quickly and effortlessly as possible. The room was cluttered with boxes of all shapes and sizes. It looked as though the last three inventory shipments had simply been tossed from the truck to the room without any attempt at organization. Harold sighed and wondered how long it would take him to clean up the mess by himself. Jerry always seemed to stick him with the worst jobs; most likely because he was the only one who never put up a fight. At least it was quiet. Back here he could listen to the music playing over the speaker without the roar of customers and the ringing of cash registers in the background. He sat down on one of the boxes and tried to decide on the best way to start organizing the boxes and clearing out the area. While he was thinking, he noticed a large, shiny piece of glass leaning up against the wall across from where he was sitting. He noticed a man wearing a red vest and black sneakers sitting inside of it. Harold watched the man as he began to sing along with the Supertramp song playing over the speaker. The man’s lips moved slowly at first. Goodbye Stranger, it’s been nice. Hope you find your paradise! Harold continued to watch and soon the man began to dance. His movements were hesitant at first, but became more wild and uninhibited as the song began to swell. Feel no sorrow, feel no shame. Come tomorrow, feel no pain! The man danced closer and closer, beckoning to him the whole time. This man said he knew secrets. He knew how to tell Jerry where to stick it. He knew

how to make Julia go crazy for him. Hell, he even knew what channels would be replaying the Rockford Files Marathon that Harold was certain he would miss that night. Harold brought his hands close to the glass and pressed them against the man's hands. He would show Jerry just how focused a worker like him could be. He would let all of his co-workers know that Erik Estrada had nothing on him. The songs of Boston and Supertramp would follow him everywhere he went. Every time he jumped in the air he would sound just like the Six Million Dollar Man. He would drive to work in his Dodge Charger; in fact, he would drive straight through the door! Just give me motion to set me free. Will we ever meet again?

"What the hell are you doing back here Harold???" Jerry's voice rang out over the music.

"I was just thinking of how to..." Harold paused and looked at the floor. Shards of glass covered his black sneakers. Harold looked at his hands and noticed that they were covered with tiny glass crystals that sparkled like under the fluorescent lights of the stockroom. The dancing man had disappeared, leaving Harold with a handful of miniature glass diamonds.

"Harold, I wanted to let you finish your shifts today before I told you this but we're letting you go. The company's stock is falling and we're being forced to let go of some of our employees. From what I see here in front of me though, this might not be such a bad decision."

Harold couldn't believe what he was hearing. He had worked so many extra hours for this man in hopes of getting a promotion and now he was being let go. But you told the district manager I was a focused worker! he wanted to scream. Somehow, he just couldn't get the words out.

"Did you hear me Harold? I said clean up that glass and clock yourself out. We'll send you your last paycheck in the mail." Jerry turned and left the stockroom.

Harold trudged to the supply closet and pulled out a broom and dustpan. He leaned over the pile of broken glass, picked up one of the larger pieces and examined it. Several rays of sunshine had broken through the cloudy sky outside and were shining through the stockroom window. He held the glass up to the sun and angled it so that a small prism appeared on the floor. By rocking the glass back and forth, he could make the prism spin and dance. When he held the glass up to his face he saw the man again. His dancing had stopped but there was a sparkle in his eye. Harold slipped this piece of glass into the tote bag that he always carried with him to work. He left the rest of the glass sitting in a pile on the floor.

On his way out of the store, Harold stopped by the photo counter for the second time that day. This time Julia smiled at him and said “Did you think of something you need? You’re Harold, right?”

He nodded and took his time smiling back. Although he was thrilled that Julia remembered his name and that he had finally, in his own special way, stood up to Jerry, Harold was still a man who had just been fired from a job that he really needed. The stack of bills that sat on his breakfast table was relentless and would not let him forget his responsibilities.

“Yeah, I’m Harold,” he replied. “You might as well forget my name though...I was just let go.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that,” said Julia. “Is there anything I can do?”

As Harold tried to think of a response to Julia’s question, his eyes were drawn to the mirrored wall that made up the back of the back of the photo center. For a brief moment he thought he saw the dancing man staring directly at him. Harold blinked a few times and then looked in the mirror again. This time he only saw himself.

Harold looked at Julia and said in a clear voice: “Do you by any chance like the Rockford Files?”

That afternoon, Harold sat at his breakfast table reading the classified section of the local newspaper, circling the jobs that appealed to him the most. He hummed along with the song that was playing on the small radio sitting on his kitchen counter. Although he was worried about his bills, Harold wasn’t exactly sad about never having to return to the Bargain Bear. No more Jerry, no more smiling bears. The song on the radio ended and a new one began. For the second time that day, Harold listened as Supertramp sang Goodbye Stranger. The song made him remember the piece of glass that he had placed in his tote bag before leaving the stockroom earlier that day. Harold found the bag and gently removed the delicate souvenir of his last day at the store. He returned to the kitchen and carefully set the glass on the window sill above the breakfast table. The glass caught the late afternoon sunlight and suddenly a small rainbow appeared on Harold’s refrigerator, directly over the sign that said Harold is a focused worker. Harold walked over to the refrigerator, tore down the sign, and threw it in the garbage basket. Goodbye stranger, he thought.

Just then the doorbell rang and Harold rushed to the door. Before opening it, he quickly checked himself in the hallway mirror. Harold straightened his hair and quickly practiced his smile. His smile didn’t exactly look like Erik Estrada’s or Lee Majors’, but it still looked pretty damn nice.

THE SPACE BETWEEN

Joanne Williams

Painters know the blank canvas becomes the painting,
Writers know the blank page becomes the message,
Musicians know rests confirm sound,
Families discover that love never falls through the cracks,
The cracks that emerge through time as some one
Leaves, some one dies.

Without the canvas, the page, the notes, there is no sounding board.
But in a family, the space becomes the true reflection of
A life well lived
In love.
Love goes on and in and through and beyond the void.
Love resonates through time and space
It has to
That's what love does,
Fills in the empty spaces, creates something from nothingness,
Proves there is meaning after all.



ROSE

Jessica Pletz

ODE TO A TAMPON

Dayna Vickery

Entering
Sliding
Settling in
Nestled quaintly

Expanding
Enlarge
Much like a stew,
it thickens

Like a season, it must change
With the ebbing
and flowing
of time

Only to be reborn
like the fiery phoenix
As the process begins
anew.

IF I COULD FLY

Blaine Burnett

If I could fly, my wings would be pearly white
No waitin, I'd be off on the early flight
So wrong, and want a second chance to do right
So I aim for the sky till I'm outta sight

If I could fly, I'd be gone man foreal I'd be outta here
Sittin in the pen thinking bout how I got in here
Writin all these letters, wonderin if anybody cares
Innocent but yet guilty, I guess its true that life aint fair

THE DRESSER

Elizabeth Anne Williston

He stripped it and remade it, long ago. The outer shell of wood was an unvarnished faded shade of gray. Once it had a mirror, but that was long broken. The two top drawers curved creating a beautiful bow front. One was complete while the other was a front for emptiness. The bottom and sides to the drawer were missing. If you pulled it open the space gaped like a wound, empty, useless, ugly. The two wide drawers beneath the bow were planed smooth. The bottom one slanted, making it difficult to close and leaving a dark sliver of an opening gradually wider from right to left. The other drawer had a perfect façade but when opened the bottom was revealed as cracked in half, leaving a large opening through which items could fall into the drawer beneath.

The dresser was left over from the first years of their marriage. He had discovered it in a forgotten corner of a neighbor's barn. Golden tones revealed beneath the worn finish made his fingers ache to liberate it from its cracked varnish. Expecting to uncover golden oak he was unashamedly disappointed to discover the swirling patterns were painted onto plain pine boards. The soft pine lacked any clear definition, no stippled beauty to catch and hold the eye. Yet, the gentle tones of the wood were graceful, providing a soothing addition to their bedroom.

It had been years since he'd looked at it closely. Long ago he relegated it to a dusty, forlorn corner of the attic. Now, his wife had dragged it downstairs and out onto the front porch into the cold sunlight of an autumn morning.

"It's got to go. I can't stand so much clutter!"

"It might be useful yet. I could still fix it up nice."

"When? It's been in the attic since Katie was born, remember?"

"Still."

"No. No more."

"We could sell it."

"Who'd buy a broken old dresser? No one wants it, least of all you."

He ducked his head, refusing to meet his wife's eye. "Just wait a bit. Okay?"

Her gaze wavered. She blinked, tears clouding her vision. "Alright. I'll wait."

She yanked the dresser drawer open. Where was it? It had to be here. She frantically shoved clothing aside, searching. Her hand scraped against raw wood.

"Damn." Pushing her silver blond hair back, she peered at a nasty sliver of wood, jammed into her finger from the edge of a wide crack in the bottom of the drawer. Anxiety creased her forehead, intensifying the ache in her temples that had threatened to overwhelm her all day. When was it he promised to fix this drawer? Last summer? No, it was last winter, when she'd snagged her favorite sweater on the broken edge of wood. Her finger began to throb, a syncopated accompaniment to the blood pulsing, heating her forehead. She winced, recalling the scene, his words echoing, beating in time to her heart.

"Why don't you trust me? I'll take care of it. Just forget it. I'll fix it. Tomorrow. You know I will. I will. I will. I will."

How many tomorrows were now dust, along with his promise? How many others had she blocked from her thoughts, simply to keep going, do what she must. She clumsily shoved the drawer shut. Wearily, she pressed her hand to her head, willing the ache to subside.

"What was it I came in here for?" She shook her head slightly, unable to recall the object of her frantic search, left only with the aching sliver of wood in her hand to counter the numbness of something lost.

The dresser continued to sit on their porch, an exclamatory punctuation to their lives. She passed it every morning, bruised her shins on its edges in her hurry to leave for work. He sat on the porch, oblivious to its presence. Watching her go, he nursed his coffee, dredging every drop of warmth to ease the numbness glazing his heart.

Her pale blue eyes burned into his, an open channel to her soul. He slipped his gaze sideways, avoiding the pain revealed.

"Your friends said I was the best one for you? Your friends?"

"I wanted their advice. I was having trouble making up my mind. And yes, I was attracted to Holly. She was so outgoing and we had fun. But you're the one I chose to marry. You."

Her thoughts pictured Holly, a robust, laughing redhead whose apartment she had visited often, where she had met her husband.

“But why? Why did you choose me? I don’t think I know why anymore.”

“You’re calm and peaceful. I love how you are with me.”

“I don’t understand. You constantly tell me I’m selfish for keeping our home quiet, for not inviting in hordes of people.”

“Holly didn’t invite hordes, she just welcomed her friends.”

Her eyes. He couldn’t escape the truth mirrored in their pale blue depths. Again, his gaze skewed sideways, finally resting on their bedroom dresser. He walked to it, ran his hand over its pale, smooth surface. He stroked the wood he’d labored over, sanding layers of old varnish to reveal a fine-grained, heart of pine surface. Not the oak he expected to find, no wide swirls, no golden tones remained once he removed the deceptive layers disguising the true nature of the wood. It wasn’t really ordinary pine, but was a soft silver shade, beautiful and silky to his touch.

He turned to his wife. “I chose you. They just helped me see what I needed. And it was you.”

He opened his arms and she let herself be pulled close, resting her head on his chest. She laid her head on his arm, turning it so he wouldn’t see the tears that filmed her eyes. She focused on the dresser behind her husband. Unbidden, the memory of his hushed voice when they first discovered it resounded within her.

“It’s oak, I’m sure of it.” His hands fingered the cracked varnish, eyes sparkling with excitement. “I’ll clean it up; it will be perfect for our bedroom. You’ll love it once the amber shades of the wood are released from their varnish prison. Oak has such a rich, distinctive grain. It’s perfect. Perfect.”

The warmth of the late fall morning drew her onto the porch. She stood, alert, shivering in spite of the bright warmth of Indian summer. She stared into the depths of the empty blue sky, pressing down her thoughts. Irresistibly, her gaze sought the dresser, now shoved to one side. She lifted her hands as if to bestow a benediction on the worn, battered wood.

The minister laid his hands in benediction on her newborn daughter’s head. He prayed for her and for their family. She looked at Katie, hefted the baby bulk of her, feeling the milk heavy in her breasts begin to seep. Her thoughts drifted to the conversation between her and her husband just

before they left the hospital for home.

“What is wrong with you?”

She snapped, “I’m just nervous. You would be too if your life was changing completely.”

“Why does change have to be such a negative experience for you all the time. You’re making me nervous, too.”

Inwardly, she cringed. “Please, let’s not argue, okay?” She ignored the nervous tension building into a major headache and smiled at her husband. “Okay?”

Her hands hesitated, poised as in prayer above the dresser. Her thoughts coalesced, pushing her into action. She roughly grasped each edge and dragged it, bumping coarsely down the porch steps. It crashed down the last step to the sidewalk. She pulled it to the curb. Turning her back, she returned to the porch. The sun warmed her as she strode past the now empty space. Inside the house, her daughter watched television. Her husband lay sleeping in the bed they shared, dreaming of golden oak swirling beneath the caress of his fingers.

STOLEN

Jaime Stenz

Worked so hard
Waited so long
Then you came.

Forced Entry
Tugged Pulled
Slammed the door.

Run- Faster
Get Away.

The next day
I See
Look what you have done.

A missing piece
Hard to replace
But you took more.

Betrayed- Trespassed
Unsafe.

PENNIES AND DIAMONDS

Julia Reges

Pennies and diamonds
Sitting in my palm.
Why bother comparing the two?

Simple penny can be so plain and invisible.
It's easy to forget that her metal coat has two sides
For with but a flip, she is able to decide our fate.
Shimmering diamond is always noticed.
Every facet of her gown reveals a new part of her,
So strong, so bright, so precious. Eternally pure.

Yet here they sit in my hand,
Making it sweat.
How can they ever be equal?
I tilt my palm and let them fall.

Well what do you know?
They're sitting in the same dirt.

There you are.

DARK BEAUTY

Eric Martin

This is a story about the summer I grew up. It was the summer I learned how to drive a car. It was the summer I learned about women. It was the summer I learned that love can actually seem hateful. I learned about the power of being a woman, and I learned about the power of a gun.

I was nine “and three-quarters” years old.

This isn’t to say that I lost my innocence that summer. My dad had already been gone for nine months after an argument he’d had with my older brother on Labor Day ended abruptly. I didn’t actually see my father die, but by the last day of school, my so-called ‘innocence’ was nothing more than fairly blurred snapshots that no one outside my head could see.

Unlike most kids, my grades shot up. I would like to say that I did better in school because that’s what he would’ve wanted, but, the truth is, it was either concentrate on school, or concentrate on loving a mother I had never known. Don’t get me wrong; my parents were married and she lived in our home. Looking back, I can see that she tried. Still, she married young and there was no getting around the obvious: she was in way over her head. Becoming a single-parent without warning made her seem even more overwhelmed. All-the-same, I earned all ‘As’ on my report card that last day of school, and I couldn’t wait to slip it on the refrigerator door, underneath the pizza coupons, next to the shut-off notice from the telephone company. I remember hoping she’d find it some random afternoon in early August, but I don’t remember why.

All the same, I felt particularly good as I strolled home that day. I walked around the side of the house to the back door, I looked into my mother’s open bedroom window through a gap in the curtains. She was lying naked in her bed with another woman. I’d never seen her before, but she was very pretty.

They had obviously overslept.

My eyes filled with every color of every detail of the entire picture. Then, the woman raised and kissed my mother on the cheek very sweetly.

I hid in the bushes. Eventually, the woman got in her car and drove away.

By the time I got inside, my mother was already in the shower. I knew I only had a little bit of time, so I went straight to her room to look for evidence; some inanimate witness to what I'd just seen.

I ended-up finding a bracelet. I knew right away that it wasn't my mother's. All little girls know what pieces of jewelry her mother has. I dropped it on the floor and kicked it under the bed. I walked out of her bedroom, back down the hall, and into the kitchen toward the back door. On my way out, I slid my report card on the refrigerator door, underneath the pizza coupons, next to the shut-off notice from the telephone company. We never talked about what I saw.

That was the first day of summer vacation, 1974.

Our house was exactly in the middle of our block; there were five houses on each side. Somebody once said "You can't go home again," but back in '74, our house might as well have been the center of the universe. When I was younger, I would pretend that I was the 'Queen of the World' from my front porch.

There was so much going on in the world back then, but since none of it ever passed by my 'throne', I didn't notice most of it. I didn't even know that Gerald Ford had become our new president until I went back to school in the fall and noticed that President Nixon's picture had been replaced. No, I had all I could handle dealing with the five houses to the left, the five houses to the right, and the eleven across the street.

"Layla?" she called. "Layla, honey, would you come over here and help me plant these?" That was Mrs. Carter. Her husband had been dead longer than I'd been alive. Still, she talked incessantly about the man like he'd only gone to the store for cigarettes.

"Big Joe used to always go down to the farmer's market with me on Saturday mornings. It always seemed like the longest morning of the seven in a week. We'd take our time and just enjoy coffee and each other. He used to say that Saturday mornings had their own unique 'smell' to them, if you can believe that. The last time we went was back in 19-and-63. The market closed for good after that season. 'Big' Joe left me that winter."

None of the other kids on the block liked her too much – she did have ferocious breath – but I liked her just fine. After "the argument," as my family refers to my dad's death to this day, she was the only grown-up who didn't always preface anything that she planned on saying to me with that "you poor baby" look. It made me feel....normal.

Still, Mrs. Carter had a way of being stuck in the stone ages. “Why don’t you ever put on any little girl’s clothes?” she’d ask me. Mind you, we’d had this conversation before. It was my turn to say, “I do, but I just don’t want to get them dirty.” The truth is, girl’s clothes were just too damned uncomfortable. All those buckles and bows and straps and barrettes made me feel pulled and restrained. I wasn’t a tomboy or anything like that. I played with dolls and was still very much in love with the Easy-Bake Oven I’d gotten at Christmas. I just thought that boys had it easier. Nobody cared if they didn’t wear shirts on hot days. Nobody cared if they smelled like fresh-cut grass. Nobody cared if they snuck out with the car and stayed all night, only to come home the next afternoon to tell my dad it was wrecked, leading to “the argument.” Me? I had to be ‘pretty.’ Who the hell for?

After over an hour of “Big Joe this” and “Big Joe that,” Mrs. Carter sat back on her ankles and surveyed our work. As the sweat poured down her bronze face, she closed her eyes and leaned her head back. “Don’t you just love this time of the year?” she asked. “Yes, ma’am,” was my (scripted) response, though I never really knew whether she was talking to me or ‘Big’ Joe.

She sat in that position considering her words for longer than I expected, and just soaking in the sunlight. Mrs. Carter really did live for the opportunity to plant her jonquils just one more time. When she had taken in enough sunlight, she came back down to Earth and reached inside her shirt to hand me this sweaty dollar bill. She always kept her money tucked in her bra. The boys only got 50 cents, and God only knows where she kept that. That dollar looked like it had been suffocating, and was now gasping for air. It looked almost diseased, even, and I didn’t want it. “Can we get some ice cream instead?” I asked her.

“Well sure, Layla, honey. That’s an even better idea. Lemme go inside and get my pocket book.”

I waited outside and looked around her yard. There’s the rose bush I helped her plant last summer. There’s the dirt patch where my dad cut the oak tree down that was struck by lightning. Everything was as manicured as the pictures in the gardening books she kept next to her cook-books. I had helped her keep it that way. I took a bit of satisfaction in it, feeling as though I’d truly earned my ice cream. In actuality, I had been nothing more than a sympathetic ear for a lonely, widowed old woman, though I wouldn’t realize it until years later.

“Ready to go Layla, honey?”

“Yes ma’am.”

We walked into the dark and humid garage, uncovered Big Joe’s ’62 Lincoln, and eased out of the driveway. I always loved riding in that car. If I was the ‘Queen of the World,’ then this car was my one-vehicle motorcade. It gleamed and shined and sparkled and glided, and Mrs. Carter carefully drove it as though each trip was nothing more than a test drive which, upon completion, would find us back at the dealership. She never turned on the radio (“too much of a distraction while driving”, she’d say) and still used driving gloves. Perhaps this is why I found her sudden swerving a bit unnerving.

“Mrs. Carter?” No reply. I looked over at her, and she appeared to be confused and unaware of what she was doing (or even what she was trying to do.) She had cut across all three lanes of traffic, and was headed for the on-coming lanes. Not sure what was going on with her, I grabbed the steering wheel, climbed onto her lap, and guided the car as best I could over to the police station (which was four blocks from where we were.) I don’t remember running into a mailbox as I tried to stop the car. I don’t remember going inside. All I remember is that by the time I’d gotten her to the precinct, tears were running down my face. I do remember them telling me that she was already gone. Since this wasn’t her first stroke, she had no chance at a second chance. One of the policemen called an ambulance, and then my mother, and that was that.

My mother and the medics arrived at about the same time. She came in quite possessively, pausing in the doorway just long enough for her height and slender frame to noticeably fill it...almost brilliantly. Her super hero’s glow quickly wore off when I saw the expression on her face; she was giving me the “you poor baby” look. She dropped to her knees and gave me a hug, which I gladly returned.

We were both crying.

As my tears began to clear, I noticed over my mother’s shoulder the medics pulling Mrs. Carter out of the car and placing her onto a stretcher. I remember hoping that they didn’t do something mean like bring her back to life. I remember feeling awkwardly relieved as they covered her body with a white sheet. She was finally on her way to see Big Joe.

The other kids in the neighborhood weren’t as sympathetic towards Mrs. Carter’s passing as my mother and I had been.

“ ‘bout time.” That was Mason Brown, a boy from across the street. He ran over to her lawn seemingly every time Mrs. Carter was mentioned over the next few weeks, and yelled up to the sky “tell me to get off your grass now.”

The last time he would ever do something like that anywhere near Mrs. Carter’s, the heavens opened up and poured rain down on us all. Mason kept dancing and teasing. Thunder crashed and lightning streaked. Mason kept singing “I’m on your gra-asss! I’m on your gra-asss!” The thunder continued to roll across the sky....

....then, he pee’d on the rose bush.

“Mason, STOP IT!” I yelled to no avail.

Satisfied with having the last laugh, Mason began to jump in the rain puddles. At the bottom of one of those puddles was a manhole cover. What Mason didn’t know – what none of us knew – was that it had been struck by lightning. The only thing that saved his life was the fact that he had already prepared to jump again when he landed on the charged metal plate. Instead of frying him on the spot and exploding that walnut he called a heart, he was thrown clear across the street. He landed on the curb....right in front of Mrs. Carter’s house.

I, on the other hand, became somewhat revered by the other kids; not because I was the last kid to see her alive, but because I was the first kid to drive Big Joe’s Lincoln. In the preteen world, reputations are made and destroyed on dares. And so it came to pass that I was dared to drive again. The challenge came from Anita Orleans, a girl from across the street who hated my guts, and never bypassed an opportunity to call me out.

“You can’t drive,” she challenged. “I heard you crashed into a telephone pole anyway.” Feeling her audience growing without actually acknowledging them, she continued, “If you’re such a good driver, I dare you to drive us all to the baseball field and back.” She paused to allow for the “oohs” from the other kids that surely came with the dare, then she finished: “Here’s the key to my mom’s Nova.” She held them over my head, and I watched them dangle back and forth like wind chimes. Geez, how long had she been rehearsing this scene? It was almost like she’d practiced in the mirror while brushing her teeth or something. It was too good to decline.

“Let’s go,” I said with false confidence.

How bad could it be? I’d already done it once, and it couldn’t have been any more dangerous than riding my bike in the street. So, with six

“jurors” in the back seat, and Anita next to me, I closed the big and heavy Chevy door. To add some validity to the act, I adjusted the seat and mirrors very smartly. Even with the seat pulled all the way forward, my feet barely touched the pedals. When I started the car, “Stuck in the Middle With You” was on the radio (or was it “Disco Lady”?) With my foot on the brake, I took a breath and shifted the car into reverse.

“Let’s go already”, Anita impatiently insisted. I eased my foot off of the brake and onto the gas. The car began to roll backwards and into the street. I made a wide turn in an attempt to straighten the car out. As we began to inch forward, the driver’s side door swung open and I literally stood on the brake pedal. It was my mother.

She pushed me to the middle of the bench seat, next to a very stunned Anita. Without saying a word, she eased Mrs. Orleans’ Nova back into the driveway. She put it in park. She turned off the radio, and then the engine. There was nothing left for her to do but deal with me now. Uh-oh. Without even looking at me, she said very coolly, “Layla, I’m gonna take Anita’s mother her car keys, then, I’m coming home. You’d better have your little self there and visible when I arrive.”

I walked the thirteen blocks to my grandma’s house, instead.

Apparently, my grandma had called my mother, (who I thought would appreciate the time I’d given her to cool down.) Nope. No sooner than my heart rate returned to normal, my mother came flying through my grandma’s house and into the bathroom – where I was...um... ‘indisposed.’ She told me that my clothes were on the living room floor, and that I was to stay at my grandmother’s until I learned my ‘role.’ Our relationship had been like an awkward first dance, but had she just really (really?) put me out? The look on her face this time wasn’t “you poor baby.” To this day, I haven’t really figured out what that expression meant, but it burned.

Life at my grandparents’ was far from baking brownies and looking through old photo albums. My grandma wasn’t the most spiritual person in the world, but she considered herself to be ‘religious’ – (out of fear of the unknown, if nothing else.) Every room had its own bible, (King James only), and there were more crosses and pictures of Jesus crammed into that one-story house than I could have imagined there being in the entire Vatican.

She spoke very ‘appropriately,’ and used words that I’d never seen

on any spelling test like “demure” and “petite” and “defer.” She started every other sentence directed towards me with “young ladies never...”, or the very haughty “a young lady is not to....” My month there was like living in “young lady” boot camp.

I remember thinking that it was only a matter of time before she’d have me in pink dresses and Easter gloves on a daily basis. She would buy me all these cutesy (but ‘respectable’) skirts and matching nylons. “A young lady” (you see) “is not to wear clothing as sloppy as bell-bottom jeans.” Apparently, being a young lady wasn’t meant to adapt to most modern concepts.

“A young lady never climbs into a vehicle so that her backside sticks out,” she would say. For whatever reason, I had particular trouble with that one. “Instead, she is to demurely sit down into the vehicle with her legs politely crossed.” It all seemed like a waste of time to me. A “young lady” could be halfway down the road while she’s trying to ‘demurely’ sit in a car the right way. What was the point?

One afternoon, while at the fruit market, she spoke more frankly to me than in all the time I’d been living there. “Do you understand why I’m teaching you all the things that a young lady should know? Do you really understand it?” Never mind that she didn’t just bark out the right way of doing it, she actually asked for my input.

“No, I don’t,” I quickly replied so as not to give her an opportunity to change the subject.

“In order for a young lady to be successful, she must know what a man expects of her.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing, even at nine “and three-quarters” years old, I knew that women were trying to get equal rights as men. She continued, “Only when a young lady is aware of what a typical man expects can she successfully circumvent his expectation.” I had no clue what she’d just said to me.

“Circle-what?” I asked.

“Listen, Layla. You know how sometimes your mother would put on a pretty dress for your father? Well, it’s because she knows that the way to a man’s heart is through his ego, not his stomach.”

The picture started to become clearer.

“Men will not hand power to a woman willingly. It is still very much a man’s world. She must create her own power. The easiest way to do that is by simply being a woman, and using that to her advantage.”

I guess I’d learned my ‘role,’ and a few days after that conversation I was back at home.

I had missed all of the summer events in my neighborhood while at my grandparents': the baseball game between the high school varsity team and their (usually drunken) dads on the Fourth of July, the fireworks at the field that night, the annual mid-season parade down Silva Avenue. There were a few birthday parties that always served as summer vacation 'mile markers.' My dad's used to be one of them.

The only things left were Mason Brown's pool party, (actually, it was his parents' party, but we just hung out over there during the day while they prepared for the grown-ups' party that night), my own birthday (I would finally be double-digits in age), and the Labor Day Block Party. We didn't go to '73s 'LDBP (as it was called) and it seemed highly unlikely that my mother or me would be up to going to '74s.

The good side of it all was that my birthday was the first event of those that were left. My mother went all out for birthdays. A year ago, she'd put together three very different – but equally memorable – parties. This year, with my dad gone and my brother on the run, she had to sink all of her creative energies into me.

As I was turning ten whole years old, she wanted it to seem more grown-up. Instead of the clown from last year's party, she hired my uncle Louie, the magician. Instead of punch for the 'children,' there were virgin daiquiris and Shirley Temples for the 'young adults.' Instead of an afternoon 'kiddie' party, this year's was at night. There were streamers and horns and whistles, but no stupid party hats. Under the tiki lamps – which were usually reserved for the adult parties – it all seemed very sophisticated.

There were no Donny Osmond records this year. Even the music seemed more grown-up. My mother had our backyard jumpin' like a discotheque, and I was having the time of my life.

And then it happened.

Over the relaxed conversations and the natural hum of summertime, an alarm sounded in my head. Something was off-center. I looked around. Nothing. I tried to ignore the uneasiness, but it didn't work. My curiosity was quenched quite coincidentally when I went over to the 'bar' my mother had set-up, for another drink. What I saw made me wish that my virgin daiquiri was a little more 'slutty.' Sitting alone at a table, toying with an unlit cigarette, was her.

"Layla." I jumped. My mother grabbed my arm and ushered me towards her, the exact opposite direction of where I wanted to go. "I want to introduce you to a friend of mine."

“Lydia, this is my daughter, Layla. Say ‘hello,’ sweetheart.”

“Hello,” she and I said in unison. After barely a heart beat of silence that felt like a heart attack, my mother looked at me (though speaking to her) and chimed in: “Today is Layla’s tenth birthday, and I do love her.”

Through it all, I’d never questioned my mother’s love for me until that night, that introduction, that word....do. It sounded like she had spent days or weeks or the past ten years considering how she felt about me.

Never mind that. How could my mother bring her here after what I saw? How could she introduce me to her, as if I were the new person in the picture? Was this Lydia person supposed to be my dad’s replacement? Was my mother that lonely? Fat chance.

I locked eyes with Lydia, and I noticed a kind curiosity about her. I didn’t care. My mother fucked up, and I hated her for ruining my birthday; my life! I couldn’t speak. I let my emotions bleed to my face. I shot my mother a look. If she knew me at all, she certainly knew what the expression on my face meant. What was I supposed to say? “Nice to meet you....I’m glad you’re taking over my dad’s side of the bed?”

“May I be excused?” was all that came out of unwilling lips.

“Sure, honey, go on back to your friends.” I turned to walk away without saying a single word. “It was nice to meet you, Layla. That’s a very pretty name. I have a cousin named Layla. It means ‘dark beauty.’”

Whatever. I was decidedly done with the party. I made up some excuse about feeling ill, (which I actually was), and went to my room to think about anything except the scene that I was just a part of. I ended up thinking about nothing at all. I just stared at – then past – the ceiling.

Just as I had during the school year, I spent most of what was left of that summer in my bedroom. My mother assumed that I was sad about the anniversary of “the argument” coming up. I was, but that wasn’t the whole of it. I needed to deal with so much that she never bothered to ask me about, then or now. She was dealing with that pain too and never caught on to mine. I did, however, emerge to go over to Mason Brown’s pool (pre-) party. I’d gotten a new bathing suit for my birthday that I hadn’t used, and summer was almost over. Had it not been so ridiculously hot that I couldn’t take being in my room anymore, I would have never gone.

When I got there, all the other kids were in the pool splashing around

and having a great time. As the story goes, before I'd gotten there Mason's "little" brother Fritzzy – (they were only fifteen months apart) – wanted to play Cowboys and Indians in the pool with the rest of the kids. There weren't enough water guns for Fritzzy to play, but Mason told him that if he could find a gun, (or a bow and arrow), he could join in.

I had been there for at least an hour by the time Fritzzy returned to the pool. He had found a gun. It was Mr. Brown's (loaded) revolver. No one paid attention as he climbed up the ladder to the pool. Nobody heard the back door slam as Mrs. Brown – who saw Fritzzy through the kitchen window – raced outside. I don't think anybody even heard Mrs. Brown yell at the top of her lungs "FRITZY!" All we heard was a 'pop.'

Startled by his mother's yelling, Fritzzy dropped the gun, which went off. A single shot was fired and Mason was pierced through the back of his neck. He tried to reach up to feel the bullet hole, but just fell forward. The pool turned pink, then red – another thing that none of us noticed. We were too shocked to move. To this day, words seem too common and feeble to describe what I saw or what I felt. The Browns left the neighborhood within a year. They never threw another pool party, mostly because they never bought another pool.

In the years that followed, life somehow went on. Mrs. Carter's house was eventually bought by a man who used it as a rental property. There were various types of tenants, from perfect to problematic, but the house never had that 'permanent fixture' feel to it. Anita Orleans is now a minister somewhere down south, and I laugh to myself every time I picture her bullying some faith-deprived soul out of their money to fund her television enterprise.

The law caught up with my brother just south of the border in Mexico. As it turns out, he had been right in their faces all along, waving from the other side like the Mexican flag. All the same, he went to trial, and was sentenced to death by lethal injection about six years ago. Time also caught up with both my grandparents, and they've been gone for the better part of twenty years.

Time has now caught up with my mother, which has prompted my return to the old neighborhood. I'd like to say that our relationship improved, (because it did), but not to an extent worth mentioning. I eventually stopped hating her – if I ever really did hate her in the first place –

somewhere around my freshman year of college. Still, things between us would depend on the day, the mood, the weather, the time. We talked regularly, but it was mostly out of obligation. I went to grad school clear across the country at NYU, and could count on one hand the number of times I've set foot on California soil since.

Somebody once said "You can't go home again," and in my case, that was true. "Home," was now a thirty-screen "giganta-plex" theater that easily wiped out my block and about four or five surrounding it. A rough measurement would put my house somewhere near theater 18. All of my childhood memories have been 'modernized' into blockbuster flops and loud, ugly carpet. All I wanted was for someone to know me and say "welcome home, Layla." Instead, I have to 'buy' my welcome home for \$9 per movie ticket, plus popcorn and a soda.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome back to another edition of the *Garfield Lake Review*. This year has been a journey to try and create a memorable and exciting *Garfield Lake Review* and I think that we did just that. This magazine has been a test to try and get done but I think that all the time, effort, dedication, and encouragement from all those involved is why it is successful. I need to extend my thanks to everyone that had a hand in creating this edition of the *Garfield Lake Review*. To all the contributors, you are what makes the magazine tick, and the outpouring of submissions shows that you want this magazine to succeed as much as everyone behind the scenes. Martha Perkins, you put so much time into stepping up the level of this publication and making it what it is. Beth Ann Flanary, you took on whatever I needed you to do and had it finished post haste. Katie Hudson, you spent a lot of time working on the cover and making it exemplary. Jole Wells and Stephanie Reed, thank you for the time that you put into reading and selecting the work that went into this year's publication. I have to thank Bruce Snyder for guiding us through the rough waters of the layout and publication. Jake Schuler, thank you for giving us some really nice ideas in the beginning of the year. A special thanks to Laura Barlund-Maas for introducing me to the *Garfield Lake Review* and instilling in me the passion to want to make it flourish. Special thanks to the Humanities Department, your encouragement helped make this magazine a success.

This magazine has helped develop my character in the past three years, and in a way it resembles who I am. I am honored to have had three years to work on the *Garfield Lake Review*, and I feel each year has been better than the last. I hope the progress we have made with the magazine will leave a legacy and all the future editors will strive to improve and leave their mark on the *Garfield Lake Review*. Thank you all again for everything: I couldn't have done it without you.

Sincerely,

Michael Steven Mikalakis

