

An elephant is the central focus, standing in a savanna landscape. The scene is filled with tall, golden-brown grasses in the foreground and background. The elephant is positioned in the upper half of the frame, facing left. The overall lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text 'down in the dirt' is overlaid on the image, with 'down' in blue and 'in the dirt' in white.

down in the dirt

revealing all your
dirty little secrets

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Scars art, pages x. Cover art, the La Brea Tar Pits.

A Matter of Perspective on a Cold New Orleans Night

Eric bonholtzer, from the book *Duality*

Mark knew he should have been enjoying himself. The bright lights, the scents and sounds of the New Orleans festivities greeting him at every turn. All the candy a fourteen-year-old could stomach, and the overwhelming air of enjoyment filling the night. But, despite it all, Mark Underhill couldn't shake a feeling of impending disaster. He had tried to tell himself it was just the masks, the All Hollow's Eve costumes and the way they twisted and leered, but he wasn't convinced. Deep in the recesses of his mind, as much as he tried to deny it, Mark knew what he has seen. It had been the *thing*, the physical manifestation of the *thing*, he was sure of it. As much as he would have liked to believe it was just some incredible coincidence, some reveler's outfit resembling the witch's artifact or some trick of his imagination, Mark knew better. What he had seen had looked too much like the voodoo doll for it to be anything but the wicked embodiment of arcane magic.

All Hollow's Eve had never been Mark's favorite holiday, but tonight had turned from a mediocre time on the town to a complete and utter nightmare. But, as much as Mark desperately wanted to go home, desperately wanted to call it a night, he just couldn't. Doing that would prove that his mother was right, that he was still too young to be out with no curfew. Mark shuddered despite the warmth of the evening, knowing with the prideful certainty of an adolescent that he had to see things through to the end, no matter what.

A bump at his shoulder made him jump, and Mark turned in a flash, certain that the *thing* had found him. His eyes wide with fear, Mark found himself greeted only by the sight of an inebriated elf walking with an unsteady gait, who kept himself from falling only by the aid of his prop long bow. Mark tried to laugh it off, chiding himself for being so on edge. He was supposed to be enjoying himself. It was a holiday. But Mark assumed that anyone who'd seen what he had seen would feel the same way.

The evening had started off on such a good note. A sweet sugar rush from too much candy filling him, and a beautiful young woman in a cat

outfit giving him a smile. The feline-attired femme had looked at least a few years older than Mark, but it was obvious from the seductive cat calls she made that she was interested. Mark had approached her with a bolster in his step, feeling big and wanting to impress, and that was when the night had taken its first wrong turn. Crossing the cobblestone of the French Quarter, Mark plowed headlong into a very authentically-attired witch, the woman's ancient appearance seemingly not attributed to make-up, her gnarled cane looking as if it came from another world.

Normally such a polite young man, it shocked even Mark when he heard the words coming out of his mouth, his normally polite 'excuse me' became a rude, 'out of my way lady'. He had wanted to show that he was tough, that he was cool. The elderly witch had leered at Mark, appearing as if she'd just been struck physically. Politely, almost regally, in a manner from a forgotten time, the woman admonished Mark to mind his manners, fixing him with a cataract stare. At the time Mark had laughed, uttering a dismissive, "Whatever," as he turned to look for the feline-costumed girl of his dreams. That was when things had gotten weird, the sorceress stranger saying nothing more as she reached out and pressed a tiny object into Mark's hand. With that, she seemed to disappear into the night, a faint smile cresting her lips, a knowing smile.

For a second, Mark just watched her go, his hands clasping the object, completely baffled by the strange turn of events. Pushing the bizarre encounter from his mind, Mark had tried to once again find the young girl in cat attire only to realize that she, too, was gone.

Uttering a curse, Mark had set his sights to the prospect of other girls and more candy, only remembering, almost as an afterthought, the object the witch had imparted upon him. He glanced down with frustration, but when he saw what he held in his hand, an instant shudder of revulsion and fear surged through his body. It appeared transparent, translucent to the point of insubstantiality, and Mark knew what he was seeing. Living in New Orleans his whole life, Mark had encountered voodoo dolls before, but never one like this. There was a texture to the doll, but to the naked eye it appeared as if there was nothing in his hand whatsoever. It was only when the light caught it at certain angles that there even



appeared to be anything there at all, a shimmer the only telltale sign of its existence. Turning his hand to drop the object, Mark felt an icy stab of pain as he realized the doll wouldn't come free, the tiny object seeming to cling to his flesh, almost becoming a part of it. Mark shook harder and finally the witch's doll fell to the ground. Now in the grip of panic, Mark didn't even look back as he set off for another section of town, a sudden and overwhelming need to be as far away from this strange encounter and all it portended filling him as he headed off into the night.

An hour later, with a bellyful of candy nestled safely in his stomach, Mark was starting to feel okay again, thoughts of the strange woman and the doll having faded to an almost distant memory. He was leaning against a store window, watching the humorous belligerents who'd had more than a few too many and taking in the flavor of the city, when he had first seen the *thing*. At first, it had seemed to be just a shimmer in the crowd, a strange trick of lighting, but as the phenomena of illumination continued, Mark realized that there was definitely something happening in the street. And with a sinking feeling, Mark realized just how much the strange shimmering sensation reminded him of the voodoo doll, only on a much larger scale. It seemed as if the texture and the fabric of the street was taking human form, the strange translucent *thing* heading in Mark's direction. Mark dropped his candy, thinking of the strange witch and her gift, and the horrible similarities. *This can't be happening*, he thought; but despite his mind's attempt to rationalize, the apparition was definitely coming closer, becoming more and more tangible with each step. The very air itself seemed to congeal into substance, a creature, which was fast approaching.

Run, his mind told him, and Mark listened, taking off down the street, ducking and dodging through crowds in a city he knew like the back of his hand. When the throngs of people grew too thick, alleyways presented new avenues of escape, as Mark rode the waves of people through street after street trying to elude whatever it was that was following close behind. Every so often, Mark would think that he had lost his pursuer, only to see a translucent glint or glimmer under a street light. Mark knew he couldn't go home. Not only would that prove that his mother was right, but it also would lead the *thing* right to his door step. No, Mark knew that option was out, and so was calling the police. As much as he desperately wanted to, especially as fatigue began to wear him down and the ache in his legs became more than just a minor pain, Mark

knew he couldn't really *tell* anyone because, quite frankly, who would believe him? Mark wasn't even sure if he believed himself. People would think he was drunk, or worse, insane.

After taking a few sharp corners, Mark leaned up against a wall, bathing himself in shadows as he momentarily tried to calm his ragged breathing. There had been no sign of a shimmer for several minutes. Mark, however, didn't want to press his luck, and as soon as he got his wind, lost himself in a crowd, the whole time trying to stay relaxed. A few minutes passed, a time of constant searching, in which Mark saw nothing. Not a single glimmer or shimmer to disturb the night. Minutes ticked by and the young man was almost beginning to convince himself that he had imagined the whole thing, jumping at things that weren't there. That was when Mark saw it again, faint, still far off, but approaching nonetheless, and with a speed that was frightening. *It's so quick*, Mark thought, but he didn't have time to contemplate it at all as he once again took off running.

Glancing behind as he fled, Mark wondered if the *thing* would even be able to grab him if it got close enough, the apparition seeming to be made of nothing more than air and light. But thoughts of the substantiality of the voodoo doll made Mark sure that if the *thing* got its hands on him, he was done for.

People seemed to fill the night in a swirl of colors and masks, and Mark felt stifled by them as he made his way through the crowd. A green devil laughed groggily, groping at an overly-tall mermaid leaning against a wall. A ruddy dwarf lay prostrate in the street forcing people to go around, over, or through him. Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum locked arm-and-arm heaved dryly onto the concrete. It was a mass of confusion and Mark capitalized upon it. Picking up the pace, he wended his way through the crowd. His head throbbed as exhaustion tugged at him, everything seeming to blend into a kaleidoscopic montage as he went. A man on stilts, blended with a man covered coated head to toe with paint, in Mark's mind. A black vampire coalesced with a soccer player, and the whole world seemed to be swirling in a blender.

To Mark, it appeared as if he were watching the whole thing from afar, his body not really his, as fatigue tore away at him. The tired adolescent could hear someone screaming for 'candy', a person or food, Mark didn't know. The lighting of the streets grew dimmer, and as Mark trudged on and he knew that he was slowly wending his way off the main thoroughfare, though there seemed to be little he could do about it, back-

ward glances telling him that the *thing* was close, very close. Mark ducked down one alley and then another, and veered into another still.

A half-conscious bum called out to him, “What’s a matter boy, seen a ghost?” Mark could hear the laughter trailing after him as he continued on. He kept running, legs positively burning as he went. “Hey kid watch it!” He heard a terse voice saying, and it took Mark a minute to realize that he’d run headlong into someone.

Mark didn’t hesitate, “Listen, you’ve gotta help me. There’s this *thing* after me. Some crazy lady sent it, and oh, I’m so sorry...I just want her to know I’m sorry...I didn’t mean it...I was trying to be a big man.. and I...” His words ran together, coming out between winded breaths, tears welling in his eyes.

Mark was silenced by the same voice as before, the tone gruff and implacable. “Look kid, everything’s gonna be just fine okay, now just listen to me, all right?” Mark smiled, looking up at the man. There was confidence in the stranger’s posture and Mark knew that this was someone who could help, someone who could stand up to the *thing*.

Mark tried to calm himself. He had reached the end of the line and he was exhausted. He almost couldn’t believe it. Things were going to be okay, the man had said. Mark was going to get help. The stranger ran his tongue over a gilded incisor as he spoke, tugging at the twill of his coat. “Look, kid, everything’s going to be okay now.” The man reached out a meaty palm and tenderly ran his hands over the young man’s shoulders. Mark looked behind him and saw that horrible, familiar shimmer at the end of the alleyway. He knew, the *thing* had found him.

Time seemed to blur, happening with an incredible speed. In one second, Mark was whipped around and slammed up against the wall by his would-be hero. He felt the man’s body pressed up against his, the smell of sweat and day-old gin assailing his senses. “Everything’s gonna be just fine, kid. Just do exactly what I tell you.” Mark was being smothered, constricted by this man’s presence.

Mark was incredibly confused by the change in the man’s demeanor but, still felt safe. This was a man in control. “Now listen, you do exactly what I say. We’ve gotta make this quick.” Relief surged through Mark, knowing that this was a man of action. “If you’re lucky kid, and you do everything I tell you, maybe I won’t kill you when its over. Give me all your money, right now...” It was only after a moment that Mark realized the full import of the words.

“I’m not messing around kid, now, I said..” A faint shimmer grew

around the horrible betrayer's neck, and Mark heard his next words choked off with a faint gurgle. Suddenly, Mark was free of the pressure but still found himself trapped between the robber and the shimmering *thing*. Mark tried to move but found every escape attempt blocked by the struggle, the man who had tried to rob him finally ceasing his frantic writing and falling to the ground in a heap. Mark shivered, feeling as if he had just hopped out of the frying pan and into the fire, backing up against the wall as far as he could, alone with the *thing*. And now Mark knew what it was capable of.

Mark closed his eyes, not wanting to see what would come next, wishing desperately that he could just see his mom and be held by her one more time. Mark knew if he were able to somehow escape that his life would change. He wouldn't argue so much, he would help every old woman across the street, anything, if he could just see another day. Mark's imminent death brought a moment of clarity as he realized that all the possibilities for good, all the possibilities to help wouldn't be always be there. It was something most people didn't think about, especially when they were young and had their whole lives ahead of them, but Mark thought about it. And, as time progressed and he didn't feel pressure around his neck, Mark Underhill hesitantly opened his eyes.



Mark found himself alone, wonderfully, wonderfully alone in the alleyway, the sounds of merriment far in the distance sounding nothing so much like cries of joy and promises of second chances and possibilities. Perhaps, Mark wondered, that was what tonight had really been all about, what the woman had been trying to instill in him, the knowledge that he always had a choice and sometimes a single act could affect so many other things. Honestly, Mark didn't know, but he did know that he owed an apology to his mother and it was one he would be happy to deliver. With a broad smile on his face that seemed to shimmer in the moonlight, Mark started home.

Distilled Morning Darkness

Michelle Greenblatt

I edge away from 6:19 a.m. I just
woke up; it's sitting in bed

with me. what else should I do?
too late for morning since I have crossed

the chasm of nighttime & the red O
my mouth

forms as the shock
of waking trickles thru the alembic

of distilled
morning darkness. I would paint

today February but wouldn't that be
too pretty? I can't concentrate,

nothing makes much sense anymore.
this twittering bird, she's happy

about morning. my neighbor is up
& whistling. even if it is broken,

break it, I say to myself, then snap
my five fingers & two wrists.

2.27.2005-4.16.2005

11:58pm

Ben Barton

white plumes
brush past in the darkness
The backdoor smoker

Sweat Stains in Traffic

Raud Kennedy

Any exit will do,
even the shoulder.
Abandon the car
and be the eight
year old inside me.
Not 41, stuck
looking at the world
through tinted safety glass.

I Have This

by Stephanie Maher

I have this quiet, constant need
To be saved.

I am home, hoping the phone will ring,
“Your grandfather James has passed away...”

My father would tell me flatly,
Having trouble holding the phone in one hand while he is busy
Untying knots, around wounds his father left on his teenage back.

I would call you
It could be any hour of the night
It would be justified.

“Jon, my grandfather is dead. I just dropped the hot kettle on the floor.”

And then I'd have you here,
My usual voice on the telephone usually not enough.
I would feel less ashamed of this desperate, tumbling love.

piece signs of rio © devin wayne davis 05

once a sky
unmoons,

nature barely
has imagination
--take a leaf & feather,
they are essentially the same;

that is why birds, who would
resemble a fish,
move with the tide

... the way this explains how
monkeys, and hairy men behave.

The World's Greatest Shark Hunter

Jon Kuntz

He was crouching behind a coral ledge, quickly scanning all around and above him, thirty feet to the surface. He was thinking, "It could have been thirty miles."

He knew the Blue Shark was lurking somewhere, most likely waiting for him to make a move. Visibility was fifty feet, actually quite good, but that shark could cover the distance in a second. Even with good visibility, a Blue was almost invisible. It had an uncanny way of looking translucent in the water. Norm knew Barracuda had that same capability, but at least they showed a side view. The shark wasn't as readily seen, because he presented a frontal view to his prospective prey.

Norm knew the Blue hadn't attacked him, or he'd be a goner. No, he was just doing the "sniff test," rubbing a prospect with that big sandpaper nose, to find out if it were edible. If it returned, it would be for one purpose only.

One very large problem was his bleeding. When the Blue hit him, the force of it drove him into coral rock. It was like falling on a hundred tiny razor blades. He was bleeding pretty badly, on his side, arm and leg. He had heard that coral secretes a chemical that deters clotting. It's possibly true, because coral is both plant and animal by grand design. It probably takes nutrition from blood.

But, Norm had bigger problems. He needed to figure a way to get to the surface, without getting eaten by the biggest Blue Shark he had ever seen. He checked his air gauge. It looked like twenty minutes more at the outside. Only one spear remained for the Hawaiian Sling, and he left his bang stick on the boat, Damn. There was a K-bar strapped to his leg, but he might as well let that go. All it would do was slow him down, when he made his dash for the surface. He ripped the keeper and let his snorkel fall away. Next, his writing pad and camera went, sacrificed for need of a speedy escape.

Fifteen minutes passed and still Norm hadn't spotted the shark. Norm needed a plan in the worst way. What were the chances of that shark having left the area? What if it hadn't? The stakes were really high. Norm thought he knew sharks better than anyone on the planet, and still, he hadn't been able to predict their behavior.

"Well," he thought, "I don't have much air left, so I guess it's now or

never.” For the first time in his life, he was more than scared, he was almost petrified. He forced himself to move the flippers, then stopped!

A fat old Bahama Grouper came lumbering along, swam around an outcropping of coral and stared Norm right in the face. He reacted quickly, because a plan was forming, mostly by instinct, that would get him to the surface in one piece. He quickly took his sling and the spear, and sent the spear right through the middle of that grouper. The poor fish immediately began flopping and twisting. It was the dance of death in the underwater world, and a pelagic shark could sense it from miles away.

Next, he took a deep breath of air then put a piece of coral in the mouthpiece valve, so it would blow air bubbles. He held onto the line fastened to the spear, which held the grouper captive, and shot for the surface. About fifteen feet from the surface, he dropped the grouper, hoping it would continue to writhe about all the way to the bottom. He also slipped out of his BC, and let it fall. He reckoned the shark would go for the grouper and then be spooked by the air bubbles, as they often are.

Whatever happened, Norm didn't know. He took no time to look back. He tore through the surface like an emerging submarine, made for the swim platform, then over the transom and into the boat. There he lay, face up, just breathing.

His heartbeat and breathing were becoming normal. Norm liked an adrenaline high, but this one was a little extreme. As he calmed, he watched the sky with white puffy clouds. They looked like faces, but he didn't have time to stare as they altered their shapes to satisfy some river of wind at their altitude. The boat was rocking in a random fashion, and waves slapped like a wet towel against the sides without beat or rhythm. He noticed a faint odor of fish emanating from the deck, and with good reason. Wherever the deck failed to hold a gray marine paint, the wood was stained with the blood of many fish.

He knew he had to go back down. He had to kill the big Blue. Otherwise, no one would believe the size of this one. This time, he would take the bang stick. He needed to get right above that shark and jam the stick down onto the shark's head. It would fire a shotgun shell which would put about a dozen lead balls into the shark's brain. They actually have a small brain, so it was a difficult target to hit. The real trick was to get into position to fire it, without losing part of one's anatomy. But, all this was counting on the bang stick working the first time.

Well, this would be his last kill. He had killed between 800 and 1000 sharks in his lifetime. Some of them were unborn babies. According to

the species, a shark can have up to 100 babies in its body, waiting to be born. They're born alive and fully formed.

Norm got his spare equipment ready and prepared to dive. The steel cable from a large winch was payed out, over the top of an iron cross bar used to winch nets of fish into the boat. The iron bar was fifteen feet above the aft deck of the boat.

He took a long look at the blue sky, populated with hundreds of white clouds, strato-cumulus mostly. He thought, there's a chance it may be my last look at them. Then, he fell over the side of the boat and started his descent. The more he descended, the more the seascape began to look familiar. Soon, he spotted his discarded tank and BC. There was no air escaping from it now. He needed some bait for the shark, so he looked around the reef. A school of amberjack swept by at a good clip, and he speared one of them. He tied the lanyard from the spear to an outcropping of coral. Then he placed himself behind a five foot reef and waited to see what would show. His bleeding had stopped, because he had put some under-water grease on his wounds, topside. It burned like hell, but it was doing its job.

Norm thought he saw the shark. It was still too far away to determine its size, or even to see it clearly. However, it is what we "feel" or "sense" underwater, that prepares some people for battle. Norm understood the menacing nature of the big shark, and he was positive it was coming for him.

Norm was crouched behind some Brain Coral, and the amberjack was on the other side. He knew he would probably have two chances to get the shark; (one) when it came in to investigate, and (two) when it came to ingest the bait.

He wouldn't have much of an opportunity to use the bang stick. If he reared up too soon, from behind the coral, the shark was sure to react and swim out of range. Too late, and he'd miss the shark's brain. It would be a tight window of opportunity.

He could see the shark's movement now. It was that big, bad boy bearing down on the amberjack. Norm waited. He knew the water caused more inertia than air, and he had to spring with just the right amount of lead. He began counting to himself, timing his action. "NOW," he screamed with a great gush of air from his lungs. He came over the coral just as the shark's eyes passed where he hid. He got the bang stick down on the top of his head, and the shark didn't know what hit him.

Now, Norm had a larger problem. The shark was trying to swim after his brain had been destroyed. It was diving, climbing, going in

circles and swimming every which way, even upside down. If it kept this up for long, Norm would have a hundred sharks on hand. He had to risk it, so he scrolled out his wire cable off the winch. He got a couple of turns of wire behind the gills, and went topside to winch it in. It took forever, and Norm didn't know in what condition he'd finally get the shark. Getting it on board was another question. The winch was never made to pull a half ton of fish out of the water. He wasn't sure if it would do the job, but he had to try.

It seemed like forever, but eventually the shark broke the surface on its tether. Norm was thrilled to see there was no damage to the carcass. He winched it all the way up, until it was hanging tight against the iron cross beam. It made the stern of the boat sit very low in the water. It could very easily swamp and sink the boat. What to do?

Norm thought a while, then decided to continue winching the shark over the iron bar, at which point, it would fall onto the well deck. That would take its weight off the very back of the boat, distributing it more to the center. Norm began to winch, but it started to make a growling sound, and smoke came pouring out of it. He got a bucket of water and threw it on the winch to cool it. He had to continue pouring water on the winch, and it took most of his concentration. All of a sudden the winch started to make a loud, whining noise and the cable became slack. Thinking he had lost the shark, Norm turned to see what happened. He had finally winched the shark over the bar, and it started its free-fall to the well deck. There was only one problem, he was standing on the well deck. He looked up and saw this monster shark coming down on him, mouth open and all teeth bared. Norm never saw the sky again.

If you could visualize that scene, what the Coast Guard saw when they came across his boat. One of the sailors said, "You could see the shark's teeth imbedded in Norm's skull, and if you paused a moment, you could almost see a huge smile on that big Blues' face."

FINITE

Sharon Esther Lampert

Days live and die.
Suns rise and set.
Flowers bloom and wither.
Fruits ripen and spoil.
Ice cream freezes and melts.
Candles shed light and darken.
Energies are generated and depleted.
Monies are made and spent.
Time is used and squandered.
Love burns eternal and passions wane.
Lives are breathed and become breathless.

ON FIGHTS AND FASCINATION

Emily Griskavich

Gabrielle punched Sarah yesterday
In the parking lot after school.
Her fist connected three times
before the police liaison got there.

My students said it was about a boyfriend,
or a stolen walkman, or spreading gossip
or a grudge so old
that nobody, especially not the girls involved
can pinpoint its origin.

Last month, the liaison had to pepper spray
a gigantic special ed. kid who wailed on a guy
that made fun of him.

From the staff lounge, I heard the scream,
the thud as 6'4" and 225 pounds
hit the dingy hallway tiles.

My colleagues and I
just listened to the moans
My eyes, it burns, let me go!
and the barks of stay right there, don't move.

Completely unprofessional to go out and watch it,
but impossible not to be fascinated
by others; suffering
while fearing it might become ours

Just like the day in ‘98
When my bio class
told me Emily your pothead brother
kicked the shit out of Cody Malone
during B lunch.
Was he high?
I heard the cops searched his car
and he had to take a piss test.
What’s his problem?

I still have no answers.

faces

Anthony Liccione

rare and raw
looking to find fault-
world pressed of pressure,
faces of every size, sex
colorless like drizzle drops
of rain on the window clinging
aloof with no where to go
but a car windshield,
a tear of water inches
down connecting like dot-
to-dots growing bigger,
when the arm of God
swishes through-
like lightning, merciless
swiping the slate of glass
clean of his creation

IM Friend

Jill L. Ferguson

your yellow smile
beckons me, lets
me know u r waiting.
i text hi how r u?
& await ur reply.
i check e-mail,
stock prices, news—
nothing good
in the world 2day.
im fine appears in
the little box. & u?
good. we catch up
on dogs & husbands
& weather in each
of our cities, plans
for the day until
my yahoo freezes.
i lift the receiver,
punch the 10-digit code,
respond w/the damn thing's
stuck again. U say, I figured.
Now hang up & fix it,
So we can talk some more.

Raw Nerves

Tom Lane

“Ow!” Nick Cried after forgetting to chew on his good side. With his finger, he peeled the sticky candy from his sensitive tooth, but the pain persisted. He called his dentist but she was away. A friend recommended Dr. Pic.

“Don’t let the name throw you. He’s a great dentist.”

Dr. Pic, however, was also on vacation.

“You can still make an appointment. Dr. Wringer’s filling in for him,” the receptionist said.

Dr. Pic’s storefront office reminded Nick of a colonial stockade he once saw in a movie. It consisted of a door, and a wall, both of log-like panelings. His shingle hung in a small window, top-center in the wall.

The waiting room, box-like and empty, contained a coat rack, a magazine table, a large willow plant, and three-seater armchairs of aluminum and leather. Through a sliding window sat a receptionist with blue-streaked, black hair. Rock music piped out of the sound system.

“I don’t know you so you must be new,” the receptionist said with a laugh, handing Nick a card on a clipboard with an attached pen to fill out. When he handed it back to her, she looked it over.

“Follow me,” she said, and led him down a corridor, and through a curtain to a hydraulic chair.

“Have a seat. The doctor will see you soon.”

Before any doctor arrived, a technician appeared, and introduced herself as Hattie. She was older than the receptionist, dressed conservatively, and wore a lab coat. She took some x-rays, and spoke with pride of a little garden she had cultivated in her yard space behind the office in her free time.

“I had it weed-free for the longest time, but now, poison ivy’s cropping up, and I can’t seem to get rid of it,” she said.

“When does Dr. Pic return?” Nick asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, gravely, and her mood darkened before she vanished.

Alone, he gazed at a huge and intricate tooth diagram on a red background, hanging on the wall. Numerous arrows, thin and black, highlighting its components, made it appear covered with hair. He looked it

over until he heard a man's voice:

"What did you do to your hair?"

"Sharon, my pal, did it. What do you think?" the receptionist asked.

"And what did you do to your pal Sharon to have her exact so savage a revenge?"

"I can't believe you don't like it, and that you'd tell me to my face," she said, exasperated.

"Don't have a baby, baby. The tooth's my game."

"But I did it for you."

"It'll grow on me. What can I say?"

In a flash, the man stood before Nick.

"Hi, I'm Dr. Wringer," he said, shaking his hand. "What can I do for you?"

"I have a toothache," Nick said, pointing to his tooth.

The dentist was young, possibly thirty, and slim. His hair, brown and quill-like, stood out among his other features. He mounted the x-ray, and frowned.

"These will never do. Take another set," he said to Hattie.

She rolled her eyes once he left the area. Then she dragged the lead apron over Nick a second time. It was heavy, and felt like something dead.

The second set of x-rays pleased him.

"So you didn't get your technician's certificate in a box of breakfast cereal," he said with mock elation.

He examined the x-rays. "I see you've had some root canals done, but this toothache is due to a bad filling."

"Let's set up for a filling, and get it right the first time around," he said to Hattie before injecting Nick with Novocain.

Several minutes later, he reached for his drill. He drilled hard. The drill's whir screamed at Nick who soon raised his hand to indicate pain. Dr. Wringer stopped drilling, and injected Nick with more Novocain. It accelerated his heart, and made him light-sensitive. He still felt pain. He raised his hand again, and again, more Novocain.

"Don't worry, it's just a local, practically harmless," Dr. Wringer said, noting Nick's apprehension at the dosage.

But it's not drinking water, Nick thought just as the dentist stopped drilling, and lost himself in thought.

"I think it's a root canal, after all," he said at length, and barked orders to Hattie to scrap the filling preparation, and to set up for a root canal.

Moodily, the receptionist entered the area.

“Ms. Frank’s new dentist called for her records. I would have sent them to her without bothering you, but the files are locked, and the key’s hidden.”

“You’re a real peach today,” Dr. Wringer said, and excused himself.

“That’s not the first call for records that he’s gotten,” Hattie said, glad to be telling on Dr. Wringer. “Bernie, that’s blue hair, is taken with him. She was a good girl before he came, but now they’re kissing cousins, and he’s married. He hates me. He wants me out.”

“Isn’t that up to Dr. Pic? Nick asked.

“Dr. Pic’s not coming back. He said the practice was blinding him, and that he had to give it up, but I think he’s got AIDS,” she whispered, and put a finger to her lips as Dr. Wringer reappeared.

“Velma Franks is mad. She’s changing dentists because one out of four crowns that I did for her didn’t take,” he said.

“Doctor, this is hardly the time or pl-,” Hattie began, but Dr. Wringer interrupted her, shouting:

“I’ve nothing to hide. Nobody does crowns better. Nobody. That crown didn’t take because she kept manipulating it with her dumb tongue. I should have extracted that first.”

Fuming, he reached for the drill.

“Shouldn’t I see an endodontist for root canal? Nick asked hopefully.

“No. This one’s child’s play. I can handle it.”

Night had fallen by the time Nick left the dentist. Novocain numbness kept him from knowing if the toothache was gone. In the morning, he awoke with it alive and well. His jaw was also swollen.

“I look like I’ve been punched in the mouth,” he said over the phone.

“Come in at once,” Dr. Wringer said, concerned.

That concern worried Nick more than his tooth.

“Probably a minor infection,” Dr. Wringer said, unconvincingly, as Nick sat in the chair.

The doctor took an x-ray himself, and studied it. Then he drilled a tiny hole in Nick’s temporary filling.

“Let’s see what this does,” he said, and prescribed an antibiotic, and a painkiller.

“What was the matter?” Nick asked.

“Don’t strain your brain over it. If you’re not better by tonight, come in again. If you’re okay, then wait for your regular appointment,” Dr. Wringer said.

Nick's condition cleared by late afternoon. He remembered his previous root canals. Painkillers and antibiotics had been prescribed from the start. He also remembered the endodontist telling him that he was drilling a hole in his temporary filling to allow a gaseous buildup from the treated root to escape, and not cause a problem. He suspected Dr. Wringer of negligence, and wrestled with himself over keeping his scheduled appointment. He kept it, however, because most of the root had been treated, and he wanted closure, and a permanent filling, without the hassle to having to find and visit another dentist.

Bernie, the receptionist, greeted him. Her mouth was swollen, and her manner was subdued.

"Oral surgery, but he doesn't charge staff," she said with difficulty.

Hattie took an x-ray.

"Today's my last day. I'm not waiting to be fired. He's nuts. Now he's got extraction on the brain. That little fool, blue hair, let him pull a tooth, but I wouldn't let him pull my valise," she said.

Her remarks tempted Nick to flee the office, but he bit the bullet, and for his resolve, he got a completed root canal, and a permanent filling.

"Root canal therapy doesn't last forever. Throbbing toothaches, excruciatingly painful, often strike without warning from older root canals. You might want to make an appointment to come in next week, and get yours examined. Extraction may be called for," Dr. Wringer said.

"Are you sure you needed that extraction?" Nick asked Bernie, leaving the office.

"Oh yes, Ed's the best. He knows what he's doing. As soon as I'm over this one, I'll be having another," she said.

Some distance from the dentist, Nick passed a cemetery. Crescent shaped tombstones of white reminded him of giant teeth. That night he dreamt of a giant Dr. Wringer, stalking the cemetery with giant pliers, plucking out the tombstone teeth, which came up from the earth dripping red.

Haiku for Hairdressers

Michael Levy

At the hairdressers
snippets of idol chatter
exclusively for hot heads

KILLER

Davide Trame

He said -I absolutely considered it as my duty-.
Given his condition at that time
he didn't feel anything, he didn't see his face,
he just went in and shot him in the back,
according to the plan, like that.
You shivered. While the interview continued though
you couldn't but agree with what he answered,
yes, he is aware that everything then
had been first triggered by fear, he now knows
it only makes things escalate as war,
he sounded meek, sympathetic, sincere,
the up and down in his twang familiar, real.
What you were sensing after all
was not a surprise, you already knew,
he was me, exactly, and you.

A Plea At The Black Obsidian Basin

Kurt MacPhearson

deep space
garbage disposal
pull me in
make me the event
at your horizon
for I have crossed
that point
of no return

Winter in Dreamland

James Michael Ward

I was going to shave my moustache like Hitler
then I found a pair of Lennon glasses
wondering the significance
of politics and entertainment
went to the book store today
there some recent Bukowski
but the book cost 17 dollars
poor dead bastard
looked at the new writer's market book
they cut the screenwriters
I know I've been talking to these fuckers forever
most execs just dismiss you to the underground
I'll delude myself that I make a difference
praying to God to make it stop
but I fight for my sanity
but things could be worse
I could be in the asylum
or cracked out on Fort street
as it is going to dinner
with my roommates sober
other than a little THC
to make things spooky
might bring the video camera
to catch the falling snow-

THE GIANT

Mel Waldmanx

The first time I saw THE GIANT I was disappearing from humanity. I thought I was a messiah from Brooklyn. I had glorious dreams.

I was going for my M.A. in philosophy. But I spent most of my time drifting into the blue, smoking and puffing and in those days-King Size Kools were as deadly as pot.

I was clowning around and goofing, off into eternity, and so now and then I'd visit this man and tell him my problems. He was terrific. I swear, he could have been a therapist. We talked, and he told me about the war, Korea, you know. He mentioned how he was a straight "A" student and never took notes. He breezed through school, but the war was different. It was a bitch. And if anyone tells you it was sweet and sweet, well, it was the smell of blood across your heart and knowing maybe tomorrow would be the last, when any moment your balls or cock or any combination of, could be blown to kingdom come and hell, who wants to be when you ain't a man anymore?

I worshipped this real man. Yeah, he even said he was scared shit out there in the dirt. And feeling, touching some guy's guts just blown into the ashes. May he rest in peace, and how close can a thing be to death?

He told me to leave school, and come back later. He was over 6 feet tall and very husky, with auburn hair, and he didn't have a goatee then. He was a wise man. He understood.

I got very sick. I smoked 4 packs of Kools each day, coughed, smoked the grass a few times, went to whores, took the needle among junkies, and after the spring term, left. I disappeared. I left without saying good-bye.

Hey you, you out there in the skin, with the clothes on and called Mr., and with a woman called Miss or Mrs. and the kids and the old, bet you can't guess where I was.

You have to know. Try. Try to comprehend. The whole freakin world is waiting. We have to find out if we ever want to return. *After* is very important.

Silence. In the silence, we look dead. Yet we are merely frozen in the seething darkness of time. We are here. And yet we are invisible.

Here. And yet far away, we exist too.

Away. Far away, where they (we) walk on grass and kiss the earth. Where human things meet and converse. And smile, and cry too. And

THE GIANT was left behind to listen to sad boys growing into sad men, and yet, some folks never return.

I did. Came back from the dead. Most say I never came back. I was so high I couldn't come down, not even once to say hello, beg, cry for momma who died years ago. Humpty Dumpty ain't together no more.

Yeah, I left and hid underneath the earth among the worms but they were not so bad considering. When I came out of the hole, and before, I thought about the man. He made me laugh. Didn't tell you he was funny. Oh god, he was the funniest thing. If there are any directors around or producers, I want you to look him up, cause he has the spirit, and when he talks, we laugh, cry, do a lot of things, silly things cause he has this terrific magnetism. He's got it. You've got to find him!

Tell him I got very cold in winter. Puff. Puff. And I caught pneumonia. Other things too. And I miss him. Hope he remembers.

A few years later, I was back in school. Finished all my course work. Passed the Comprehensive Exam. But had to write this thesis. Had to choose an adviser.

We were re-united. I almost kneeled before him. He laughed and cackled and made me laugh and cackle. So we got along splendidly. I even told him where I had been and he didn't flinch.

He had a goatee. I had a potbelly. Had gained 60 pounds. We were different. So I grew a goatee. And he took me on. He became my mentor.

We began in the spring. In fact, I began and he watched. We didn't rush. And he had a drink here and there. I think it was April, and he didn't talk about Korea. He drank Scotch.

I shook in his presence. Yet he always made me laugh. Told me about this sergeant who was queer. Wanted to be THE GIANT'S lover. He thanked the guy but said he wasn't that way. I roared. Don't exactly know why. He was this jolly green-eyed or blue-eyed giant, with red hair. He promised to tell me, in one big cackle, what happened on the battlefields, when there was no Scotch around.

After several months, I chose this glorious topic about *time* and how people things react to the passing and the changes and adjust to the illusions and perceptions and...I wanted to prove or disprove the existence of time. (Wow! Was I nuts? How could I achieve this grandiose goal?)

THE GIANT swallowed some Scotch and said: "Go for it, kid!"

You know, *Time* laughs at us. I knew that, and, discovered bits and pieces here, there, and wondered about the war and how this one now, this Vietnam that I never entered, but this Vietnam which took the lives of many young boys, wondered if the man would have fought in this one, but I didn't ask him, no not now and too bad I hate liquor cause when he carries this bottle around, I want to join in, but my stomach ain't fit for that kind of thing, although it's not as bad as sticking needles inside, unless...

Time passed. The thesis on *time* went slowly. I interrupted him at meetings. He cackled. Often, he was annoyed. I was sorry.

And after almost a year, when the deadline is coming near, and I gave him the thesis 2 months ago to read, but he keeps on saying he forgets and they pressure him, I start thinking maybe...

Hell, if you love a man, you love him the way he is. (My father beat the crap out of me. Yet I loved him. Dad terrorized me. Dreamed of killing him. I didn't. Still loved him, even if he murdered my soul too.) Yeah, but after 5 years I've got to get the M.A. I need that piece of paper. I need it bad, the way some guys need a fix. But I've only got 3 weeks to get the thing read, retyped, and accepted. (I typed it once, but the format was wrong. These graphs have to be done in Indian ink. The thesis goes to the library and it must be perfect. Transcendent, unlike the writer and adviser.)

I met him today. He says they pressure him, but he promises me. He won't let me down. I swear that's what he says. But time is running out, and I wrote this shitty thesis on time. And who gives a damn?

Two weeks left. After 5 years, the deadline is almost here. He looks sad and says he's gonna read it some day. But some day is too late. They give you 5 years to finish the M.A. and then-you lose everything.

He had this bottle of Scotch in his desk. I wanted to remind him, but he forgets. What's wrong with him anyway?

Gee, I never wanted the piece of paper anyway. I thought it was important. He said it was. But his breath stinks now and he doesn't care. Tomorrow he's gonna project this great image in front of his students. Tomorrow is his debut. He doesn't make it. He never conquers some big country. Never becomes the President. Of something.

I left and didn't say good-bye. When you've been away, you smell the grass, and the breath, and the soul. And you understand.

Follies and Fancies

Gerald Zipper

She looks to see herself
absorbing her elegance through the glass
adoring the glorious plumage
more resplendent than the rest of us

He looked to see himself
the wisest of men
and intellect with bell-shaped thoughts
peering down from craggy peaks

She believed here was the grandest passion of all
loving and being loved as none before
breathless from the thinness of her air

He posed with letters and lines
whirling through equations and parabolas
stunned by the complexity of his thoughts

but we long ago stopped playing these silly games
knowing how better to camouflage our foolish fancies

The Mathematics Of Love

Christopher Barnes, UK

with you my night is full of dreams

old wound-down orchestras
compete for rainbow-ribboned attention
with white noise, pips, the new moon

we the emotionalist performing dogs are hot
the antecedents of empty bodies
there are no benevolent fathers

with the wink of a swollen eye
meat sings

I pierce a moan-anthem
totting up the mathematics of love
slug-streaked parts of you turn
long toes are diggers of safe homes

FIRE

jm avril

Physical alchemy
Of the material plunged
In a princely chaos.

The critical state
Of a cupboard drowning
In the red waters.

You were thin
And, in life got red
For the idiotic braggarts.

You were cremation
In the royal Stake
By the hangman created.

APATHY

Cynthia Ruth Lewis

Just another day.
I rise, purposely overlooking your empty
side of the bed, dress, and go outside to
get some air, when I notice the bright
morning sun glinting off shards of glass
from the neighbor's newly-broken out
window

I walk closer to investigate: screen's
torn off and flung to the side of the
vacant house, window-glass gaping wide--
wasn't sure if anyone might still
be inside

thought maybe I should call the neighbors
to let them know, but then again,
the world unfortunately being what it is,
maybe I didn't see anything--
maybe it's not even broken

I go back inside, leaving the front door
and curtains open, pass the unpaid bills
on the kitchen counter, sit down, light
a cigarette, and start to think, wondering
exactly at what particular point in my life
it was that I stopped giving a shit

Sisters

Michael Bonanno

Sisters,
I humbly apologize
for the daggers
who kept you cloaked,
who concealed you
within the walls
of their abode,
making you machines
that produced their sustenance
as well as the
offspring you maintained.

Sisters,
I ask forgiveness
on behalf
of the leaders
who did not seek
your approval
nor your opinions.
They hypocritically powered
the engines of state
as if
the cessation
of your state
was preordained
by destiny.

Sisters,
I repent
for the sweat
in which you bathed
as you toiled
beside those
whose recompense
unfairly dwarfed yours
like a vacant liability,
an annoyingly painful bruise
to be conveniently avoided.

Sisters,
my sisters,
I save my greatest remorse
for every man whose hand
has imbued your skin
into a demonic rainbow,
for every man who
has demanded your submission
in exchange
for his bastard satisfaction.

Gravid with a bird

Milos Petrovic

I'm afraid that
I'm not going to have
Enough eyes to count the stars
When sky is going to spawn,
For the last time.

And then, when you're gone
When all indecision (doubtfulness)
Of water come
When you leave and say:

I wasn't get drunk by him,
It was wine.

Disenfranchised

Linda Webb Aceto

Terror:
knees crawling over fate
spiked with gun metal shards
spit through blazed magenta blue.

Tradition

Walker Manning Hughes

The squat gray mare lurched and pedalled, fighting to gain the crest of the rocky slope. Foamy sweat lathered her neck and shoulders from the urgent push across the flats, making it hard for John Thomas to hold his seat. There hadn't been time for a saddle, and the boy's face contorted as if it alone could maintain his place by sheer force of will. Crimson hair swayed in a silent rhythm over the boy's twelve-year-old frame.

"Come on girl. Get up now," John Thomas encouraged. If he didn't hurry, and if the newborn was a boy child, he might never see his grandpap again.

The horse, near blind in her pre-dawn exertion, trusted the boy and pushed forward. At the summit she stumbled. John Thomas heard a vicious *crack!*, and felt a sharp intake of breath between his legs.

"Not far, Sadie. Let's go," he said, but he knew it was no use. A tear broke free of the well swelling his eyes and he slid from his slick seat. Only then did the horse go down. A throaty, agonized cry broke the quiet of the morning, as near hopeless and human as the boy had ever heard. The mare despised the pain and tried to find her feet.

"No, no. Stay there girl. You did good. You did good." The boy caressed his friend's head and saw her front leg bent in a way it never should have been. White bone grinned inside a violent red gash. The rock that had turned lay there, its green belly basking in the long forgotten morning breeze. The hole it left behind crawled with armored centipedes, their hundreds of pumping legs mocking the powerful beast that had been cut down to their base level.

"I don't have my rifle," John Thomas said into the wind. He knew he had to end the horse's pain. He turned and broke into a run, wanting to fly the last half-mile into town.

He had two pressing reasons to find his grandpap now.

The ancient church bell tolled, calling the town to gather, and the boy appeared to be just another excited resident as he pushed through the dusty street.

"John Thomas, wait!" a voice called, and the boy turned to see a frail, apple-cheeked girl of ten running towards him. She clutched her skirts

with one hand and a ragged, floppy-eared puppy with the other.

“Sarah Mae. I’ve no time now.”

“But it’s terrible, cousin,” the girl said. “Pa’s to drown my baby!” She waved the little dog as evidence.

John Thomas stopped. “What? That doesn’t sound like Seth Daniel.”

“He’s not hisself. She made her water right on his boot, and he can’t stand it. She’s barely weaned, and not even named. You’ve gotta help!”

“Here, give her to me,” John Thomas said. “I’ll keep her safe, but I’ve got worse troubles right now and you’re slowing me, girl.” The shivering pup yelped once, but snuggled in for warmth when held close. “I’ve got to find grandpap.”

“Everybody’ll be at the church. They say Mary Grace is birthing. They say it’ll be a boy.”

“If it is, we may never speak to grandpap again.” John Thomas turned and hurried towards the town’s center with Sarah Mae struggling to keep up. There was a crowd already gathered, pushing through the double oaken doors of the long, low church.

“Have you seen Josiah William?” John Thomas asked anyone who would listen. Eventually a woman pointed into the building.

“We’ll never get in there,” Sarah Mae said.

“Come on.”

The pair ran to a back wall, where a window stood open. Soon they were inside, with the little puppy tucked into the boy’s coat. They found the sanctuary and went in.

“There he is!” Sarah Mae said after a moment.

Several men huddled near a podium at the head of a press of townsfolk. A woman was there in a wheeled chair, a blanket wrapped bundle in her arms.

“Grandpap!” John Thomas said. A white-bearded man with creased, knowing eyes turned. A six shooter swung on his hip and on the hips of many of the men there, a rare sight inside the holy place and a testament to their willingness to do what had to be done.

“Boy, does your mother know you’ve come?” the older man said.

“No, sir,” John Thomas said. “But I had to. And now something terrible’s happened.”

“What is it, boy?”

“It’s Sadie,” John Thomas said. He fought hard to stay steady, to be a man for his grandpap. But before he could finish explaining about his horse, a rotund man stepped forward and jostled a small, hand-held bell.

The Mayor. Everyone grew quiet and the frustrated boy's grandpap shushed him with a wave.

"Good people," the mayor called with raised hands. "Today has brought us a new member to our little community. A child, naked and with nothing, who seeks to make a place among us. To take an identity that can be respected and cherished." There were several nods from the onlookers. "Some say we are a backward town, that we are old-fashioned. But I say a child has a right to a decent name." Cheers exploded from the crowd. The bundle held by the woman let out a squall at the unexpected outburst. The mayor leaned to whisper in the woman's ear, and she raised the bundle over her head. The noise subsided in anticipation and the blanket was pulled back.

"A boy child," the mayor proclaimed.

A concentrated hush settled over the town. "There are no male names left behind, and not for a hundred years has this question been asked. Who will name this child?"

"I will," a clear voice said, and John Thomas saw his grandpap step forward.

"No!" the boy yelled, but no one turned his way.

"By what right do you claim this honor?" the mayor said.

"By right of age. I am the eldest."

The mayor paused to allow anyone to refute the claim. When no one spoke, he went on.

"What name will you give the child?"

"The name that was given me. A name that has been handed down for generations on end, and carried with honor." The white-bearded man took another careful step. The woman handed the angry red baby to him, and he raised it even higher for everyone to see.

John Thomas felt the earth shift under his feet. The puppy in his coat gave a quick jerk and the boy stared at it absently.

"I name this child," his grandpap said. "From this day until another takes it, let him bear the name of Josiah William."

The baby stopped his fussing, as if he understood the importance of what had happened to him. The crowd let out one cheer of approval, and grew quiet once again. They parted to make a lane for the old man. He walked to the door, and as he passed, each person turned to show him their back. He was a nobody now. He had no name.

John Thomas felt his heart shatter. He didn't want to turn, didn't want to disregard his grandpap. But he knew he must. He couldn't dis-

honor tradition and his own good name, and he couldn't belittle the old man's sacrifice.

In a loud voice he said, "If anyone here can hear me, and loves me as I do him, help me now! My horse Sadie lies up on South Ridge with a broken leg. She needs tending to." He saw his grandpap pause for a moment, and without looking give a slight, almost imperceptible nod. John Thomas swayed on his feet as he turned to present his back to his grandpap.

The crowd stood as the old man made his way out of town. John Thomas stayed still until they began to break up.

After about twenty minutes, the long rolling report of a gunshot broke the calm, warming air. John Thomas looked at the little ragged puppy.

"From this day until another takes it, you will bear the name of Sadie," he said. Tears streaked his face. After another few moments, a second shot sounded, clear and final.

The boy turned and found the end of a dwindling line of people. Numb, he waited to pay his respects to the child called Josiah William.

The Black and White of It All (Revised)

Kelsi Oser

Jay's eyes misted over as they moved back and forth like a typewriter over each line I wrote. We were hanging out, of all places, in a church parking lot, drinking forties and snorting coke. But something had come over me when Jay began talking about his sister who was only a year younger than him, about how much he loves her and how he doesn't know what he's going to do about her cancer. I parted from the group with my notebook in hand, and wrote a poem about life and death and love and hope, inspired by Jay's heartbreaking situation. As the words flowed from my fingertips onto the paper, salty tears also flowed quietly from my sad eyes, creating mascara tinged sunburst splashes on the page. A warm summer breeze dried my cheeks and forced deep breaths of sweet air into my cigarette smoke-filled lungs.

I never really showed people I didn't know very well my work; the things I wrote were usually much too personal and revealing. But the distance in Jay's eyes remained even when I'd pulled myself together enough to rejoin the crowd. I pulled him aside nervously.

"Here, I wrote something; it's kind of about what you're going through..." I mumbled, already embarrassed by my boldness to assume he'd even care. When he finally absorbed the last line, the guy who most people would be afraid to fuck with had damp cheeks as well. Suddenly, his arms were around me, tightly. We stayed like that, in silence, for a long time.

I didn't always communicate hopped up on cocaine and booze in dark parking lots. I was one of those annoying little babies that never stopped talking, one of those toddlers that everyone smiles at while secretly fantasizing wringing their necks in the movie theater. You couldn't shut me up if you promised me the world. I'm told I had my own language and knew my name at six months, and by seven I associated English words with people and objects. My first comprehensible word came nine months before I learned to walk, and I formed complete, coherent sentences by the time I was nine months old. By eleven months, I dictated every possible thought that entered my head.

By the time I turned eight years old, the bellowing voice of my father

echoing in the stairwell came to be a nightly occurrence. “LIGHTS OFF!” He had a tendency for shouting ten times louder than necessary when he wanted to make a point. Five minutes later, when the sliver of light peeking out below the bottom of my door had not yet disappeared, I could always count on an ear-piercing whistle he made with his fingers. He was sneaky and quick, always forcing me to crouch next to the door, book in one hand and light switch under the other. Somehow, I always managed to get caught hours after my bedtime, in the middle of a frantic scramble to jump in bed. During close calls, my heart galloped at full speed, and I would forget to breathe until danger had passed.

During adolescence, I discovered I possessed a few crucial talents. I managed my way to the New York State Qualifiers for both the 100 and 400 meter hurdles; evidently I was good at leaping over obstacles. I was a brilliant saleswoman, discreet and effective while dealing acid to support my own habit. And though I rarely cared enough about the subjects I was learning about in school to actually pay attention, I *did* care enough about my grades to refine my bullshitting capabilities in the field of essay writing. Eventually I realized that my writing—and most definitely not my test-taking or study skills—was successfully propelling me through high school.

But becoming a good scholarly essayist came as a mere byproduct of all the impassioned prose, poetry, letters, and journaling from my adolescence. I found solace in expressing emotions that I barely understood with surprising precision and clarity. Between heart-crushing crushes, fickle friendships, a turbulent home life, and a bad case of depression, I had much to let out; writing my exact perception of things made me feel more secure and confident about my life. I wrote all the time. I also took drugs all the time.

Ninth grade, fondly known as “the corruption year” among friends, signified a turning point in my life. I went from being the cigarette-experimenting “rebel” in my relatively nerdy, smart group of friends to the young girl ready to try anything, anywhere, with anyone. I sought to shed myself of my former identity. I was miserable being the frizzy-haired girl with braces that was as invisible as the air circulating through the school’s hallways. I was depressed, and like most fourteen year-olds, misunderstood. When the opportunity to change arose, I seized it.

I threw myself into a dizzying world of drugs, alcohol, and older guys. I snuck out through my second-story window countless times to party with skaters and stoners, and ravers and speed-freaks. It was a colorful, vibrant world, not bland and boring like my old life. I felt alive, and for the first time, desirable.

I carried my battered spiral notebooks everywhere, recording revelations and insanely original ideas, philosophizing on the world with acid in my spine and ecstasy on my tongue. I began to see the beauty in everything, and my dilated eyes were wide enough to let the world inside. I sacrificed precious brain cells that will never be regenerated, but drugs gave me a completely new perspective on life. The laughter, though not as gratifying as my drug-induced thoughts, also kept me coming back for more. I was sick of writing lyrics and poetry about my pain and sadness. I essentially regressed to my childhood and revisited my lost sense of urgency to discover and explore new aspects of the world and ways of being. My parents weren't quite as thrilled. Like my eight year-old self, the sixteen year-old me was still an expert at breaking the rules, and even more talented in getting caught.

When arguments with my parents elevated into screaming matches, any word that left their lips quickly enraged me to the point of uncontrollable resentment for my powerless position. At this particular point in our conflicts, all constructive lines of criticism and debate shut down. Neither party could discern between the other's legitimate points and verbal assaults. After storming off, absolutely hopeless that any acceptable resolution would be made, I'd scrawl furiously in my notebook about the injustices my parents had committed against me. Instead of trying to convey myself with choked up gasps and flushed cheeks, sometimes I'd let my mother read my frustrations on my bed with me curled up next to her in exhaustion. Trying to vocalize my jumbled thoughts while still emotionally volatile never worked out for me; my pen was the only vehicle through which I could convey any reasonable argument to my parents and actually be *heard*. Even then, seeing eye to eye was a rarity for my parents and me.

After school one chilly September day, I huddled with my cousin, Therese, on my front porch. I was chain-smoking and glaring at my mother, who was absorbing every move we made from the other side of the bay window to our left. This was my only time to be with anyone I cared about; I was lucky that a good friend was also a relative because I was no longer allowed to come into contact with any of my friends. Having recently been deemed a "Person in Need of Supervision" by a family court judge, I was only permitted to go to school and work, driven to and from by my parents to ensure that I wouldn't use drugs in between leaving the house and arriving at my destination. So when my mom told Therese to leave a half an hour after we got home from school, I was outraged at the brevity of the rare visit. My father pulled up the steep driveway two hours

earlier than usual, and the cold tones in my parents' voices demanding me to go inside sliced through my skull.

I sat with my knees pulled to my chest and silent streams draining from my swollen eyes, waiting for another fight to begin. Last week's incident was still fresh. That night they tracked me down at the park when I was supposed to be somewhere else, under parental supervision. When the mushrooms kicked in, it was the first time I'd smiled in weeks. But when my father's silver Celica coasted around the loop in the parking lot, I knew he'd spotted me. Any trust I'd tried to gain with my parents was instantaneously lost. After we "discussed" my escapades soon after, my knees sunk and I slumped next to the stove. For *two and a half hours* I laid sobbing uncontrollably, face down, on the filthy kitchen floor, lost in my own self-hatred, frustration, anger, and despondency. That night I *did* want to die, and my parents almost called 911 because I lost the will even to move or speak. I got through the night, though, and convinced them I was better. Or so I thought.

Now, a week later, my parents sat facing me, one to my left and one to my right. Therese had already started her long walk home; I was furious they wouldn't even give her a ride simply to fight with me. The calm swooshing of ruffled leaves was the only sound for what seemed like an hour. I was tiring of waiting for them to start in on me. Unexpectedly, the doorbell rang.

"Who is that? What's going on?" I jumped up, alarmed. Two social workers sauntered in and proceeded to inform me that I would be transferred immediately to the hospital's therapy/school program, which ran 8-5 Monday through Friday. That way I would be completely cut off from all my "delinquent" (but only) friends, have to quit my job, and have school for twice as long. Naturally, I resisted. Hysterically sobbing and swearing at the two strangers out to ruin every last aspect of my already crumbling life, I ran to my room. I called Holly with my back against the wall and both legs locked in front of me against the door, preventing anyone from entering my bedroom. When the police busted in to place me under a mental health arrest, one officer picked up the dangling phone. "Don't worry," she told Holly, "We're going to help your friend," as I screamed in terror in the background. Apparently, she hung up before hearing Holly's accurate response that I would be fine as long as they left me alone.

My fifteen-day ordeal imprisoned in the adolescent psychiatric unit of Genesee Hospital was more traumatic than any previous incident that had contributed to my pessimism regarding my future. The psychiatrists and nurses disagreed with anything I said, or claimed that I was lying. After all, I was a patient in the psych ward. That's all they needed to

know to invalidate my thoughts.

When the pillars of my world became to crumble, I knew I could hold on to my sanity as long as I held on to my pen. Free expression enabled me to retain my identity when the power of suggestibility may otherwise have convinced me I was simply a hopeless, self-absorbed, psycho loser. During each private therapy session, I felt these messages pleading to poison my mind against me, sneakily creeping into the cracks in my psyche, like a red sock weaseling its way into the white load.

Even before the hospital, writing remained my only outlet for the anger, humiliation, and hopelessness that festered inside. Through poetry I broke down my emotions. In prose, I contemplated the reasons for which my life was seemingly a series of misfortunes. And in my journal, I'd recorded every inconsequential detail of my substance abuse, social interactions, family dysfunctions, romantic encounters, and anything else fit for an after school special. Nothing could have prepared me, though, for the day I met with my parents in one of the psych ward's cramped conference rooms.

The head ward doctor, the psychiatrist assigned to me, and my case manager were also present the moment my explicitly detailed diary was placed on the table. As it sunk in that my parents searched my room for my deepest, darkest secrets, I became nauseated. It read like a raw confessional exposing my complex web of deceit in which my parents were entangled. As if having my parents read about how I sold acid (a felony) and about my explicitly detailed first romantic experiences wasn't horrifying enough, they highlighted the most disturbing passages for the doctors like it was research for a term paper. Needless to say, I decided that writing an unabridged encyclopedia of my life was definitely a catastrophic mistake that I'd never repeat.

Most of my memories from the hospital consist of staring out the window. My room overlooked the emergency entrance, so I saw people being rushed into the ER every day. I wondered what each person's story was, if they'd come out alive, or if they were strapped down against their own free will as I was when they wheeled me through those automatic doors. Oh, and those nurses on their smoke breaks. The cool air enhanced the effect of billowy clouds rolling from their mouths, and I would inhale tightly and slowly with them, trying to mimic the feeling of pulling drags from a coveted cigarette.

The "professionals" holding me hostage tried to convince my parents to give up custody so they could claim me as a ward of the state. I was a "hopeless" case, they maintained. By this point, though, I'd learned the

trick to being discharged. From then on, I kept my thoughts and opinions confined to the pages I was allowed to keep privately under my crunchy cot next to my barred windows. The day the head psychiatrist's petition (to detain me without consent until I turned eighteen) was denied by the judge, the ward staff sheepishly acknowledged how lucky I was that my parents refused to sign me over to the state the previous day. Suddenly I wasn't so crazy after all, huh? Time and verbal repression of my thoughts and emotions had earned me the right to once again savor the crisp, smoky scent of the still autumn air. Hopefully those copies of my diary were destroyed a few years ago when the despicable hospital in which I was both born and jailed closed its doors forever.

Though the exploitation of my deepest emotions and most private and sacred experiences scarred my trust in brutally honest writing, I continued writing from personal experience in more discreet language once I escaped the hellspital. Whether I scribbled prose, poetry, or reality-based fiction, I ultimately wrote for personal therapy. Writing is the only type of self-medication my parents ever approved of; it just took them some time to figure out that, yes, that means writing about things they wish I didn't do and horrifying experiences they wanted to protect their child from having. Writing changed my perspective on life, with time, by reminding me who I've been, how I've interpreted situations, and why I've made particular choices. Reading past work forces me to revisit myself and determine how and why my views and personality have evolved. Writing still helps me through life as a method of healing, of confronting pain, and of course of emotional and creative expression.

Every few years when I run into Jay Golisano, we exchange typical formalities. But each time, right before we part ways, he mentions quietly that he still has that poem I wrote hanging on his wall, over his bed. Being a gifted writer is one thing. But having the power to give hope, to create light in a dark world, is something I'll never take for granted. I'm determined to use it.

Baby

Nicole Rogers

Genevieve sat on the couch next to Rebecca and Callie. Callie had recently learned two things, the names for the parts of a face and that she was soon to have a little brother. She loved to show off, so she positioned herself in between her mother and Genevieve and began pointing to parts of their faces and saying what each was called.

Callie finished up the face by sticking her finger in Genevieve's mouth and saying, "Teeth."

Rebecca sighed and said, "Callie, we don't put our fingers in other people's mouths."

"It's okay," Genevieve said and gave Callie a little hug.

Seeing that she'd impressed Genevieve, Callie moved on to identifying "baby" by pointing to Rebecca's stomach.

"Yep, that's your brother, Andrew."

"An-ooo," Callie repeated as best she could.

Then she turned to Genevieve as if suddenly realizing something. She pressed her finger against Genevieve's flat stomach and announced, "Baby."

Genevieve laughed nervously.

"No, Mommy's having the baby, not Aunt Gen," Rebecca said.

Could Callie be right? Genevieve wondered. Her period was two weeks off, but she had been feeling a little odd lately. It was just a perpetual feeling of fatigue and queasiness that she had chalked up to stress, but now that Callie had put the thought into her head...

"Guess you're going to have to start teaching Callie other body parts so she doesn't keep mistaking 'baby' for 'stomach,'" Genevieve said hoping to quickly move past the baby issue.

"Well, I thought she had that down. She's never said 'baby' when referring to anyone else's stomach." Turning to Callie and mussing her hair, Rebecca said, "A little confused, kid?"

"No," Callie said. Then she glanced at the phone. "Daddy's on phone."

Upon her declaration, the phone rang.

Rebecca checked the Caller ID display. "She's right."

Genevieve and Rebecca looked at each other, then at Callie. All Genevieve could do was shrug, so Rebecca picked up the phone to tell her husband about their daughter's latest development.

instead of feeling nervous

Janet Kuypers, from the chapbook "Dual"

this also appear in the book "Duality"

I didn't know how many occasions would be obvious and apparent. I didn't know how nice it would be to have you around, even if I never made the effort to visit you. You know, my sister said that it would be nice if I moved to where I grew up, because even if we didn't see each other all that often, it was nice to know that I was close enough. I think of you now, after I had moved toward you and then I moved away. I think you're ingrained in my head now, you and your stories, you with the way you wanted to show yourself off to people who didn't like you, you who made fun of things instead of feeling nervous about them. That is what I like about you. I don't know how to explain it any other way.

I remember you coming by when I was at work and you said you were borrowing your dad's jaguar, and you wanted all of my coworkers to see it. and I thought, well, okay, if they have the time for this, and you wanted to point the car out to me and I saw it out the window and I thought, yeah, that's a car...

Once you gave me a ride in the car and well sure, it's a nice car, but it doesn't win me over, the theory here is that I'm supposed to like you for who you are and not for how much stuff you have, but...

god, that makes me think of how you would get into a huge argument with one of your friends and you two would hate each other, and two weeks later you'd make up because she apologized and all would be well again and I knew in the back of my head that they got mad because they didn't like your attitude but they'd have to apologize because they liked the perks of being friends with a rich kid.

I digress. sorry.

Once when you and a girl you were on a date with met me at a fifties restaurant, and the waitress was insanely slow and we couldn't get her attention, you took your paper napkin and your plastic tropical drink

knife and stabbed the paper napkin into the straw and said you felt like macgyver because now you have a rescue flag that we could use to flag down the waitress.

you see, these are my memories with you. they're all a little above and beyond the call of duty, but I guess that's who you are.

We went to post prom one year while we were in college, ganged up with friends we still had in college, and we ate at the top floor of the john hancock building for dinner, and one of the high school girl dates was afraid of heights... Well, they were all boyfriend and girlfriend, and this was their prom. and they were doing something extravagant and they didn't want to mess anything up and look too young. Versus you and I, of course, who knew everything at the ripe ol' age of nineteen, and we were feeding each other portions of our food and I think they were shocked with us but we weren't interrupting anyone, no one thought we were doing anything wrong, and lo and behold, we were having fun. Go figure.

I don't know, we had this habit of making fun of things that were unfair to us - one guy that liked me, well, you made so much fun of him that I'd be buckled over laughing, we'd comment on the rocks silently asking for food because they must be starved if they called the park "starved rock" park, and then there was this one guy you know that said you were an athiest, and instead of confronting him about it, you told me that no, you aren't an athiest because you praised that guy that said you were an athiest, and we would jokingly insert his name in prayers and pray, "Our Steve, who art in Heaven..."

But what I think I remember the most is when I flew across the country to see you and you were working, you got me a map and gave me a key and told me to just do what you want to do, so I shopped, and read in the sun, and toured the college and felt like someone assumed (for once) that I was entirely capable of making my own decisions and being in charge of my own life. Which was nice.

What is my point from all of this? Well, that maybe memories can seem poetic, but that it is nice when you don't feel nervous through life and you just make a point to live. How many people get a chance to do that?

the Battle at Hand

Janet Kuypers, from the chapbook "Dual"

I wanted you to know that I was on a mission when I saw you, and that I was a warrior and you were just a helpless victim that couldn't fight my weaponry.

that wouldn't fight my weaponry.

I would come in to town and pillage and rape, and rape and pillage depending on how you put it.

and rape is such a hard word, you know, entirely inappropriate for this, because I made sure that you wanted me before it was all over (because I have a knack for doing that when I fight my battles).

this is how I care to think of you. I was on a conquest and I came fully equipped with ammunition. I had bayonets; I had a rifle with rounds of bullets in a chain thrown over my shoulder; I had a .22 caliber magazine loaded hand-gun.

I didn't even need to use the hand-grenade or the tear gas.

even before I started using my tongue as a weapon with a kiss I used it as a weapon with words. and I knew I had won you won over from the start - you looked at me when I spoke (and I think you might have actually wanted to listen to me).

and I would never have to resort to violence to get what I wanted from you.

we seldom had opportunities before. there wasn't much of an opportunity here but we made one, and we somehow made it work.

I know I wasn't ready for a battle before but I want you to know that I came ready to fight and I didn't care the circumstance or whether or not we had to be quiet (because we wouldn't want anyone to find out - and no one did).

and no, it was not a momentous moment in my life. it was just a moment. a conquest, a battle, and in my own mind, I won the war.

you still thought I was beautiful and that I was horny - did I create a little monster in you?

now I'm going to have to re-arm myself and use my stockade of defenses to push you away.

but that is the cost of winning battles all the time, I guess.

you thought I would always want you, and you know, I liked winning the battle, but I'll have to work again so that you don't come back to

haunt me because we weren't meant to be anything to each other and you were just a conquest for me - a battle won.

people thought we would never get along. but I know better, I know there is no such thing as NOT getting along with me, and I know I can make anyone like me, as I did with you.

you were easy prey, you know.

false suicide


Janet Kuypers, from the chapbook "Dual"

"A woman called the station once, said, 'My daughter has been depressed lately, has been talking about killing herself. And she's an early riser, and hasn't returned any of my calls. Could you go over there? I'm afraid something terrible has happened.' So we said we'd go there, and we got in the squad car and went to the woman's house. All the doors were locked, and we started looking through the windows, and I saw her on the bed, stark naked, with her tongue sticking out, quite dead-looking. Now, this is kind of strange, because women usually commit suicide dressed well. In all my years I ain't never seen a woman commit suicide naked. Well, my partner kicked the front door down with one kick, and we went back to the bedroom, and I grabbed her hand to see if rigamortis set in yet, if she was cold, if she was stiff. And when I grabbed her hand she jumped up and screamed, and then she saw another police officer and she started to calm down. And we said, 'Your mother thought you might have killed yourself. She said you were an early riser.' And she said, 'Damn mother,' under her breath."

please drive through from "the plush horse stories"

Janet Kuypers, from the chapbook "Dual"

John once asked a pair of construction workers for their drivers licenses when they ordered scoops of rum raisin. they actually gave them to john. he said, thank you, please drive through.



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