

Sl at e &
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Mar r o w

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Autumn Reason, by Sydney Anderson
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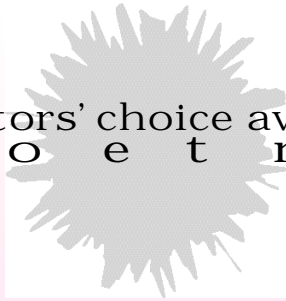
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editors' choice award:
p o e t r y



part sand

by ben ohmart

My feet are there, breaking off
by the piece and when I'm at my knees,
I look behind me and you're still there,
getting me together, making me late
for the lecture, but getting me there at all.
Grades slip when fall brings its winds,
you look for me all over and I am there.
Lay down, roll within me, a weekend.
Come up, we're fine, the bath with a plug.
Mud, but you reshape me,
but into my own image. Photos. From all sides.
In the sun, my tan aludes me, comes back.
Joints loosen, no one can hear me soon,
I catch up and realize, you're too good.



editors' choice award:
short story

expecting the barbarians by j. quinn brisben

Stavros could see the two young men across the street standing under the street light by the parking lot. They were elaborately combing their hair and talking softly to each other. They were alert, watchful, obviously with some serious purpose in mind. Any competent cop could have spotted them immediately, asked them what they were doing in that neighborhood so late at night, accepted their explanation genially, then stayed until they moved on.

A squad car would be by in five or ten minutes. This was a prosperous arterial shopping street, two blocks from a major intersection. One block to the east, across the street from the bank, Kostakis kept his lunch room open all night. Cops liked to stop there for a cup of coffee. They liked to stop at Stavros' restaurant, too, but he had closed as usual at midnight. He had been less than a year in this neighborhood, but he knew most of the cops in the district and could greet them without having to squint at their name tags.

In five or ten minutes a squad car would come by, probably from the west. Stavros would see it, get outside quickly and lock the door to his restaurant, which was already dark except for the light over the cash register, go down the street with the canvas bag full of the night's receipts, drop it in the night depository at the bank, then get into his car around the corner and drive home before there was any trouble. Even if the squad did not stop it would effectively neutralize the young men.

He felt the grip of the gun which he kept under the cash register. He had no faith in it. Last month Kim, who owned the Korean place one block west, had been

jumped in his own parking lot. He had a good safe in his place and went to the bank in the day time, so he had no money on him. But he did have a gun. The muggers took it away from him and almost beat him to death with it. A week later the hoodlums had been caught shortly after they had used the gun to kill a liquor store owner over on Clark. Kim told Stavros that he felt deeply dishonored by that and would never carry a gun again. A gun is no good in the hands of a civilized person against fast-handed barbarians who do not care whether they live or die.

It was a hot night in late September. Stavros had turned off the air conditioning when the last customer had left and helped everyone clean the place up and get ready for the next day. He had unaccountably felt like being alone for a while and had sent his employees home a little early. He had stacked the chairs on the tables and swept the place out himself. He remembered the knowing, sad look Gus had given him that night as he went out the door.

Gus was his oldest waiter, a shuffling man with bristling grey hair who drank far too much and who had once owned his own restaurant. Gus could see that there was never a line of people waiting to be seated, that half the tables were empty even at the busiest time of the evening. There was money in the till every night, but it was not enough to meet all the expenses. It would depend on Stavros' agility in fending off creditors and other suppliers how long he could hang on, but the place was inevitably going broke.

The location was not bad, although the place had no parking lot and customers had to use the commercial lot across the street. There were a dozen restaurants along the four blocks of the street that were the commercial heart of the neighborhood, and most of them made money. It was a popular area for young people to come in the evening, and the many offices in the area assured a big lunch business as well. Stavros had no liquor license, but patrons were allowed to bring their own bottle, and a healthy symbiotic relationship had developed with the liquor store next door.

The trouble was that Stavros had a place that was in no way distinctive. He did not stay open all night and attract a big breakfast trade like Kostakis across from the bank. He had no bar. He did not offer belly dancers or other ethnic entertainment like three of the other neighborhood places. His menu was long, with a full range of Greek and American specialties, but there was nothing on it that was really out of the ordinary. He had been told many times that he should specialize, specialize in gyros or big Greek salads, even specialize in cheeseburgers with olives on them, anything that would make his place stand out in the area.

The long menu meant extra supplies, waste in the kitchen, delays in service. It was the same menu that Stavros had had in the old place on Halsted, the same menu that he had kept for twenty-five years, one that was difficult to maintain with today's high labor costs.

The decor was wrong, too. There were the same blown-up photographs of Greek tourist sites in half the other places in the area, the same crossed Greek and

American flags, nothing to distinguish it from any other moderately priced Greek restaurant. Stavros did not even have a faded photograph of his native village, as most of the other proprietors had. His native village had been a street of dumbbell tenements on the near west side of Chicago which had been bulldozed below the depths of the lowest foundations to make an expressway when he was fifteen years old. Stavros did not know if anyone had preserved pictures of that street; certainly he had not.

Most of all, Stavros knew, the trouble was in himself. Old Lianos in the next block had a place even more ordinary and faded than his, yet it was always crowded. Lianos hugged every customer who came in, regardless of age or sex, remembered the names of hundreds of them, overlaid his walls with autographed pictures of minor celebrities who had had a wonderful time there, did a huge wedding and anniversary trade. Stavros was not like this. He was a small man with a nondescript moustache who preferred to stand quietly behind the cash register or move quickly and anonymously among the tables and through the back door to see that the cooks and dish washers were on the job.

The whole restaurant had taken on his air of anonymity. The best customers were the cops. Stavros gave them free cups of his competently made but not outstanding coffee, but so did every restaurant in the neighborhood, and they did not come for that. They went to Kostakis or Lianos for free food. They came to Stavros for anonymity.

Several times a night, one or sometimes two cops would come in with someone else and go immediately to one of the booths in the back which could not be seen from the street. Sometimes the cops would leave before the someone else, and the someone else would ask to leave by way of the kitchen. These were stoolies, of course, small-time burglars and muggers, pimps and dope dealers, whores and shoplifters.

On these occasions the cops insisted on paying for meals both for the stoolies and for themselves. The cops had a special fund for that. Sometimes a bottle of wine or hard liquor was included in the deal, even some cash. Stavros supposed that dope was sometimes part of the deal, too, but he never saw any change hands. He would have been shocked if he had. The cops knew he had a respectable trade. There were rules for the use of premises such as his which were well understood even if they were never written down.

The cops used Stavros' place and made sure he was never bothered by little things like hassles over the status of immigrant dish washers and waiters. They protected him from bad drunks, although they were not nearly so many here as in the old place on Halsted. That was near Skid Row, or what was left of it now that the big office buildings were spreading west of the river. Many of the bad drunks were crazy or so drunk that they were long past caring, and they would wander into Stavros' place for its warmth and chairs. A wave at a passing squad or a call to the district station would get them removed quickly and discreetly.

Stavros was glad that there were fewer drunks this far north. They disgusted him; he did not understand how they could let themselves go like that. He was a fastidious man himself, not only because his business demanded a high standard of cleanliness and order but also because it pleased him to be that way.

The young men were still standing under the light, smoking cigarettes and calmly surveying the scene. Their jeans were skin-tight, but they were carrying jackets which possibly concealed guns.

On Halsted the drunks had been an irritation but not a real threat. He had not really wanted to move from there, had been forced to do so in fact. Business had been declining there for years, even before old Pappas, his father-in-law, died. Most of the residential neighborhood, which had provided the main support for the place, had been torn up by the building of the expressway and the big university campus. Only the row of restaurants along Halsted was left. Most of the patrons were not Greeks anymore. Pappas, though, had retained the loyalty of a lot of old-timers. Some of them would drive in twenty miles or more from the suburbs to drink coffee with Pappas and discuss the events of the day. Pappas was the kind of man whose judgement they respected.

One by one the old timers died off. Their sons and grandsons did not replace them. Then Pappas died. Stavros was advised to move the place then. Pappas had two sons. One of them was a lawyer with a lot of political connections. The other was buying McDonalds franchises back in the 1950's and had become very rich. Both of them were nearly a generation older than Stavros. They told him that the old neighborhood was dead, that he had better move north and west where a lot of the old restaurants were relocating. Stavros had ignored them.

He had hung on for another five years. The Agnopoulos brothers had a popular place next door to his and wanted to expand. They offered Stavros a lot of money to vacate his lease on the old building. Stavros refused. The next day a Rolls Royce drove up and parked by a fire plug in front of the little restaurant. No cop in his right mind would ticket such a car. It was the most famous car in the Chicago Greek community. It belonged to Papadapoulos.

Papadapoulos ran all the gambling in the community and in quite a few other communities as well. He was a big in the Outfit as you could get without being an Italian. The ward committeeman, who represented the Outfit in all their dealings with local government, was his special friend. Stavros bought all his insurance from this ward committeeman and had all his table cloths and napkins washed by the ward committeeman's laundry because people who did not make these arrangements got into more trouble than it was worth. This had been true in the neighborhood since before Stavros had been born.

Papadapoulos was delighted to see his old friend Stavros again. He recalled the many pleasant times he had had in this places when old Pappas had been alive, a grand old man, a credit to the community, one who understood that Greeks had to stand together. He inquired after the health of Stavros' beautiful wife Helena,

reminding him that he, Papadopoulos, had been a guest at their wedding. He also inquired after the health of their two lovely daughters, perhaps, how time flies, soon to be brides themselves. How sad that we must grow old and the world change, but that was the way things were. Meanwhile the young men who had come in with Papadopoulos were sitting impassively, looking at the plate-glass window in the front of the restaurant and at other fragile things.

Stavros understood. He had understood that day in the 1950's when a less polite man had told his mother that they must move out of the apartment on Union that was the only home he could remember. There was no way that a person could hold out against power like that. The longer you tried to resist the more it cost you. Soon he vacated the lease for twenty percent less than the Agnopoulos brothers originally offered him. The brothers made no profit on this. The twenty percent went to a lawyer who was a friend of Stavros' brother-in-law, to Papadopoulos, and to the ward committeeman. Compared to predators like those, the two young men under the street light were a minor threat indeed.

None of the remaining old-timers had followed Stavros to the new place. Now, besides the cops and their associates, his trade consisted of transients and, on weekends, the overflow from the more popular restaurants on the street. There were also a few regulars, loners mostly.

One was a man in a shabby suit and frayed necktie who looked vaguely academic. He was maybe forty-five, the same age as Stavros. Every day he came in at precisely six o'clock with a bottle of the cheapest retsina from the liquor store and a book, usually one dealing with European history. It was seldom the same book two days in a row. He would prop the book in front of him, open the wine himself with a corkscrew on a Boy Scout knife, then order a small salad, a cup of egg lemon soup, and lamb with rice, never varying his order in the slightest way. He would read and eat in an abstracted fashion, frequently spilling food on his shirt. When he had finished with the lamb, he would continue to refill his glass until the bottle was empty, then order a piece of baklava and a cup of coffee. After that was consumed he would go, always leaving a tip of exactly ten percent of the bill.

Once he tried to engage Stavros in conversation. He was reading a biography of the twentieth century Turkish leader Kemal Ataturk, and he asked Stavros something about the expulsion of the Greeks from Asia Minor in the early 1920's. Stavros knew a good deal about it, for his mother had told him many stories of her perilous odyssey as a girl from Smyrna to Chicago. However, he did not want to talk about it with his customer. The man was not a Greek. All he knew about it was what he learned from books. Stavros had a strong dislike for people who knew Greek things only from books.

A long time ago he had been a great reader himself. He was always the best student in his class in the Orthodox parochial school, winning scholarships so that his mother never had to pay tuition. He had gone to a respectable all-boys technical high school and had won a good scholarship to the University of Wisconsin. In so

far as he had an ambition, he had wanted to be an engineer, a builder of roads and bridges. He liked the clean flow of interstate highways which were being built then. He liked the bronzed and muscular crews who worked on them in the summer-time. They reminded him of workers in vineyards and olive groves in a land that he had never seen. He was glad that nothing less than the clean lines and mathematical coherence of the new roads had replaced the heart of the old neighborhood.

It took him more than two years in Madison to realize the mistake that he had made. He liked most of his classes there and did well in them, although he did have a hard time with a graduate student who graded the compositions in his required freshman english class. Stavros wrote grammatically and clearly on all the topics on which he was asked to write, but he found it difficult to care about the writings he was asked to analyze and criticize. The graduate student complained repeatedly that Stavros' writing lacked feeling and imagination.

Finally, told to describe a vivid memory, he wrote about the block on which he had grown up, the smells of the little grocery stores and restaurants, the social clubs and the bars, the incense in the dark old church, home of the booming bass voice of Father Chrysotomos. The graduate student read that one aloud to the small section of the huge class that was his personal charge. Knowing that he had cinched a grade in English which would not greatly lower his overall high average in his important subjects, Stavros relaxed and talked in class about his background.

One of the students who heard him do this was Shirley. She was part of a group who were doing an off-campus production of "Medea." She took Stavros to a rehearsal, and the director decided to scrap all their work so far and rethink the play with the help of an authentic Greek. Stavros did not really know classic Greek, but he had studied the classics in school and could translate the sounds of the original and puzzle out the meaning fairly well. The theater group thought his talents were wonderful.

Shirley, especially, thought he was wonderful. She came from a small town in northern Wisconsin and was in full revolt against the restrictions of her upbringing. Still, there were limits as to how brave a revolt a young woman could make in 1959, even near the Madison campus. A black lover was impossible except for the very daring, a Jewish lover was a bit of a cliché. A shy and previously virginal Greek-American engineering student had just the right touch of exoticism.

When the next school year began they were living on the third floor of an old house near the campus. Shirley had redecorated the place with dark green wallpaper and furnished it mostly with stuffed pillows. Stavros, an only child who had spent a lot of his time with his mother in the kitchen, rather enjoyed doing most of the cooking. There were lots of parties with jugs of cheap wine where everybody brought guitars and sang folk songs. Stavros met a couple of real communists, black people from both Africa and America, and people who did not believe smoking marijuana should be a crime. The scholarship which Stavros had did not cover nearly half of their expanses, but Shirley had a generous allowance from her disap-

proving family.

In the summers Stavros went back to Chicago to work for a fruit wholesaler in the Haymarket, just as he had done when he was in high school. On the August day that John Kennedy won the presidential nomination Stavros' mother died without warning of a heart attack. She had worked in Lambrakis' bakery as usual on that last day. Stavros had no clear memories of his father, who had spent many years in a tuberculosis sanatorium before he had died.

Stavros' mother's funeral, held in Father Chrysotomos' new church several miles from the heart of the old community, was well-attended. Stavros received many offers of financial aid from his mother's old friends, which he politely refused. He put his mother's keepsakes and most precious household goods in a trunk which he stored in a warehouse. Before he went back to Wisconsin in September, he cleared out the small apartment where he and his mother had been living. The neighborhood was filling up with Mexicans, and this place had none of the childhood associations of the building in which he had grown up and had been reduced to rubble years before to make a highway.

With Shirley back in Madison, he began to have bad dreams. He was locked inside a trunk and could not get out. He was reading a page of Euripides which would suddenly go blank. He was running up a blind alley in Constantinople with the Turkish cavalry thundering after him. He was trying to stop bulldozers from effacing the last vestiges of the ruins of Troy. The diagrams and mathematical symbols in his textbooks began to seem meaningless. He was uncomfortable in the dark green walled apartment, yet he was afraid to leave it.

Shirley insisted that he see a friend of her who was majoring in psychology. When the friend heard that Stavros' mother had recently died, he started talking a lot about Oedipus. Stavros had no faith in the man because he had obviously never read the play. Even Shirley began to seem a stranger to him, some Medea-like outlander who would bring disaster on him. She had never had the slightest interest in his engineering studies, and he did not really share her interest in literature or unorthodox lifestyles. This world with its confusion of tongues and its constantly changing rules would never be his world.

Shirley was active in the Kennedy campaign and in October went to a strategy meeting in Milwaukee. Stavros went with her. Shirley suggested that he see the sights while she was conferring. She had heard that there was a new Greek Orthodox church in town designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Stavros found the old Greek Orthodox church and an old priest and poured out his heart to him. The old priest said that Stavros should go home. Stavros was not sure that he had any home to go to. He was advised to seek out his parish priest.

After driving back to Madison, he packed his few personal belongings and caught a bus to Chicago. Shirley thought that it was a bad thing that he was giving up his scholarship, and she still liked him a lot, but she was not really sorry to see him go. She was not equipped to deal with him or his troubles, and she thought

she was beginning to outgrow the relationship anyway.

Father Chrysotomos welcomed him like a son and seemed to understand his problems perfectly. The priest had grown children, and there was a spare room where Stavros was welcome to stay as long as he liked. If a person of his education did not mind taking a menial job, Pappas down at the old Smyrna Restaurant on Halsted, a countryman of his late blessed mother, this Pappas needed a waiter, and such a job would keep body and soul together until something better came along.

Pappas liked Stavros from the first. He was absolutely honest and could be trusted to watch the cash register and the other waiters while Pappas discussed the affairs of the world with his many old friends. He had a good eye for meat and fresh vegetables and was an unassertive but shrewd bargainer. Lambrakis remembered his mother fondly and made sure that he got the best of the day's pastries. Within a few months he was managing the restaurant, a situation which suited old Pappas very well.

Pappas had married twice, the second time when he was nearly fifty. His second bride had been a girl in the teens from the old country. Thus his daughter Helena was nineteen when he was nearly seventy. She had been raised by her mother to accept the old ways and had never questioned them. Pappas thought that it was about time that she got married, just as he thought that it was about time that a younger person took over the more time-consuming chores at the restaurant. Stavros was ideally suited to both purposes. He had no money of course, but he was hard-working, intelligent, polite, and not bad looking at all. Besides, his mother had come from the same town as Pappas, and Pappas believed it was his duty to help such a person.

Stavros could not remember proposing to Helena. He was invited to dinner at the home of Pappas, took Helena to several church socials and to the movies, and after a while it was settled. Helena was no great beauty, but she was good-natured and pleasant to be with. Helena, her mother, and Stavros had all mastered the art of getting along with Pappas, which was to be quietly competent and to let him think he was having his own way in everything. Stavros had no objection to joining such a family and much preferred to marrying Helena and running a restaurant on Halsted to being an engineer in an alien world.

A squad car came slowly up the street from the west. The two young men began strolling east toward their own neighborhood, elaborately paying the squad no attention. Stavros had the day's receipts in a canvas bag and could have easily made it to the depository and to his car under the unobtrusive police protection. He could have hailed the squad, since most of the police knew him by sight, and they would have detained the men until he was safe. He did not do so. He watched the squad until it was out of sight, then watched the young men walk slowly back to their post under the street light. He could not explain to himself why he had not moved, but he certainly had no intention of doing so just yet.

"Those people were a kind of solution," he said, then wondered how that phrase

had come into his head. It was from some kind of poem, a modern poem, a poem he had not liked. Of course. He had heard it the Sunday afternoon that the Parnassos Society had invited that damned barbarian Peter Isgren to lecture on modern Greek poetry.

The Parnassos Society was one of several Greek cultural organizations of which Stavros was a nominal member. It met once a month in a public room of a small but elegant hotel on the near North Side. Stavros did not ordinarily attend such meetings, for they were quite frankly just a pretext for the young people of the community to get together. He had been especially invited to attend this meeting by his older daughter Anna. He ought to have known that something was up.

He loved Anna dearly, but she had always been troublesome. In the big house on the Northwest Side where he had lived with his wife's parents, and still lived as the head of the household now that old Pappas was dead, Anna had always been a disruption. Everyone else, his wife, his mother-in-law, who barely spoke english, his younger daughter Maria, himself, had always submitted to the loud rule of the old man, doing what he wanted to, when he wanted to do it. Anna never submitted.

Even when she was five years old she would argue with her grandfather over which television program to watch, arguments which sometimes led to tears and slammed doors on her part but which usually led her to total victory. That Christmas old Pappas gave her a huge television for the play room, one over which she had total control, for she was his darling. This pattern of noisy confrontation followed by lavish gifts continued for the rest of the old man's life. He died when Anna was fourteen; she was inconsolable for weeks.

Anna had already made it clear that she would take her Greek heritage on her own terms or not at all. When she was twelve she had insisted on being withdrawn from the Orthodox parochial school. When Stavros refused she defied her teachers in such ingenious ways that she was expelled. Stavros was anguished but Father Chrysotomos reassured him.

"The teacher she hated was a bully and a tyrant, totally unworthy of that great profession," he said. "The school pays so poorly that the principal dare not dismiss even such a wretch. I think Anna showed a fine spirit in defying her and will be better off in a school where teachers are not allowed to be so arbitrary. Anna wants justice, a rare thing in this world but worth struggling for, She is a regular Antigone, that one."

When she was sixteen, she refused to obey Stavros' restrictions concerning dating and late hours. He stopped her allowance. She promptly got a job in a restaurant near her high school. He reminded her that she was living in his house. She told him that by the terms of her grandfather's will it was her grandmother's house and she would submit to eviction from no one else. He said in despair that he was her legal guardian and that he must turn her over to the juvenile authorities if she continued to disobey him. She told him to do that if he dared but that she would

under no circumstances be the last teenager in Chicago to be restricted by silly rules which were inappropriate in the 1980's.

Stavros listened a long while while Father Chrysotomos again praised Anna's high spirits before he knew that he must retreat. Anna allowed him to do so with some dignity. Even after things had calmed down, though, she continued to work as a waitress and was reluctant to take any money from her father. Despite her independence of spirit she was as good a student as her father had been, with tastes running strongly to the natural sciences. She won scholarships which enabled her to attend the local branch of the University of Illinois, whose campus covered a large portion of what had been the neighborhood where her father grew up. She wanted to be an obstetrician.

On her twentieth birthday she left the house and moved into a small apartment near the campus. She had a roommate. She did not specify the sex of the roommate. Stavros was afraid to ask. She had a small allowance from her grandmother, who was slowly awakening to the independent possibilities of widowhood.

Two months later Anna called him to make sure that he attended the next meeting of the Parnassos Society. The speaker, Peter Isgren, was a young man with long blonde hair and a scraggly beard. He was wearing a suit jacket and a necktie, but he was also wearing faded and patched blue jeans and sneakers.

He began his speech by explaining how he had come to be attracted to Greek poetry of this century. He was of Swedish ancestry and had grown up in Mitchell, South Dakota. When he was in high school he had a job in a lumber yard. The lumber yard was managed by a man named Charalambides who read Greek and who had many books. As the young man explained it, there was not much else to do in Mitchell besides watch the annual change of decorations on their convention hall, the famous Corn Palace, so he had begun to read and speak Greek under the tutelage of his boss. He had done so in the same spirit that another youth might have built hot rods or collected Indian arrowheads.

He had moved on to classic Greek and to Russian and other Slavic languages, but modern Greek had remained his first love. He was now completing a master's essay on C. P. Cavafy, whom he considered the greatest modern Greek poet. He spent a pleasant hour quoting Cavafy, Kazantzakis, and other modern masters, showing the creative tension which had come from the ambiguity of being placed in a culture that was marginal to and at the same time the deepest root of western civilization. He analyzed extensively the witty and beautiful poem of Cavafy in which the people of Byzantium have their cultural fatigue intensified by the coming of the barbarians, then are frustrated when the barbarians fail to come.

After the lecture Anna introduced him to Peter Isgren. He could tell by the way people fell back when he and Anna approached the man that this whole afternoon had been planned for his benefit. Peter was cordial and flattering, but Stavros was abrupt and cold with him. Later, Anna confirmed his suspicion that she was living with this young man and planned to marry him.

Stavros told her that this was impossible, that the young man had perhaps learned some Greek from books, but he was not a Greek. Anna recited a list of young women of their acquaintance who married non-Greeks. Stavros said all of this had no relevance to his family, which had always been proud to be Greek and would remain so. Anna said that she would marry whom she wished. Stavros said that he had no power to stop her, but that he would not give his blessing and would not attend the wedding.

Father Chrysotomos performed the ceremony, his fee paid by Anna's grandmother. The affair was simple, as befitted the resources of young people who lived on scholarships and part-time wages at menial jobs. Anna's mother attended, but her father and younger sister remained at home. He relented enough only to send some baklava to the site of the reception. Anna refused to come to the house without her husband, and Stavros had not seen her since. His wife and daughter were loyal, but life at home had become flat and tasteless.

Now the restaurant was definitely failing, and Stavros would be able to keep it open only for a few more months. His brothers-in-law might help him, but they would do so contemptuously. At the moment he could think of no fate more humiliating than to be an old waiter like Gus or to manage a McDonald's as an employee of his brother-in-law. His wife and younger daughter would be just as well off living on the vast amount of insurance that the ward committeeman made him buy.

He was sure there would not a squad car coming by for another five minutes. The two young men were waiting across the street. He slipped the gun into his jacket pocket, grasped the canvas bag full of money, and went out the front door, locking it after him. He walked down the street slowly. The young men walked parallel to him across the street.

Perhaps I will shoot one of them before they get me, he thought. Perhaps my death will force the police to give more protection to the merchants in this area.

The young men were staring hard at him. He could hear their footsteps across the empty street. Then there was a pause. The young men had stopped and were conferring with each other. Stavros walked at a steady pace. He was sure they would rush across the street to attack him any second now. His hand slipped into his jacket pocket. He was less than a hundred feet from the bank depository. There was no sound from across the street for almost a minute.

He unlocked the bank depository and put his money in. He could see the young men going into Kostakis' all-night place across the street. Perhaps they had seen something that he had not seen. Perhaps they had just changed their minds.

Stavros would have to think of something else.



editors' choice award:
p o e t r y

Clipping Koltin

by ryan malone

My wife cuts his toenails
and he laughs like slapstick.

A sweet, rolling roar
that jumps from the couch
and splashes the ceiling
and tickles her ears
and scares all her cats.

He's just six, and he's not her son,
but oh, she is lucky

Because She is His History.

Telling him stories
and watching him grow
and witnessing things
that his mother
 who drinks
will certainly
certainly
always forget.

His sweet, rolling roar.
His sad little eyes.
And his joy
that's like everything good in the world.

My wife cuts his toenails
and he laughs like slapstick.

He's just six, and he's not her son.



editors' choice award:
short story

st ab

by b.a.d. la rosa

I'm being stabbed repeatedly, feeling nothing because it's a dream. My corpse falls, the hub of a death-wheel whose spokes are inward-pointing knives.

My killers are all friends and family; long dead family members are back, standing among them.

My waking relationships don't matter. They've all killed me. My fallen corpse watches a swirl of human shapes descend and do something to my face.

A man I've never seen before holds up my lips by the corners, a patch of ragged sliced flesh.

"See?" he announces to the pleased crowd. "We finally got him to smile."

I awaken, and it's enough. No cold sweat or stifled scream. Acceptance of nightmare, 5 a.m. alarm chirping cruelly (every day's a second chance) returning to a living mortal body, sleepy, crusty eyes, leaden bones. Head aches because the pillow clamped it in a judo lock, neck dented with pain.

I have to get up and work, but I fool myself, motivate by telling myself I'm getting up because I really crave breakfast, bringing me off the floor out of my warm, torn sleeping bag. Sleep and food, the body's tag-team partners.

Breakfast: half a cup of cold Pepsi. Peanut butter sandwiches, the grape jelly ice cold. Nourish and flourish.

I'm 26 and very old. Even MTV, with all its magic powers, couldn't dramatize my life so that it'd appeal to anybody. Even my bouts with depression are boring; finicky masochists lose interest quickly.

With my gun, I own death. It sleeps in its hard plastic case, two clips full of hol-

low-point bullets gleaming like cool gold teeth. I rarely remove it from its case. Quaker Instant Death.

I've never put it to my head. I went through all of that as a teenager. I won't do it. The Something that prevents the most ignoble person from Doing It, pulling the trigger with the barrel whispering in their ear, has long since returned to my skull. I am sane and safe.

So why horror?

I load the gun case into the truck. The law says No, but I carry it anyway. Can't be too sane and safe.

Electrical work. Working towards a journeyman's license. Company of four of us and my ballcap filled with sweat. Five of us, if you count that funny Mexican: Manuel Labor. Haw haw.

The people I work with: "Shitmouth" has ten years experience on me. His crooked teeth glisten as if slathered with movie-popcorn butter. His breath smells like burning plastic. And he's subtly arrogant, a monstrous prick. He's unkind.

Shan is a dope, a thirty-year-old Irish pasty with a rutilant crewcut. He's a male air-head, rarely likable by me, a barrel of dislike.

The Boss is sniveling, brilliant, hasty, didactic. He's fat with a Hitleresque mustache mercifully offset by a thick beard (Shan also has a beard, a rutilant Van Dyke.)

Goddamn you know how it is when you want to quit your job but it's too late, you're comfortable with its particular assaults on your dignity and happiness; you'd rather eat your old job's bitter fruit than hunt meat on the plains where herds of new jobs might be, but the pain and suffering and uncertainty is endless. You get mud-stuck.

"Where do you go?" Shan asks, meaning for fun. I smile until Shitmouth comes around and changes the subject. I hate them both.

I hate people. There is nothing philosophical about it.

People are monsters, not to be trusted with anything important. If I were a Christian or some other religion it might make more sense, there'd be a context for the hatred. I had my childhood, and it was good, but it's over now and I hate people.

The Boss has taken off again in his forest green truck. He is constantly leaving whatever work site we happen to be at. We're laying conduit, burying it in a lawn. The sun slams everything with homicidal heat. Sweat sticks to my balls and caulks my ass crack. Not twenty feet away, in a red brick office building, shapes move freely behind blinds and tinted glass, a dance of paperwork and coffee to the sweet music of air conditioning. It's so insane to be alive, to be here, in this heat. I feel that nobody cares, and if god ever returned he'd be angry I was wasting my time doing this. I wish I was stupid enough to love and believe in god. But there is no god in my life, only masters upon masters and somewhere close to the top god starts, one final master, a gigantic praying mantis cold to the touch, cold being ripped apart inside his mandibles. Only cats do not have masters.

I was lucky to get this job. The Boss likes me, and liked me from the start, one of those quirks. Maybe I remind him of some boy he had a crush on or respected when he was a kid. Not that he's gay. I'd prefer if he was gay (though I'm not). I'd have more control of him. On the job I'm obeisant and do the best I can. I need my job. I have nothing else.

"Where do you go for fun?" Shan asks. His bitchy little gal whose father paid to have the fat sucked out of her ass gave up on him. She drove him crazy but I don't think he was smart enough to know this until the end of whatever they had. She tried to control him and he, dumb dog that he is, eventually resisted. Once he asked me about marriage. I told him either marry many women or none at all. One is an unlucky number. I was embarrassed to contribute to his path, because then she was gone from his life, but not forgotten. Dumb dog. One for the fire.

"Where are the connectors?" I ask Shitmouth, and he throws me a look of appalled disbelief so incredibly out of proportion to my question I feel like smashing his fucking face in with a brick. He has a real name, but why should I use it? He's not a decent human being. He's a turd who somehow managed to grow limbs. The obscenities do the best in this world.

Shitmouth has a big, ugly ogre of a wife who is a great cook, and an ugly son, born with a cleft palate. The son (the thing) looks like the cat creature from the movie Sleepwalkers. Shitmouth is fascinating only in that he is the absolute inverse of the average joe. Instead of taking his job out on his wife and kid, he intensely loves his family, and thus is an ass-hole on the job.

Me, I've quickly learned that to be single in America is to be nothing. I'm 26. I'm in the mid-zone. I could be married or I could not be. When people inquire about my family it takes me a little bit to realize they mean one of my own, rather than my mom and dad and sibs. Hmm. There are pretty women (pretty . . . to what end?) but I don't bother asking anymore. Some people roll with the punches but not me. I hate people. I'll never be vulnerable again.

I read a lot. A quote by Somerset Maugham reads: The great tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love.

I love my first phone! The only balsy thing I ever did was hop in my ten-year-old Ford truck with the savings of my youth and haul ass to California. Now I'm here and rent my own place and own my first phone and address. I am proud. Somewhat poor for now, but very proud. The Boss has promised to send me to Vo tech and pay for it, so I can obtain a journeyman's. And I just got word today my younger brother is also coming out to Cali. After five tortuous years at FSU, he earned a double major. He's got a fantastic job as a computer systems consultant, and he's going to work out of San Francisco. He called me from home.

It was kind of a shock. It took me five days to drive across the United States. I-10 all the way. It was a matter of pride. Now, here he comes, and I am so full of worry. Mother Nature - that bitch - has left the Defrost off over most of the country. Beards of ice and cold everywhere.

He starts the drive tomorrow.

"I'll call you from . . . how far did you go?" he asks. I tell him he can make it probably 300 miles a day or more. He'll stop and visit our twin sisters, at FSU, of course. I worry for him. He doesn't own a firearm. And his car is running - good but old. I worry.

"So you got your furniture and everything?" Shan asks futilely. His rutilant red hair.

Nobody can believe I don't have furniture yet. I just don't want any. No TV, bed, microwave. I eat cold soup from the can for dinner. I'm not homeless, just bedless, I try to joke. Nobody can believe it. My not buying furniture has people more upset than concentration camps.

Monday.

"I made it to Covington, Louisiana," says my brother, calling from his hotel.

"And the car is fine? Good weather?"

"Yeah."

"See you soon!"

That's 400 miles.

"Mount the box," Boss says, climbing into his truck. It lowers considerably and rocks with his added burden.

ME? I want to scream, panic rising from my belly like mercury. Shan and Shitmouth are working together on the other side of the building.

"Okay," I say meekly. Boss seems not to notice. If he has faith in me he never shows it, and that's bad. Scared, I go look for the circuit breaker box and the right tools. The sun curses and laughs and wrings the sweat from me with its fire. It can only burn.

Tuesday night.

"All day today I installed a breaker."

"Oh," says my brother? with as much interest as he can muster after driving 600 miles. I don't mind. I love him. Really, I care about as much about that damned circuit breaker as he does. It's just a job. He's made it to Conrad, Texas. No storms . . . yet.

It took me forever to install the breaker, but I did it, came home and cried in the shower. Now it's just a harmless memory, embedded in Lucite, in the past. Tomorrow we'll all connect it. At night it's cold to make the sun's heat even more absurd. "Just be ready for Texas. It's a whole day's haul, even at 75."

We talk about the happy past, full of laughter and jokes. I start to feel human again. My old family humor cheers up my brother. He is not a loner but he's in a loner's situation, driving across beautiful wastelands, big, purposeless country. I love him and wish we could all be together for awhile, the whole family.

But I'm supposed to have a family of my own now.

"Shan, what's a good place to go out?" He looks at me uncertain, but I don't smile, to let him know I need his help.

"The Blue Ram is good pub," he says, then adds quickly, "Do you drink?"

"Sometimes," I tell him. Not the way he and all of America drinks. "The Blue Ram sounds cool. I might go," I lie.

"I felt like crying," my brother tells me Wednesday night.

His progress is excellent. He not only whipped Texas but made it all the way to Lordsburg, New Mexico. Damn near 800 miles! The bridges ice well before the roads, he tells me. I remember the road signs warning of that, but when I made the drive in early January I got lucky, there was no violent cold snap, I tell him.

"I was scared. I bought gloves and a scarf in a small town and wore two pairs of sweat

pants, it was so cold." He's safe now, and has called me last, after phoning the folks and our sisters. I hate you, Mother Nature. It should have been me you put through the grinder.

But I don't really mean it. I drove out here over a month ago, it's ancient history. I'll die in California.

"You'll make it here tomorrow," I tell him. He reminds me he has rented a cellular phone in case of emergencies.

"Call if you need to, don't worry about the cost," I tell him, which is absurd. I'm the poor one, but I'm happy for my bro. My mom gave him six thousand dollars as a graduation gift. He deserved it. And I feel good that he is secure with so much money.

We talk some more before the final, "I love you." We mean them.

"My brother is driving cross-country, boss," I tell him. We have hooked up the breaker and our work here is almost done. Shitmouth is in a particularly good mood and Shan is starting to smile more. Maybe he's found a way back to his girl.

I have worked extra-diligently this morning, so I may ask now: "Would it be possible for me to leave early so I can meet him?"

"Go now, dude!" Shitmouth blurts, but he means it. The Boss, who is usually cool towards Shitmouth, looks at him. I say nothing. It's a horribly tense moment, being at the mercy of others. Praying mantis praying mantis praying mantis.

Boss nods quietly. His cap has our company logo on it. It's always fresh and clean. I think he has one of those ballcap washing frames you stick in the dishwasher, I think manically, heart racing as I run to my truck.

It's weird to be home so early. The walls seem surprised to see me, the sunlight unsure.

The phone rings and I answer it, cutting off the machine. My hands are dry and dusty. I smell, a little. "I'm on Lucinda," my brother tells me, on the cell phone.

Christ! I drive Lucinda nearly every day! He's here!

"Okay! You're going the right way!" Coming off the 405. Long Beach, California in its own way is as naive and lobotomized as my hometown in Florida. All the way across the United States and he doesn't use the cell phone until he's just two miles away!

I stand at the top of the cochina-embedded stairs when he appears around the corner, handsome, thinner, sweaty in the sun, his eyes bright and warm and expectant, recognizing the order of the apartment numbers.

My left arm shoots out in anticipation of the hug we will each receive as soon as he's up. He's on the fourth step when my arm straightens, my right arm, holding my gun. I close my eyes on him and the world. The sunlight striking the blood in my eyelids makes the blackness red. My finger freezes on the trigger. It feels like it weighs a million pounds.

Hurry! I know what he's seeing and I want to scream for him. The gun explodes smoothly its first time outside of a range. My facial skin ripples from the shock wave and my ears pound hard, once.

The round is a tracer. My squint is open enough to catch the molten streak, my brother's stomach disintegrating, thrown backwards in double handfuls as he is thrown like a puppet. He flies, slamming into the wall and the lamppost, guts unpackaging as he crum-

ples into the mulch and underfed plants.

Much to my horror he doesn't die instantly. I can't scream or move. The gun has said everything but it cannot explain.

I can't shoot again. I see him writhing, unable to look up at me. I don't know if he's seeing anything. His stomach had some food in it. Crackers, it looks like. Balloonfulls of blood. I can't finish it.

Shan said the Blue Ram. I think about that. I shot the wrong person.

Doors are opening everywhere, except the apartment next to mine. My brother is almost dead. I don't know why. There's something amiss. I'm missing. I finally do scream. Inside my apartment I pick up the phone, and dial home.

"He's dead!" I wail to my mother, and she knows instantly who and that I'm not lying. Who could ever joke about such things?

"No!" she cries, and I cry and cry and scream and curse. She thinks it was a car wreck. We both cry for him. The pressure wins. I'm going to tell her any minute. Police are coming, I know. They always arrive too late.

The sky does not open up.

No lightning strikes me.

Outside, birds chirp again.

I think of my brother racing to beat the cold. All the way across the country, to a senseless death. I claw my face with my left hand, still holding the receiver. My right hand is welded to the gun. Who will I shoot when the cops arrive?

Who should I shoot?

I hang up on my mother and run to the steps.

He's lying there, still alive.

The police are coming. People are retching and screaming.

Because the monster has a face, one assumes he can be spoken to, reasoned with.

Not so. The gun halfway between my head and the base of the steps.

Not so.

I wish Shitmouth were coming and not the cops.

bull

by jane butkin roth

I know a man,
an artist with contemporary style,
who is enamored with elephant turds.

He chooses to confide in me,
explains to me the process:
the molding, shaping, curing as
the shit takes form.

I feel his

passion,
the adrenaline rush of
his artistry in motion.

I attend an exhibit in his honor where
Harvard-educated and
big
bespectacled experts
come to admire his elephant turds,
which have been transformed into
flags, bookshelves, even schoolchildren.

It looks like bullshit to me.

Thoughts drift
to tomorrow's poetry workshop,
where I'm an impostor,
not a real poet,
my lines as flat and dry as the Mojave.

The real poets drench their paper

in rich symbolism,
literary allusion, and mythology.
They twist and sculpt their words like
my friend with his elephant turds,
turning something
into something else.

Sounds like bullshit to me,
but

tomorrow might be the day
I become one of them
by osmosis;
so I'll take my place again,
like some fat, stubborn rock,
waiting to sprout flowers from
no roots.

So far,
no matter how hard I try
to see things differently,

the sun, to me, just shines;
the sky is only blue, and
sometimes,
yes sometimes,
it just plain rains.

t h e f u l l n e s s t h e r e o f by charles chaim wax

I loved the snow, but it had not snowed all winter in Brooklyn. I became inspired to experience snow on the high peaks of New Mexico during Easter Vacation. All the other teachers thought I was crazy to spend so much money on a whim.

I dialed information to get the number for Holiday Inn in Santa Fe. I wanted to make sure I had a room when I arrived. I didn't feel like wandering around searching for a place to stay. I called the number and one ring later a woman picked up and said, "Holiday Inn. How may we help you?"

"Santa Fe, Holiday Inn?"

"Yes."

"I'd like a room for tonight." And then I quickly added, "I wanna use my Platinum Card to reserve the room."

"Did you say 'room' or 'suite'?"

"Uh, well, suite."

"Balcony?"

"Yeah."

"In room whirlpool?"

"Yeah."

"Apple or IBM PC?"

"With modem and fax?"

"Of course."

"Both." Then I started to laugh to myself. I quickly covered the mouthpiece.

She asked, "Your name and Platinum number." I told her my name and read off my Platinum number. "The room is yours, Mr. Bernstein, for as long as you wish."

"Thanks. I should be arriving at the airport about 10:30 tomorrow tonight."

"Do you wish a limo to be waiting for you?" I again began laughing and again quickly covered the mouthpiece. The image of some chauffeur holding up a big card with my name on it seemed unbelievable.

"No. I'm gonna need a car. I wanna see a bit of the territory."

"And beautiful country it is, especially in the mountains, if you love the snow and the cold..."

"I do," I gulped. "You got snow there, right?"

charles chaim wax

"Fourteen peaks over 10,000 feet. I should think so."

"I was in Santa Fe in 1971, or 1976. I can't remember."

And this time it was her turn to laugh. I was somewhat offended because I thought she was laughing at the fact I couldn't remember which year I had been there. But a moment later she said, "I'm sorry. But I wasn't even born then."

" '71, or '76?"

"Both."

I moaned, "I lived mosta my life before you was born. But...but...so that means you're, lemme see..."

"Nineteen years old..."

"And you already manage a Holiday Inn."

"I pick up the phone at night, Mr. Bernstein."

"Yeah. I don't know what I was thinkin'."

"Oh, I've got a call. See ya."

"Yeah."

The next night I heaved the duffel bag over my shoulder and walked into the lobby. I went to the desk and said, "Mr. Bernstein."

"Isabella Dunbar, the nineteen year old," she laughed.

"I spoke to you on the phone."

"I spoke to you on the phone," she laughed. I noticed she laughed a lot, and her eyes sparkled whether she laughed or not. Well, she was nineteen. Why shouldn't they sparkle?

Then, for some reason, I blurted out, "How much is the room?"

"Suite, I believe..."

"Yeah."

"If you have to ask..." And again the laughter.

"No, of course not. That was a joke."

"Don't be silly. Four hundred and twenty dollars...before tax..." And then the laughter.

When she said the price a sharp pain pounded the top left part of my cranium. I was completely loony. What in the hell was I doing spending so much for a room. I'd be whirlpooling my way to the poor house. I tried to smile but merely babbled, "Very reasonable, for this time of the year, I mean, with the ski season and all."

"I think you should bring your skis inside, don't leave them on top of your car. Sad, so sad to say, we've had...thefts..."

"I don't ski." My answer sent her into hysterics. The energy of her laughter was so effervescent I couldn't become angry but I was curious so I mumbled, "Was that funny?"

"We don't usually get many non-skiers." What did that mean? I could be on business. I could be an international trader in Indian Artifacts for all she knew. "So?" she asked.

"What?"

"Why?"

"Why am I here?"

"Yeah."

"I just arrived from Hollywood. One of my stars got in a tiff with the director on this big budget picture. She flew off. You know how these temperamental prima donnas are. They don't get their way - off they fly."

"Who?" she asked eagerly.

"Not at liberty to say, but she does have blonde hair..."

"Michelle Pfeiffer?"

"She got blonde hair?"

"I think so." I stared at Isabella. I began to laugh and laugh. She must have thought I was laughing at her because she said Michelle Pfeiffer had blonde hair. She moaned, "I'm a small town girl..."

"With super-duper flair."

"Really?"

"I'm in the business. I should know. What do you do?"

She stared at me a little funny and then said, "Answer phones."

"Full time?" I blurted out, and then realized I shouldn't have said that. "I mean, is that your career goal?" I expected her to say she was a painter, a potter, wrote poetry, or dropped from a hot air balloon to pirouette down steep slopes inaccessible to the ordinary skier, or, perhaps, even a therapist devising new cures for anomie.

"That's a good question," she said, and then the laughter returned. I was glad to hear it again. "I'm nineteen..."

"Nineteen," I sighed.

"...and don't know what I want to do. Should I know what I want to do?"

"No, not really..."

An old couple came to the desk. The guy looked ninety and the woman in her early fifties. He held a cane in his right hand. The woman held his left arm firmly. Isabella smiled at me and pushed the key in my direction. Then she turned her complete attention to the old couple.

I went to the elevator, took it to the third floor, and walked to my room, C-17. I put the key in the lock and opened the door. I turned to the right and saw the light switch. I turned it on. I suddenly got dizzy. I dropped my bag on the floor and wobbled to the bed. I flopped down and closed my eyes.

After a few minutes I opened my eyes. I saw the remote control on the small table to my right. I picked it up and turned on the TV. Some guy with a well coiffured synthetically colored blonde pompadour was preaching. He said, "Jesus Christ has the power to get everyone out of debt. Say, 'My God is a debt-canceling God.' Most of you have known him as a Savior, but now you can know him as a Debt-Canceling God. Remember debt cancellation is everyday business for the man of God. God wants to cancel your debt. Everyone of you can have the miracle of debt cancellation. I hold in my hand a letter from Frank Peene. He received the miracle of a \$500,000 debt cancellation. His farm was saved. And Pearl Nulle. She received a debt cancellation of \$300,248. Her Hair Emporium business was saved. John Duff, \$630,117 debt cancellation. If the Lord can

open a blind eye, He can cancel your debt. Sixth chapter of Kings, 2nd verse. 'The iron did swim and the man of God did say, Take that iron and be free of your debt.' Say it, 'MY GOD IS A DEBT CANCELING GOD.' Remember what God wants is for you to be a prosperous person. Say it again, 'MY GOD IS A DEBT CANCELING GOD.' Now I want to give you this book More And More absolutely free which is the blueprint for the miracle of debt cancellation. Ninety lessons are in here. You do one a day. They show you how to take those things out of your subconscious mind that are blocking the plans God has for you because a double minded man is unstable in all of his ways. You got to have your subconscious mind in line with your conscious mind. Now there's a number on the screen, but we're being inundated with hundreds and hundreds of calls every moment so all you Victory Viewers call now for your absolutely free book More And More..."

I immediately reached into my duffel bag and got my Waterman rollerball pen and copied the number in a frenzy. I only hoped I could get through. According to this guy I could somehow write off this whole crazy search for snow trip if I only believed 'MY GOD IS A DEBT CANCELING GOD' and got my hands on this book More And More to guide me to that miracle.

I dialed the desk. Isabella picked up. I said, "This is Mr. Bernstein. I really can't chit-chat now. Please get me 1-900-345-6789."

"Yes, sir," she said meekly. I think she was shocked by my tone of voice, but I had to get through before the hundreds and hundreds of other Victory Viewers dialed the toll free number.

I heard a guy say, "Victory Viewer hotline, Brother Paul Bruns."

"Yeah. I want or order the absolutely free book More And More I just seen on TV."

"Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord. Now, Brother..."

"You want my name?"

"Yes, Brother."

"Bernstein."

"Bernstein?"

"Steve Bernstein."

"Steve Bernstein?"

"Yeah."

"Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord for your safe return. Is the Bible in your hand, Brother Bernstein?"

"Hold it a minute." I turned and opened the draw of the small table to the right and took out a Gideon's Bible. "I got it in my hands now."

"Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord. Let us read together, Kings 6th chapter, 2nd verse..."

"You want me to read to you, or you goin' to read to me?"

"Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, but I'll carry the ball this time, Brother Bernstein." He began to read. He must have read for fifteen minutes straight. He had a robust voice, but I was tired from all the adventures of the day.

I blurted out, "I think I wanna order the absolutely free book, More And More..."

"What's that, Brother Bernstein?"

He was so busy reading he didn't hear what I said. I repeated myself, "I wanna order the absolutely free book, More And More."

"Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord. Say after me, 'MY GOD IS A DEBT CANCELING GOD.'"

"I hope so," I mumbled.

"What was that, Brother Bernstein?"

"I said I hope so cause I musta spent three, four grand on this trip, and I really wanna get that Platinum Card yoke off my neck with the miracle which the book is gonna tell me how to do like it done for Pearl Noodle and Johnny Fluff and the rest of them people who wrote letters..."

"Only through the man of God and faith in Him. Let us read together, Nehemiah..."

"Hold it..."

He was off again. Well, I was laying down. I closed my eyes and let him read, but I mean, this could take hours, days, if he got carried away and read the entire Bible. "Brother Buns..." No response. "BROTHER BUNS," I screamed into the mouthpiece.

"Did you say something, Brother Bernstein?"

"I did, Brother Buns..."

"Bruns with an 'r.' Now I know that 'r' is a little wiggle of an 'r' so we must take hold of it like the Lord..."

"Brother Bruns, I wanna order the absolutely free book..."

"Praise the Lord. Say after me, 'MY GOD IS A DEBT CANCELING GOD.'"

"Yeah. Take my name and address, please."

"Yes, sir, Brother Bernstein. Credit card number?"

"What?"

"Credit card number..."

"Brother Slocum said on the TV the book was absolutely free..."

"And so it is. We're talking 'Shipping and Handling.'"

"How much?"

"Nineteen dollars and ninety-five cents."

"It looked like a pamphlet..."

"Say, 'MY GOD IS A DEBT CANCELING GOD.'"

"Can I pick it up in person? I really wanna read it, but then I wouldn't have to pay the S&H."

"Praise the Lord. All Pilgrims welcome. 2411 South Front Street, Mobile, Alabama."

"I'm in Santa Fe."

"The reach of the Lord is long indeed. Do you want me to continue reading from the Bible, Brother Bernstein, as you come to a decision?"

"This guy is fulla shit," I mumbled to myself, and closed my eyes. I began to breath deeply. I reached and put the receiver on the phone. "What was that all about?" I chuckled loudly.

In the morning I stood and put the Waterman pen into my duffel bag. Since I hadn't

taken off my clothes I didn't have to get dressed. I walked into the huge bathroom and looked at the whirlpool. I smiled.

I went to the lobby to sign my Platinum bill. Isabella wasn't there. A middle aged guy with a grayish mustache and a pot belly stood behind the counter. He was smiling. "I trust you had a pleasant stay, Mr. Bernstein."

"I did." He pushed the bill to me. I glanced at it. I immediately said, "There must be some mistake. I'm readin' \$532. How much tax they got here in New Mexico cause Isabella said the room was \$420."

"Correct. Plus a phone bill of \$126."

"I didn't call nobody."

"You were on the phone for sixty-three minutes." He pushed a sheet of paper to me.

"That was a toll free call for an absolutely free book, More And More..."

"A \$1.99 a minute..."

"What?"

He sighed deeply, "The price was on the screen."

"I didn't see it."

"Need a microscope," he said, and then he began to laugh. It was the same kind of laugh as Isabella.

"What's goin' on here?"

"Call American Express and dispute the payment. Explain everything to them."

"What scam is this I am bein' hoodwinked by, my good fellow?" I roared.

"You have to pay the entire bill, but call American Express and dispute the portion from the phone call. He read the Bible to you, didn't he?"

"Yeah."

"After the first five minutes he knew you didn't know it was a 900 number. That means a toll call, not a toll free call."

"In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, they should do such a thing...I am truly shocked."

He groaned deeply.

I signed the bill and asked, "Was that your daughter last night cause you laugh like her?"

"Yes. She said you were a big shot Hollywood producer. Get your fancy lawyers on those bastards. Put 'em out of business."

"I intend to do that, first thing when I get back. But now I'm lookin' for..."

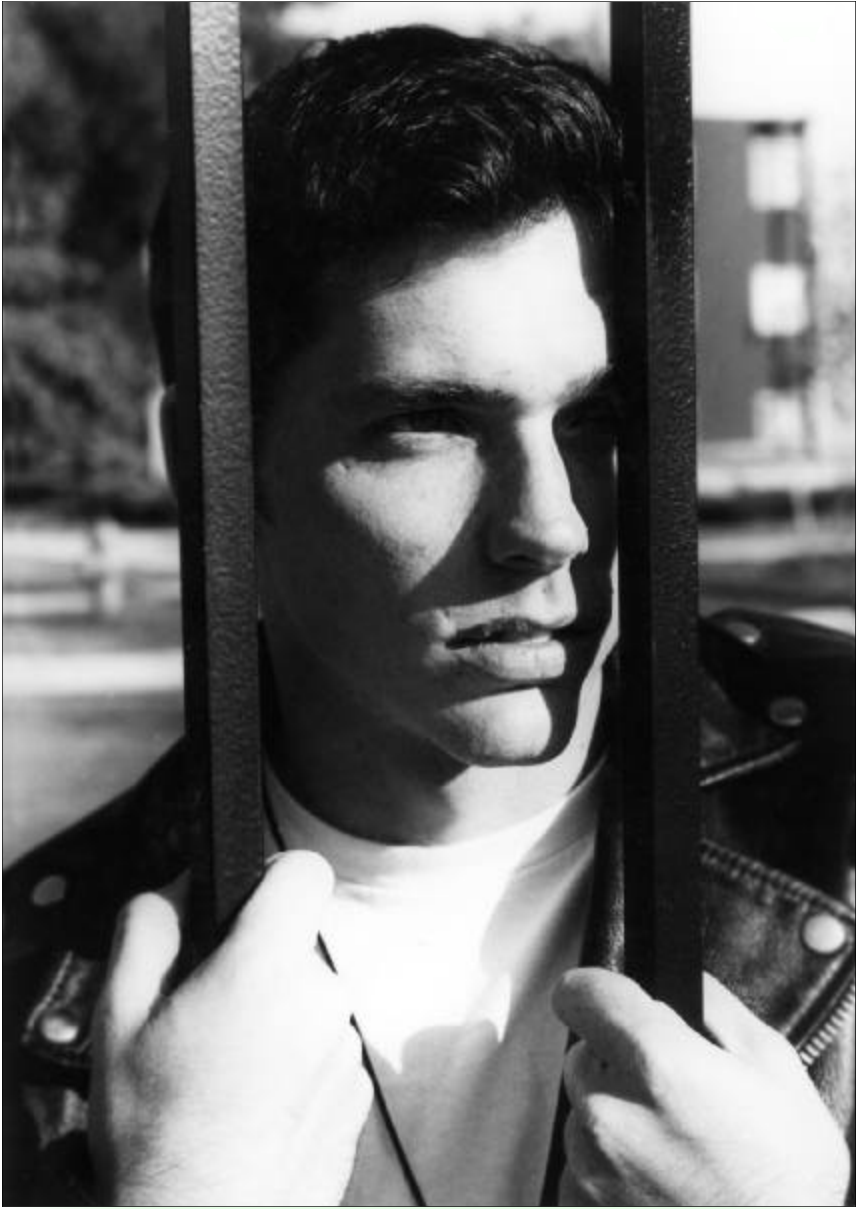
"Julia Roberts?" he whispered.

I sighed, "Sorry, I can't." He nodded, and smiled a knowing smile.

This was my mother
her name was dorothy

by nancy l'enz hogan

Passionate always, never passive
shaking with courage
fighting for life for
me - her child, for her, as mother
together
Too much love in
distraction, with the struggles
of each day gnawing at the
fleeting thin repose of night
Life bites chunks from Life
devouring itself
The heart breaks with hunger
as love waits barefoot in the snow



photograph by janet kuypers
b r a d l e y

motions on the planet
by shannon peppers

I don't let anybody in to see me
to be a real part of my life
I talk to people
I get close to people
the only person that I can count on is me
I just need something that I can count on

what can I really lean on
what will never let me down
what will never desert me

nobody lives on this planet
people go through the motions

people are too afraid
to open themselves up
and they never get the chance
to really live

I don't want to go through the motions
I want to live
but I'm afraid
if I don't break out of my shell
I won't see what the rest of the world is like
I wonder if I really want to know

126 Trade Winds Road by bruce genaro

It is Indian Summer on Cape Cod, that fifth season of the year that arrives without notice and then departs just as quickly. I am driving leisurely on route 6A through Truro, a town at the northern-most tip of this tiny peninsula. All the windows on the red Ford Mustang that I rented earlier this morning are down. The air is warm and yet cool, stagnant outside, but the wind whipping around inside the cabin tousles my hair, ruffles my shirt. The sun beating down, dances on the hood of the car, practically blinding me, mocking my sunglasses. The sand dunes on my right are piled higher than I remember and sprouting tufts of tall green sea grass. The gentle strains from some classical station leave the tiny speakers on the dashboard and drift out towards the ocean. At a certain point on this road (which I am fast approaching) you can turn left and head for the center of Provincetown, a quaint and cosy artist colony at the end of the world. Commercial Street dominates this city, aptly named for the hundreds of little antique stores, dress shops, tee-shirt emporiums and artists booths that dot the street on both sides. Instead, I keep the car pointed on its steady course towards the horizon and the National Seashore, a beige strip of sand that harbors so many fond memories for me. I am just two miles from the Herring Cove Beach parking lot when my eyes fill with tears. And as no thought precedes them, they seem to appear for no reason. But I know why they come and let the cool droplets tumble over my lashes and spill down my cheeks. The salty water feels cool as it evaporates, and changes energy, becoming some other part of the universe. Oddly, it makes me feel more alive.

The house sits up on a bluff at the end of town over-looking the Atlantic Ocean and the horizon. The bright orange roof surprises and pleases me as I approach it. Surprises because it is so unlike most of the other traditional "Cape Cod" homes in this enclave. Pleases because it reminds me of Todd, the friend who designed and built it eleven years ago. What strikes me most about the design of this house are the columns that support the roof and create a portico at the front. Huge Doric columns that bulge slightly at the center, magnificent in their simplicity, and painted white. Not just white, but a white so bright you are drawn into them. A white that has the intensity and vibrancy of colors usually only found in a rainbow or a Warhol painting. A white that seems to glow against the landscape and the sand

and the gray slate of the building itself, intensified by a blazing October sun.

I turn right onto Trade Winds Road past that house with the ocean view and drive to the end of the cul-de-sac, stopping the car in front of another house. This one is a very large and modern looking building, all glass and angles, and I wonder how this design ever got past the planning commission. I shift the transmission into park, my right hand resting on the stick shift. I sit there for I don't know how long, breathing deeply, tapping my fingers on the steering wheel to Ravels' Bolero which is now flowing over the fm airwaves. This was a detour I hadn't expected to make. A side trip I foolishly thought I could avoid. I want to get out of the car, walk up the front steps and ring the bell, but I am unable to move. Transfixed, I am here, yet I am somewhere-else. Several more minutes go by before I shift the car back into gear and pull into the driveway of 126 Trade Winds Road. As I get out of the car I flash back to all the floor plans and elevations that Todd showed me with such pride during the construction phase of this vacation home by the sea. Always asking my approval of marble samples, paint chips and wood stains, surely knowing that I idolized his talent and would never find fault with any of his choices. He inherently made the right decisions while I was only capable of verbalizing and agreeing with what he instinctively knew. His creativity sanctioned by my intellectualization.

It was twelve years ago last month that we met, several summers after Anita Bryant became a Nazi and The Post Office Restaurant poured all of their orange juice onto Commercial Street in protest. Several years before we would again be in the streets, protesting, this time for our lives. I remember sitting around the pool at The Great Western, an anonymous little motel on the outskirts of town. It was a week of hot weather and blue water. A Walkman with the only two tapes I had brought playing over and over. Rimsky Korsakov's Scheherazade and the voice of Grace Jones singing Autumn Leaves embedded in my head forever. The rental car, an extravagance I could ill afford during that period of my life, sat inactive in the parking lot for most of the week. I sat there by myself till the loneliness became unbearable, forcing me to don my tee shirt and 501's and head off in search of validation. All of those summers seem to blend together as if they were one continuous holiday. Too much sun and too many boys. Nameless boys. A moment's diversion. A detour from pain. For a few hours I was no longer invisible.

Standing at the Boat slip, a Miller Light in my right hand while the left is actively involved in peeling off the label. My right foot taps uncontrollably to the disco beat emanating from the dance floor, while the rest of me tries to appear aloof. To my right The Atlantic Ocean and to my left The Sea of Boys. Familiar faces parade by in tee shirts and tank tops followed by more nameless faces appearing on the deck for the first time and never to be seen again. Where did they come from? New York, San Francisco, Barcelona? Where will they go? Ten years later I will not recognize one familiar face. Where have they gone? Moved away? Coming next weekend? Dead? Dying? How many acquaintances will I never see again? How many

friendships have I lost or never made? How many talented, interesting people have I had the opportunity to know and didn't? Too timid was I to approach anyone. Too invested in putting up the front that I needed nothing and no-one. Standing there by myself, hoping, praying to be acknowledged, and when I was I would greet them with a slight smile and an air of indifference that tried to mask the loneliness that seemed to dominate my world.

"Hi" said Todd so effortlessly. "Hello" I said, looking in his eyes for a fraction of a second before returning my gaze to the amber bottle with its label in shreds. The silence that followed was deafening. I have always had a problem with silence, usually preferring to ramble on endlessly just to fill in the void. Todd was tall and lean and carried himself with confidence. He had blond hair and brown eyes, a combination I had only recently developed a weakness for. He shook my hand strong and hard and smiled brightly as we made introductions. It was a reprieve from the awkwardness of first introductions when I found out that Todd was an architect and a partner in a small local firm. I had just recently moved to Boston to attend the Boston Architectural Center, a four year program (usually completed in six) that leads to a Bachelors degree in Architecture. At least we had some common ground to stand on as we danced the getting-to-know-you waltz.

After about an hour of socializing and, well, yes, flirting, Todd and I decided to slip away from the throng of people and pounding music and grab a beer at a cafe around the corner. Todd discussed with me in detail problems he was having with a construction firm that was building a mini-mall in Andover. I bragged about how well my first studio project had been received. I was comfortable with him. Odd for me because I was never one to be comfortable with anyone or anything, including myself. Low self-esteem was a legacy from my parents and a somewhat common side-effect of being gay. I'd like to say that we didn't sleep together that first night. I'd like to, but I can't. I was putty in the hands of anyone who paid any attention to me back then. Besides, he was awfully damn cute. Any romantic notions I may have begun nurturing were dashed with the revelation that Todd had a partner, Jay. They had been together for five years. Jay was an intern at Boston General and was on call all that weekend, allowing Todd an infrequent bout of Bachelorhood. From that night on we were close friends, as close as I would allow, but now that I knew about Jay it was strictly platonic. He and Jay had a large circle of friends and eventually adopted me into their extended family although I resisted at every turn, fearful of any intimacy. Sex I could handle, relationships, friendships I couldn't. For some reason they never gave up on me and I was thankful yet cautious of every invitation.

Having Todd as a friend allowed me to tolerate my job as a grunt, an apprenticing position with Jones & Brazen that The BAC had secured for me. It was a large firm for an architectural office and lacked many of the things I was hoping to find while apprenticing, like mentorship, creativity and ethics. Jones & Brazen was quite successful in their field, but not well liked in the community. They had

a reputation for designing cookie-cutter buildings. I personally and openly referred to them as the J.C.Pennys of Architecture. Every office complex they designed (and I use the term loosely) seemed to be the same repeating pattern; a pre-cast concrete band followed by a band of gray reflective glass, followed by a precast concrete band for as many stories as the building had. It was with a combination of disappointment and satisfaction that I would read the Boston Globes' scathing reviews of their latest building. The partners and principals of the firm were about as cliché as you could get. Many of them Boston Brahmins or Brahmin wannabes and way too many bow ties and round le Corbusier glasses for my taste. I spent my days as an outsider, drawing floor plans, running errands and keeping to myself as much as possible. My feelings for the designers always wavered somewhere between envy and contempt, and I survived by making the occasional phone call to Todd's office for a sanity check and a little stroking.

I had dreams of one day joining Todd's firm, but that was not to happen. I was not meant to be an architect, suffering hours and hours of solitary confinement with a pencil and a T-square, drawing (again, I use the term loosely) bathroom elevations and floor-plans at quarter inch scale. I remember sitting in class one of the first days of my first year, the lecturer asking us to look around the room at the other students. The auditorium contained about a hundred and fifty other people ranging in age from 20 years old to 50. He said, rather definitively, that only about ten of us would ever complete the curriculum that would lead to a degree. That was just the statistics. I don't know why he told us that, but I remember swearing to myself that I would be one of the ones that made it. Two and a half years later I had dropped out, still working for Jones and Brazen, but wondering what I was going to do with my life.

It was Todd who talked me out of being an architect and into being a writer. Although it pained me to admit it, I never did quite have the talent required to design buildings. I could appreciate them more completely than most people, certainly more than most outside of the industry, but I could never quite turn my appreciation into inspiration. It had become apparent to me that my essays always received better grades than my design projects. Not a good sign. While my appreciation for the use of space and materials only increased during that time, my execution and implementation of them failed miserably.

So, if I wasn't going to be an architect there was no reason to hang around the east coast any longer, enduring those Arctic winters and shirt drenching summers. California or New York was where you went to be a writer, so I opted for warmer weather and moved to Mill Valley to be among my new peers. Over the next ten years I made annual visits to Connecticut to visit my family, always making it a point to fly into Boston first, rationalizing it with the fact there were no direct flights to Hartford. In the three years that I lived in Boston, Todd's friendship and encouragement saw me through some very difficult times, exams, failed relationships and a minor drug habit to name a few. Todd was more a family member to

me than my real family. Only now do I understand that the reason I saw my family so often over the past decade was to have an excuse to visit him no matter how brief my stay. I had made a good life for myself in California, but a good, true friendship like ours had failed to materialize for me again on this other more transient coast.

Unfortunately three thousand miles and ten years puts a great strain on a relationship, especially a friendship lacking those romantic ties that bind. As the years drifted past, our phone calls became ever more sporadic and letters dribbled down to a yearly vacation post-card. I blame myself for that, too fearful of rejection, even from a good friend, to pick up the phone just to chat. Fearful that the saying "out of sight, out of mind" was created with me in mind. In my case it was more like "absence makes the heart grow fonder." He was always in my thoughts, always with me. I had imaginary conversations with him standing beside me on vacations as I marveled at the frescoes in Florence, lit candles in cathedrals in Rome or sat on the banks of the Seine taking pictures of Notre Dame. He was that rare thing, a true friend. And I put up as much resistance to him as I could. And when resistance didn't work, I put up distance.

It was this past December, less than a year ago that I received the Christmas card from his partner Jay. The card that said matter-of-factly that Todd had passed away in October. I wrote back immediately with my regrets leaving out the part about my anger of not being told that he had even been sick. Of having been shut out of what was obviously a difficult time for him. Of not having had the opportunity to say good-bye. But I had no right to be angry, least of all with Jay. Maybe with myself. I have not been crying because Aids has finally touched my life. I have not been crying because Todd is gone. I cry because I never really let him know how much he meant to me. I cry for the life I have lost to fear. The fear that makes me push people away. The fear that if people "really" got to know me they wouldn't like me. And now, here I stand on the steps of Jay's home, the home that Todd designed and built, ringing a doorbell that my friend will never answer.

Two Vows at Mont. St. Michel

by christophe brunski

a Nuptial Fantasy

Gifting
(to Sarah)

Swimmer,
When you rescued me from the airsphere
You clutched my voice and pulled me
Under the surface of words

There I gaze for you in the light-webbed wavebreak
To attain the depth of simplicity's waters
Fluttertonguing imagined weather from the recalitrant shoreline:

Par terre sous les ardeurs les murmures mouillés
Je donne

A ring and Paris for you
A painpath I followed
Drown me angel

Endurance
(to Christopher)

Hermetic emblem-shedder,
You are a perfectly naked orb
Faceless and suspended in the middle of your void.
And although your mind wraps its spiny tendrils
Around my shoulders, breath, chest, and neck
Around everything thriving in the flesh
You are the quintessential definition
Of the impatient urge
To surpass the mire of being and being.

seeing things differently by janet kuypers

I was sitting at Sbarro's Pizza in the mall taking a break from shopping and eating a slice of deep-dish cheese pizza when I caught parts of a conversation happening two tables next to me. It was two-thirty in the afternoon, so it was kind of empty in the eatery.

"So what's it like to be back?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, to be free again - I mean, to be back to the places you haven't seen for so long?"

"Well, of course I missed it. It's strange being back, actually."

"How so?"

"Well, everything looks different now."

"Well, it has been nearly six years, a lot happens, even to a suburb. There's been a lot of construction around here, and -"

"I don't mean it looks different because it changed. I mean it looks different because I have."

"How have you changed?"

"You mean how did being in prison for half a decade affect me?"

"Well, what do you mean you see things differently? Like colors look wrong? I don't get it."

"No, it's not like my vision is different, at least not literally. It's just that people seem different to me now. The places all look the same, one street looks the same as the next, it looks the same as it did five years ago. But I see things about people now, things I never noticed before."

"Like what?"

"I don't know, exactly. But I read people. It's like I know what they're thinking without having to talk to them, or even know them."

Then they both paused. I guess their timed pattern of one person eating while the other one talked finally got messed up and they were both eating at the same time. Oh, did I mention that they were both women? One had a baby in a stroller sleeping next to her, that one was the one that didn't go to prison. They both looked like they were about twenty-eight years old. Regular suburban women.

"You see, it's like this: when I was in prison, I was all alone. Being in a federal prison

means the crimes are bigtime, so everyone in their had a big chip on their shoulder and wanted to either have you for their girlfriend or beat the shit out of you when you were on laundry duty. And of course everyone knew that I was the cop killer, and everyone also knew that I swore up and down that I didn't do it. So when I went in there they all thought I was some big sissy, and I knew right away that I was going to be in big trouble if I didn't do something fast."

"So what'd you do?"

"Well, I figured they knew that I wasn't a tough bitch or anything, so the only persona I could put on that would make people scared of me would be to act like perfectly calm ninety percent of the time, calm, but tense, like I was about to snap. And periodically I would have a fit, or threaten violence in front of guards, timed perfectly so that I would never actually have to do anything, but enough to make everyone else think that I was a little off the deep end, a bit crazy. Then they'd give me space."

"So... did that work?"

"Yeah, for the most part. But the first thing I had to learn was how to make my face unreadable."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can see someone walk by and know they're bored, or sad or angry, or happy, right?"

"Well, sometimes..."

"Well, I had to make sure that when people looked at me all they saw was a complete lack of emotion. Absolute nothingness. I needed people to look at me and wonder what the hell was going through my head. Then all I'd have to do is squint my eyes just a little bit and everyone would see so much anger in my face, you know, because usually there was nothing in my face to give me away."

"And when you got angry -"

"- And when I got angry and threw a fit and smashed chairs and screamed at the top of my lungs and contorted my face all over the place, I just looked that much more crazed and in a rage. Like out of control."

"Wow. That's wild."

"And I became completely solitary. I talked to two other people the whole time I was there, at least in friendship."

"Wow, two people?"

"Well, in a screaming fit, or in a fight, then I'd be yelling at people, but yeah, I had to limit the people I talked to. Couldn't let others see what I was like."

So I was sitting here eating my pizza listening to this, and then I remembered, oh yeah, I remember this story from a long time ago, the convicted this women of killing a cop, shooting him at point-blank range, and just in the local paper three weeks ago they found the person who really killed the cop, and they let the women they convicted of the crime five years ago free.

It seems the cop pulled her over and had her license in his car when the murderer camp up in another car, and this woman managed to get away, but the cop died and her

janet kuypers

license was there on the scene. So I get up and go to the fountain machine and refill my Diet RC Cola and come back to my seat and I just start thinking that that's got to be rough, I mean, going to federal prison for over five years for a crime you didn't commit and then having them come up years later and let you out early and say, "oh, we're sorry, we had the wrong person all along." It's like, oh, silly us, we made a mistake, please do forgive us.

But how do you get those years back, and how do you get rid of those memories?

So I just spaced out on that thought for a minute and the next thing I knew they were talking again.

"And I knew from the start this one woman didn't like me, I could just tell from her face. We never spoke, she was like my unspoken enemy. And so once I was doing laundry work, and there are rows of machines and tables for folding and shoots for dirty clothes to fall onto the floor and pipes running all along the ceilings and steam coming out everywhere. And there were others there with us, and guards, too, but once I looked up and it was totally silent and no one else was around except for her. No other prisoners, no other guards, nothing. And she was just standing there, facing me square on, and she was swaying a bit, like she was getting ready to pounce. And I knew that she planned this, and got some of the other inmates to distract the guards, so that she could kill me."

"Oh my God, so what did you do?"

"Well, I turned so my side was to her, and I grabbed a cigarette from my pocket and put it in my mouth. Than I said, 'Look, I'm not interested in fighting you, so-', and then I reached into my pocket, the one that was away from her, like to get a lighter, and then I took my two hands and clenched them together like this, and then I just swung around like I was swinging a ball-and-chain, and I just hit her real hard with my hands."

"Oh my God."

"Yeah, I was hoping that I could just get in one good blow then get out of there, like teach her not to fuck with me again."

"Oh my God, so what happened?"

"Yeah, so here's the punchline, so when I hit her she fell back and hit her head on a beam that ran from floor to ceiling, and just fell to the floor. So I go through a back hallway and find everyone in the next room and just sort of slip in there, but then I hear a guard asking about Terry, that was the woman I hit. and everyone looks around and they see me, and I have no expression on my face, so they don't even know if Terry saw me or not, and so everyone starts to look for Terry and they find her dead, right where I left her."

"Oh my God, you killed her?"

"Well, she hit her head on the beam, my blow didn't kill her. But no one knew who did it to her, and of course no one bothered with an investigation, so there was no problem. But after that, no one ever bothered me again."

"Holy shit. You killed her. When did you know she was dead?"

"When they found her, probably. Not when they saw what kind of shape she was in, but the instant they saw her I thought, 'she hasn't moved.' And I knew then she was dead. It was kind of unsettling, but I couldn't react."

"Kind of unsettling? I think I'd be screaming."

"But that's the thing, all these women had killed before, at least most of them had. I'd be condemning myself if I reacted."

"Wow."

They sat in silence, the young mother staring at the other while she ate the last of her pizza.

The murderer grabbed her soda and drank in between words.

"Yeah, so prison - and everything after that, really - seemed different. I figured out how to remove all emotion from myself when I had to."

"...That's wild."

"And once I figured that out, how to make my face unreadable, it was easy to be able to read what other inmates were thinking. I could read anyone's face. Someone could twitch once and I'd know whether they were afraid of me or not. Any movement made it obvious to me what they thought of me, themselves, or their life. That's why I look around here and just see what everyone else is feeling."

"Really? What do you see?"

"I see some dopey men and some bitchy women."

"Shut up."

"No, it's true - and they care about little details in their life, but they don't give a damn about the big picture. They scream if someone cuts them off in traffic, they freak out if they have food stuck in their teeth after a meal. But they don't care what they're doing in their lives."

They got up and walked over to the trash can, dumped their paper plates and napkins into the trash.

"I see a lot of people walking around with a blank stare, but it's not an emotionless stare. It's that they're all resigned, it's like they all assume that this is the way their life has to be."

"Oh, come on, it's not that bad."

"Yeah, it is. It's like they all were in prison too."

And they walked out into the mall, and I sat there, staring at my drink.

i see the scene
by alexandria rand

Every once in a while
I see the same scene again:
I lay in the bed
 the field of daffodils
with you draped over me
folding over me
conforming to my body
like a rustling curtain
rippling in the breeze from an open window.
I do not sleep.
I couldn't,
I would never want to.
Our contours interlock,
our limbs intertwine.
Your breath rolls down my stomach
like the breeze that brought you to me.
I take your hand,
and although you sleep
you seem to hold me
with all the intensity you possess.
And with each beat of your heart,
with your heat,
comes the cool night air in the wind
caressing me
until the light from the morning sun
awakens our silhouette.

Treasure Island

by ken sieben

Sunday, November 13, was my best friend Ben's fifteenth birthday. Too old for a party, he asked instead for permission to take his father's 13-foot Boston Whaler out to Skeleton Island and camp overnight. His parents were divorced last year, but his father still keeps the boat at the Island Watch pier 'cause he qualifies for owners' rates. Anyway, his mother first got his father to say no when he asked back in June, but all summer long Ben demonstrated his skill at handling the boat, and he even overhauled the 35-horsepower Evinrude in his small engines course, so his father couldn't think of any real reason to object. His mother - and mine, too - finally gave in when we agreed to set up camp at the southern end of the island where our red tent could be seen from the front windows of the bayfront townhouses where we live. I think they were praying for a blizzard, though. Of course, Ben brought along his father's old binoculars so we couldn't actually be spied on.

Well, Mom said I could go but what she meant was after I got finished helping at the restaurant. It's been tough on her running the place by herself since my dad died two years ago, though it seemed to me that she always did most of the work even when he was alive. It's a family-type seafood place right on the water a few blocks from where we live called Admiral Benbow's after her father, who started it when he retired. Actually, he was only a tugboat captain so he must've given himself a promotion. But all day long I washed dishes and polished tables and scoured pots and stirred the soup and had to watch what a gorgeous day it was. The sky was so blue and clear it made my eyes ache, and every time I carried garbage outside I could feel how warm it was for November.

Until we started to load the boat, that is. Anyway, we were underway by 2:30. Since Ben's mother also works on Saturdays, and we don't have any sisters or brothers, there was no one to see us off. Old man Trelawney, who used to be the mayor, was fishing for flounder from the pier. He pointed to the dark anvil-shaped clouds forming in the western sky and said we oughta wait, but we'd been planning the expedition too long to be put off.

"Well, squalls pass by quick," he said. "I guess you boys won't shrink any from a good dousing."

The weight of all the camping gear, extra clothing, food, fresh water, and spare

ken sieben

gas tank prevented the boat from planing properly, and the bay was much choppi-er than we had imagined, so it took us almost half an hour to cover the two-mile distance.

By the time we had the boat unloaded and beached, not a speck of blue could be seen in the sky, the water had turned black, and thunder was starting to rumble. We set up the tent as fast as we could, stripped off our outer clothes, and threw them in along with all our gear and food. When the first bolts of lightning cracked open the clouds, we had just filled a plastic garbage bag with dry salt hay.

Then all hell broke loose. I never seen anything like it. From where I knelt, holding up one end of the tent with my left hand and protecting my eyes from the flying sand with my right, I could see a pair of bewildered mallards waddle up out of the water and sit down on the wet beach like they, too, just figured to wait out the squall and then resume their plans for the day.

"Hey, your head's bleeding," called Ben, who with his back to the wind was holding up the other end of the tent.

I wiped my hand across my forehead and felt the sharp sting of sand rubbing into flesh. I watched the rain wash away a half dozen red stripes from my right palm, then covered my eyes again. "Goddam sand's blowing so hard it cut me," I called, glad for having chosen to face the wind.

For fifteen minutes we kept the tent upright against the battering wind and rain. Before it started, Ben told me that once before, on an overnighiter with the Boy Scouts, his tent had been knocked over in a storm and he let it stay in a crumpled heap while he kept himself dry under the big dining tarp. But his sleeping bag and clothing were soaked through in every spot that had touched the wet canvas, so he spent a long miserable night. That wasn't going to happen to us.

And then it was all over. Why, the sunlight had broken through the clouds in the west before the rain even stopped. By the time Ben and I were securing the tent ropes to the driftwood "dead men" we buried in the sand, the sky was a cool blue again and the squall a mile out to sea. We tied a rope between two trees for a clothesline and waded into the water to rinse the sand off our feet and legs. Damn, it was cold! Then we stripped off our bathing suits to hang them on the line and allowed the sun and wind to dry our naked bodies. "Don't you wish we had some girls along?" Ben asked.

"Yeah," I answered. "How'd you like to see that Darlene Kaye with nothing on?"

"Are you kidding? She's old, my mom says she's over forty."

I reflected on this, not wanting Ben to think me a stupid kid just cause I wouldn't be fifteen until February and I was only in the ninth grade. "Who cares? She's got the biggest tits I ever seen."

"You never seen her tits, did you?" I think Ben was suddenly frightened he might've missed something.

"I've practically seen all of them," I said. "That bikini she wears in the pool doesn't cover very much."

"My mom says it's indecent."

I had to laugh. "Mine, too. I swear she calls me into the fucking house every time Darlene comes near the pool." Then I could feel my pecker starting to get big cause I was thinking about Darlene's tits, so I crawled into the tent for some clothes. When I emerged, I said, "That damn wind is sure getting cold. You better put something on."

He said, "I don't feel cold yet, but I guess I better not let my prick get sunburned." Ben's summer's growth spurt had made him four inches taller than me. He also liked to stay bare-chested to show off the muscles which were beginning to bulge in his tanned arms and shoulders after a summer of serious weightlifting.

"Yuck," I said, screwing my face into an expression of pain. "Let's see if we can get a fire going."

Trapped behind the sand dunes were ancient pilings, driftwood, and pieces of abandoned boats deposited by the high tides of past hurricanes and northeasters. We used to search for buried treasure here cause every boy from New Jersey knows this island was one of Captain Kidd's secret hiding places. Within a half hour we gathered twice as much wood as we'd need. We split it with hatchets to expose dry surfaces, and on the beach in front of our tent built a log cabin of firewood around a pile of salt hay. With a single match, Ben ignited the dry hay. The flame spread to the intersections of the wood and we soon had a blazing bonfire going. Ben looked at his watch. "It's quarter after five. My mom should be home from work now. Do you think she'll be able to see the fire from shore?"

"Sure, she can at least see the smoke. My mom probably has all the waitresses watching for it." I could see the red roof of the restaurant due south of the island and was happy to be out here away from the noise.

Suddenly a loud roar shattered the calm silence and echoed across the water. I saw a line of white streaking toward us. "Look at that baby!" I said, pointing.

"Boy, how'd you like to own one of them?" Ben asked.

"Fat chance," I answered. "They cost around fifty grand."

"So? Just think how many broads you could get with a boat like that. I bet there's a gorgeous blond on that one right now. Let's take a look." He crawled into the tent and came back with his binoculars and the telescope my dad gave me last year for Christmas. "Wow," he added, "there's two of them! A blond and a red-head!"

"Son of a bitch," I said when I got the long, shiny silver fiberglass boat into focus, as it roared by a quarter mile away.

"It's called Pieces of Eight. That baby must be twenty-six or twenty-eight feet long. Those guys are sure lucky."

"Yeah. But they oughta call it Pieces of Ass."

###

For dinner Mom had made us foil stews - chopped beef, potatoes cut into small cubes, corn niblets, and sliced onion, all rolled up in a double thickness of alu-

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minum foil. We placed the two packets on a bed of hot coals and raked more coals around and on top. "You're the cook," Ben said. "How long do you think these'll take?"

"Let's try twenty minutes, that sound okay?"

"Yeah." Ben walked over to the boat and returned with a six-pack of Budweiser. "Want a beer?" he asked.

"Yeah, how'd you get it?"

"Simple. My father took some friends out fishing last Sunday. I offered to unload the boat while they were cleaning the fish, and I accidentally on purpose forgot to check the baitwell. I threw some ice in this morning to cool it off."

"Pretty smart, man." Ben always knew how to do things right. And he was well liked at school and a good athlete. To be treated as his friend, despite being a grade behind, had been gratifying to me during the year we'd been neighbors. "How much you got?"

"Another sixpack besides this one."

"That oughta be enough."

"Yeah, I don't wanna get too drunk."

"Me neither."

After finishing a second can of beer, I decided the stews were done and pushed them out of the coals and into dry sand with the aid of two long green sticks. I poured water on the foil to cool it, then untwisted the tops to let the steam off. "Looks perfect," I pronounced. "Here, pour the grease out," I said to Ben as he opened the second one. "You don't wanna get the runs."

Hungry, we ate in silence, watching a lone sailboat glide out the channel toward the deep water past the island. "Wonder where they're headed," Ben offered, nodding toward the boat.

I opened another beer and passed the last one to Ben. "Maybe around the world. Or maybe just around North Cape. Who knows?" That reminded me of something I'd been wanting to tell him. "You ever go sailing?"

"No, I think it's boring. What about you?"

"Shit, it ain't boring. You gotta know what you're doing to handle a sailboat."

"Well, did you ever do it?"

"I went once with Carolyn Martin and a friend of hers."

Ben looked as surprised as I had hoped he would. Carolyn Martin is considered the best-looking girl at Waterwitch High, but she's generally seen only with seniors and basketball players. "No shit! I guess you weren't bored, then."

Me and Ben were the envy of every boy at the school 'cause Carolyn also lived at Island Watch, which meant we got to wait for the bus with her in the mornings. At least on those rare mornings when a kid with a car didn't pick her up. She was five-nine, which was taller than half the boys in her class including Ben, and she was the star of the girls' basketball team. Nobody in any of the local bars ever even proofed her anymore. Carolyn was in Ben's grade and lived with her mother and

aunt. Ben told me her father skipped out last year and ain't been around since. That's tough on a kid, at least Ben's dad takes him out fishing sometimes.

"No, Ben, I wasn't bored." I grinned, remembering the day. I was fishing for fluke from the end of the pier when a voice I instantly knew to be Carolyn's yelled to me from a 16-foot Hobie Cat sailing by. "Want to join us?" It turned out that they just needed my weight for extra ballast 'cause the wind was real strong out on the bay, but I didn't mind. Just to be seen in the same boat with Carolyn Martin would assure my reputation for an entire school year. We stayed out for three hours which made me late for work and thus the unhappy recipient of one of my mother's angry lectures about responsibility. But that only gave me more reason to remember the day.

"How come you never told me?"

"I was saving it for a special occasion." I did manage to tell everyone in my own class that I met during the summer, but I was careful not to exaggerate my role in case it ever got back to her.

"So when was it, anyway?"

"In July, that day you went fishing with your dad I was just hanging out feeling pissed off at you for not asking me along when they sailed by and picked me up."

"Wow, I wish I'd've been with you!"

The breeze from the northwest was freshening and I suddenly shivered. I reached into the tent for a sweater and put it on. Ben stirred the coals and added a few more pieces of wood.

"She has some pair of legs, huh?" said Ben, still trying to get more details about my afternoon with Carolyn Martin. "How would you like it if she wrapped them around you?"

I grinned again. "Absolutely perfect!" I remembered sitting with my legs dangling from the windward side of the catamaran's trampoline, watching her tall rigid body hiked out horizontally in the harness to stabilize the boat as gusts of wind pounded us from abeam. Her toes gripped the bar of the trampoline like a fucking monkey's, and her long tan legs stretched diagonally upward to where the narrow straps of the trapeze harness worked her bikini up, exposing the bottom of her ass. I was sure we would be spilled over and the other girl seemed terrified, but Carolyn was ecstatic. She must thrive on danger, I thought. No wonder she was bored with school.

"That's not all she's got that's perfect," said Ben in a tone that begged to be asked for an explanation. He finally reached for the windbreaker I brought out for him.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, she got a cute little pair of tits, kinda small, but real nice. And she got a perfect pair of ass-cheeks." His voice cracked on the last word.

"Yeah, I'll go along with that." I answered.

Ben cleared his throat and drained the last of his beer. "I mean I know exactly

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what they look like."

"What do you mean?"

"I seen her naked."

"Go on, you're bullshitting me."

Ben now had the upper hand. "No I ain't. I seen her naked lots of times."

I felt as though I had been gypped in some permanently unknowable way. "Oh, sure, I suppose she puts on a show for you every night."

Ben grinned. "She does, but she don't know it."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

Ben reached for his binoculars and waved them in front of my face. "I watch her undress at night. I can see right into her room from my window."

"No shit."

"Yeah, it's great."

"Doesn't she pull down the shade?"

"She just got new curtains, you know, the kind that only covers the bottom half of the window? I have to stand up on my desk to see over them."

I'll tell you, at that moment I felt absolutely convinced that life just wasn't fair. The front of my house faced the front of Carolyn's, a fact which I had, until that moment, regarded as fortunate. I could wait for her door to open before leaving for school in the mornings and then walk with her to the bus stop. I had never before seen Ben's advantage in having the rear of his house face the rear of Carolyn's. "You mean you just stand there looking out? What if somebody sees you?"

"Nobody can. I put in an extra set of brackets for my shade a few inches down the window. When I want to watch, I set the shade in the lower brackets and pull it all the way down. Then I can see over the top."

Once again I admired my friend's ingenuity. "So, do you watch her every night?"

"Usually. I like it when she looks at herself in front of the mirror."

"Yeah? What does she do?"

"She like studies her whole body. First she puts her hands under her tits and lifts them up, I guess she's trying to make them bigger. Then she turns around and checks out her ass."

"I'd check it out anytime she wants," I declared, remembering again how great she looked on the catamaran but wishing I had had the nerve to reach over and grab a handful.

"It's perfect, man, just perfect. Too bad you'll never know yourself."

"Come on, you gotta let me watch some night. I'll spend the night at your house."

Ben pretended to think gravely. "It'll have to be when my mom's away. Maybe next summer."

"Shit, man, you know what I think?" I asked. I really felt pissed at him by then, and confused. Seeing Carolyn Martin naked would have excited every guy in

school, but somehow the idea of Ben spying on her didn't seem right. It seemed to violate her in some way, yet I knew I was going to pester him about it until he either admitted he was lying or else let me stay at his house and watch her. "I think this is all bullshit. I bet you never seen her naked."

"You can think anything you want. But I know what I can see anytime I feel like it."

###

"Here comes that Pieces of Eight back," I said, looking through my spyglass from the top of the highest sand dune on the island. We had been exploring, looking for evidence of life. Two summers ago on a picnic with his parents Ben discovered a perfectly readable copy of Penthouse in the sand next to an empty wine bottle. He hid in a thicket of beach plums and studied it from cover to cover before realizing that the beach plums were thickly intertwined with poison ivy vines. He dashed into the water and scrubbed himself all over with sand scooped up from the bottom, but three days later the skin on his legs, arms, and back, which had brushed the vines as he crouched, swelled into blisters. His mom had to take him for daily shots of cortisone for a week and spread calamine lotion on for another before his skin returned to normal. He said he treated the blisters on his pecker by himself. When he was able to pedal his bicycle we went to the library for information on v.d., but we couldn't find anything about catching it from poison ivy.

The sun had set fifteen minutes before and the evening turned out as gorgeous as the morning had been. The only sign of the afternoon's violent storm was the succession of long swells on the bay which the silver boat raced over, leaving, on the reddish water behind it, a three-mile widening line of white that curved gradually toward the island.

"Look's like it's coming here," Ben finally answered. The boat roared to the northern end, a quarter mile from where we were camped, before it cut speed and the sound changed to a thumping chug then died altogether. "Come on, let's go see what they're doing," he added.

"Think we should leave all our gear?" I asked, uncertain what he had in mind. You could never tell with Ben.

"Who's gonna take it, stupid? Just bring your telescope."

"Why?"

Ben looked exasperated. "So we can watch them, you know, see if they do anything." Soon we were lying prone within a clump of ground oaks near the crescent-shaped island's northern end, only about a dozen yards from four people milling about trying to light a fire. I still had an apple in my coat pocket which I had brought for dessert, but we were too close to risk making any noise. The anchor of the silver speedboat was stuck in the sand, but the northwest wind was blowing the boat parallel to the beach and it was taking a terrible pounding. Not only that, but the tide had just started to drop and it would be beached in half an hour. Either they didn't know enough to keep a boat offshore with a stern anchor,

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or they were too drunk or spaced out to care. I was beginning to wish we had stayed on our end of the island. But you never could tell with people like that, they might've tried to bother us. I supposed it was better that we knew what they were doing, but I sure hoped they didn't ruin our trip. "Hurry up, I'm cold," a female voice whined. I thought it belonged to the redhead.

"Well, don't just stand there, find some dry wood," a male voice responded, harshly.

In spite of my hesitation, by the time I had my spyglass fixed on the little group, I was caught up in the excitement of the adventure. Ben whispered, "I wish they'd get that damned fire started. It's too dark to see anything through these binoculars. How's your telescope?"

"Okay, but I wish we could get a little closer."

"Well, we can't, they'll spot us! And keep your voice down!"

The first man rose and said, "I'll get a fire going, just watch me."

The other said, "But everything's wet." He sounded real vague, like he didn't know why.

The first one said, "Just make a pile of small pieces of wood. I'll be right back." He started walking toward the water, limping noticeably as if his left leg belonged to someone else and he was obliged to carry it. He lifted himself into the cockpit and in a few minutes climbed back onto the beach carrying a paper cup above his head. Then he limped back up to the others, poured something onto the wood, placing the cup at the base of the pile, removed a lighted cigarette from the other man's mouth, and ordered the others to stand back. He puffed on the cigarette a few times till the tip glowed red and flipped it into the cup. The gasoline exploded with a shocking boom! and both girls screamed. Flames flew twenty feet toward the beach, following the fumes where the man had carried the cup.

Ben and I heard our own involuntary cries of fright and hoped we hadn't given ourselves away. But no one turned. From our position in the bushes, we could see the two men clearly in the bright flames, but the girls were facing away. They were both wearing jeans and windbreakers, but you could tell the blond was a real piece. She was taller than the redhead who looked kind of dumpy. The man with the limp announced, "Now there's a fucking fire!" His face looked around thirty but he had a real high forehead and long silvery gray hair. He was wearing old army fatigues and a heavy khaki sweater.

The other man, much younger and not as tall, but with a bulging beerbelly, sallow cheeks, a full blond beard, and long straight blond hair tied into a ponytail, answered, "Yeah, John, but you didn't have to fucking try and kill us!"

"Yeah, John," the redhead added, "I think you're too drunk to know what you're doing."

"One can never be too drunk, lassie," John answered, with a mocking bow toward the redhead. Then he turned toward the blond and said, "And how's our newest young beauty this fine evening? Did she enjoy her ride on my silver walrus?"

The guy had a real crazy, fancy way of talking, like he knew all the secrets and was just toying with people.

"Oh, yes, thank you, it was fun," she answered, and me and Ben turned to look at each other. "But, I'm getting kind of chilly, do you think we'll be going home soon?"

"Holy shit!" Ben whispered, "that's Carolyn Martin."

"Yeah," I answered. "I wonder what she's doing here."

"I don't know, but we better stick around. I don't think I trust those guys."

"They look kind of wild to me, especially that guy John that started the fire. He scared the shit out of me."

"So let's get this party started," John said. He pulled a half-empty bottle out of a canvas bag, opened it, and took a long swig. "Ah, good stuff," he said. "Take some yourself, Thomas, but save a little for the ladies." He passed the bottle to the other guy, who drank and offered it to the girls.

"No, thanks," said Carolyn. "I really don't care for rum." Her voice didn't sound as confident as it usually did, but she didn't sound exactly scared, either. So I didn't know what to think. I mean, she always hung around with older kids, but not this old. I wondered if she knew what she was doing. A lot of the guys thought she was kind of stuck up about being so pretty and so smart - Ben said she always got the best grades in the class - but that time she took me sailing she was real nice and friendly. My mom always said she was wild, but I couldn't imagine her doing anything really bad.

I guess the redhead must've liked rum all right 'cause she practically drained the bottle. She passed it back to John, who did drain it, and then he hurled it right at the boat. We heard it smash as it struck the bow and it probably shattered into hundreds of pieces, though it was too dark by then to tell, and the moon was just rising in the east. "What the fuck did you do that for?" asked the fat guy, Thomas.

"Why, I just christened the craft." "Christ, asshole, you do it every fucking time you finish a bottle. Don't you think it's fucking christened by now?" Thomas was pissed and he seemed like the kind of guy that gets mean when he's pissed. I began to worry about Carolyn.

The redhead seemed angry, too. "Now there's broken glass all over the fucking beach," she said. I knew Carolyn wasn't used to that kind of language, and it bothered me to hear a girl say fuck.

"But we're all properly shod, aren't we?" asked John in his mocking tone. "Unless you're planning to go skinny-dipping, I see no cause for concern. And it's a bit chilly for that, wouldn't you all agree?"

After a few minutes, the redhead said, "You want me to dance for you, you gotta be nice, John, don't you know that by now?" She suddenly dropped to the sand and curled up on her side, her back to the fire. "Make sure you keep putting wood on, fellows." Then she must've just passed out.

"You got another bottle of that shit?" asked Thomas.

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"No, but there's plenty of beer in the boat. Would you be kind enough to fetch it?" Thomas disappeared from the fire-lit area, and returned with two sixpacks. Carolyn took a can - I was glad they weren't bottles - and stepped back a little from the fire. Thomas addressed John as if the girls weren't even there: "You know, your boat's just about sitting on the beach right now. I tried to shove it back in the water, but it's too fucking heavy."

"Again, my friend, there's no cause for alarm. It's a clear night. We have fire. I have several blankets and extra clothes on board. We can keep quite cozy until the tide comes back in." John looked at his watch. "That should be just around sunrise tomorrow."

"Well, what the fuck are we gonna do all night?" Thomas demanded.

John looked at Carolyn. "Ah, yes, there is the matter of entertainment.

###

Ben nudged me and whispered, "Let's find a spot where we can talk." Covered by the darkness, we moved out from the trees as silently as we could and made our way south to the beach to a point where it curved out of sight. We were about three hundred feet away from the fire now, but we could still see its glow in the sky. My heart was racing and I would've given just about anything to be back home, or even washing dishes in the restaurant. I felt terrible about what we had seen and heard. Since we were both chilled from lying on the ground for so long, we decided to walk back to our tent at the other end and get some more clothes.

"Do you think they'll try to rape her?" I asked when we got there, feeling ashamed for her but also aware that the idea excited me. Then I felt even more ashamed for imagining that I would want to see Carolyn raped.

"Shit, yeah," Ben answered. "Couldn't you tell by the way that guy looked at her?" What I couldn't tell was whether Ben was hoping it would happen or not.

"Well, we can't just watch her being raped by a pair of animals, can we? I mean, she's our friend."

"What the fuck, maybe she wants them to do it. She came out here with them, didn't she? She didn't seem to be their prisoner or anything like that."

Damn, if she did know what she was doing and actually wanted it, well, maybe Ben was right.

"Anyway, what could we do about it? Did you see the size of those guys? They'd beat the shit out of us if we tried anything."

"Maybe we could figure out some other way. Let's try to think of something."

"If we could get my boat into the water, we could take her home."

"How can we let her know we're here?"

"I don't know, but let's make sure we can move the boat first." It was too heavy to pick it up and carry, but we were able to lift up the stern and pull it down the beach, a few feet at a time. We had to get our legs all wet and our fire had burned itself out, and it felt damned cold, but at least we had a means of escape.

We agreed that if it looked like she was gonna be raped, we would try to protect

her. We were smaller, but we had the advantage of surprise. They had no idea we even existed. We would sneak up to within a few yards and then charge them with weapons - we brought a hammer and a heavy wrench from the boat with us. We'd have to hit them as hard as we could, aiming for the backs of their necks to knock them out with a single blow. Then we'd grab Carolyn and run back to Ben's boat. Now, all we had to do was get her, so we walked back up the beach as quickly and quietly as we could. On the way, we decided that if she seemed to be enjoying herself, we would leave her alone, though neither of us said whether we planned to watch or not.

Even though we don't really hang out together, the three of us had that one thing in common - no father. Of course, my situation seemed more permanent, mine being dead and theirs just divorced. Still, it provided a bond among us which I hoped Ben would feel too. But once I got thinking about my dad, I knew I couldn't have watched Carolyn being fucked, even without my spyglass, cause I was afraid my dad would be watching me watch her. That made me feel guilty as hell.

Halfway there, we could hear some kind of music, so instead of returning to our spot in the ground oaks, we decided to move in a little closer to check things out. We managed to climb to the top of a small dune that overlooked the spot where Carolyn and the others were. An enormous boom box sat on the sand near the fire playing some raunchy-sounding electric guitars and drums. Maybe the music itself wasn't raunchy, but the redhead was doing a pretty raunchy dance. She seemed to be in her own world again, lifting her arms up and shaking her ass. "Take it off, baby!" Thomas said, and she suddenly unzipped her windbreaker and tossed it aside. "Now your sweater," called Thomas. "Show Blondie how to do it!"

That's when I both realized Carolyn was nowhere in sight. I wondered what had happened, and apparently Thomas did too. "Hey, where'd that little bitch go?" he suddenly shouted. He also turned off the music, but the redhead continued to dance like she hadn't noticed.

"In the woods to relieve herself, that's all," John answered. He did not seem as drunk as he did before.

"I don't think you should've let her out of your sight."

"My friend, ain't nobody leaving this island tonight, so relax. What if she decides to take a little walk? When the temperature starts to drop, just think how grateful she'll be to climb under my blanket and let me make her warm again. You worry too much."

But Thomas was not satisfied. "Listen, I don't feel like stumbling around in the dark. I'm gonna go look for her."

"I suggest, then, that you wait until the moon is a bit higher. The longer you wait, the better you'll be able to see."

The redhead finally stopped dancing and reached for another beer. "Come on, Tom," she said. "Don't you like me anymore, huh? You like that skinny blond better?" That was the first real good look at her that I had, and I could see that she

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wasn't bad, really, but sort of used-up. She looked around thirty or so, just starting to get a little heavy in the ass. I felt something touch my foot and kicked at it, but then it grabbed my ankle and I let out some kind of sound, not much, but enough to make me glad that Thomas had turned the music back on. I turned around to look and I almost couldn't believe what I saw. It was Carolyn!

I nudged Ben and we crawled silently back down the south side of the dune where Carolyn stood waiting for us. "How's the view from up there?" she asked. "Did fatso take her clothes off yet?" It was amazing to me how she could tease us like that so soon after what had almost happened to her. I began to think Ben might've been right when he said that was just what she was looking for. But when she spotted the weapons we were still clinging to, she put her arms around us both and began to cry softly. She whispered, between sobs, "I knew you guys were planning to camp out here tonight, and I saw your tent when we passed by before. I was so scared but I had to think of an excuse to get away from those awful men. Then I spotted you. Oh, I'm so glad you're here."

We must've looked pretty silly, I thought, all huddled up like a lop-sided tripod. You know, she's two inches taller than Ben, and he's four inches taller than me. "Come on," I finally whispered, "let's get out of here!"

We backtracked to the beach and ran as fast as we could back to our camp. "Holy shit!" Ben said when he rounded the final bend. "The boat's gone!"

###

What a couple of dumb shitheads! We had forgotten to set the anchor after we shoved it into the water. It must've got pinched between the wind that was blowing out of the north and the current that was moving northeast. We spotted it a couplehundred yards offshore. "Looks like I'll have to swim for it," Ben said. He seemed relieved that it was retrievable but not anxious to enter the water which was only around fifty degrees.

Ben's pretty strong and he's a good all-around athlete, but one thing I'm better at is swimming and he knows it. So I said, "Wait a minute, Ben, I can make it faster."

"Nope," he said, "it's my dad's boat, and I'm responsible for it. I'll go."

But Carolyn must've had her own ideas and by the time she finished saying, "Listen, both of you know that I'm a better swimmer than either of you, and this whole mess is my fault, so I'll go," she was out of her sneakers and socks and jeans and sweater. I saw her standing there in this skimpy little bra and panties for about half a second and then she was gone.

She just ran into the water full speed, dove head first when she was in knee-high and started swimming in a straight line toward the boat. She was as beautiful and graceful as anybody I ever seen in the Olympics. We couldn't take our eyes off of her and I know I prayed that she'd make it. Ben didn't believe in God, so I prayed for him, too. Well, she made it all right, but just as she was lifting herself up over the side - and giving us a beautiful view of her ass in the moonlight - Ben said

"Holy shit!" for the third time that night.

"What's wrong now?" I asked. He reached into his pocket. "I've got the fucking key. I took it out of the boat before." He stripped off his clothes and shoes as fast as Carolyn did and then grabbed his bathing suit from our clothesline, put it on, and put the key into the pocket. "If she can make it, so can I," he said. "You get our gear ready to toss into the boat when we come back." Then he, too, dove in and swam as fast as he could.

I felt very lonely standing there by myself, but I didn't waste a second. I stuffed all our clothes, even remembering Carolyn's, into the duffel bag, put the food back into the little Igloo cooler, rolled up our sleeping bags, and took down the tent and folded it as good as I could. I didn't even lose a tent stake. From time to time I looked up to check Ben's progress. Carolyn was standing up paddling the boat toward shore, trying to close the gap, looking as beautiful as a goddess. I had everything ready by the time I saw him climb in the boat, and I don't think I ever felt as relieved as when I heard that old Evinrude start up on the first crank.

But just about the same time I heard Thomas's obnoxious voice calling, "There goes the bitch, she's getting away!" And John was running along behind him, moving with amazing speed for a guy who had to drag a leg. They were still about a hundred yards away from me, and the boat was only half that. I lifted the bag of clothes up over my head and waded out to where the water was chest high. God damn, but I never felt anything that cold! Once my lungs were covered, I just couldn't fucking breathe anymore. I turned to see that John and Thomas had stopped at the water's edge. I guess they figured that no fifteen-year-old blond was worth it. They still had the redhead. Instead, they started throwing things at us. They threw stones, pieces of firewood, debris from the beach, anything they could get their nasty hands on.

"Grab the duffel bag," I heard Ben say, and its weight was lifted from me just as I was hit in the back with a small rock.

"Grab his other arm," Carolyn said, and I was pulled over the forward gunwale. I fell all the way in the boat as Ben gunned the engine, turned the boat sharply, and sped out of hurling range toward home. "Fucking assholes!" Carolyn yelled back at the two men. "I hope you freeze your balls off."

Damn! Language like that coming from Carolyn Martin was a greater shock than November seawater. But judging by the way my own felt then, I knew it would be the perfect revenge.

My mother

My mother My mother

by janet kuypers

We went to see my mother this weekend. You see, my mother has cancer, and we decided to go across the country for a weekend to surprise her and see how she was doing. it was breast cancer, so it really was the best case scenario, i suppose, so i managed to put it out of my mind until we actually had to fly there

The night before i couldn't bring myself to pack. it was two in the morning when i finally pulled my suitcase out from the pantry shelf.

i kept telling people at work, "well, you see, I have to go visit my mother because she has cancer, so I have to miss a few days of work," but I was always able to say it so matter-of-factly until I had to actually visit her

In fact, when my sister told me the diagnosis, it was right around Christmas time, and there was so much work to do and I still had presents to wrap and a meal to prepare and Christmas was supposed to be a happy time

that I managed to postpone even thinking about it until we all decided to surprise her for a visit. And then I had to pack. To decide what to take, what to leave behind, put my life into a little black box with a handle and wheels, and go

It shouldn't be this way, and I knew that, I knew that I shouldn't be visiting my mother under these circumstances and I knew how she never wants to think about bad things because they always make her cry and this would make her want to cry and cry because the only reason why we're there is because things are bad

But I wasn't supposed to think that way, things would be just fine.

So I finished packing at four in the morning and the next thing I remember is I was on the plane with my sisters, cracking jokes as we picked up the rental car. and then we got to mom and dad's house

and everyone was so happy to see each other, it was one big family reunion and we were laughing and talking and trying to figure out where we were all going to sleep

and the sisters and dad walked into the front room to see if the couches were good enough to sleep on or if we would have to get out an air mattress and I was alone in the den with mom

so I suddenly became serious and sat down next to her and asked her how she was really doing. And that is when she started to cry, saying that the cancer spread, but what she was most concerned with was the fact that she didn't want to spoil the time that we came to visit her. But what I don't think she understood was that we couldn't have come at a better time, and nothing she could do would spoil our trip.

exploring power by courtney steele

Imagine a perfect society. Swaying trees, sunny skies, a cool breeze. When you walk down the all-too-clean streets everyone you see is friendly. Everyone is good and kind and giving. Imagine being able to come home from the job that you love to a warm, safe home. There is never a disagreement in this society, and differences in people (like gender, race, age) are not hated like they are today but loved and appreciated.

It's a hard society to imagine, I know. The hardest part of this perfect society to imagine is the fact that power, as we define it in today's terms, does not exist. Power, by definition, is the ability of one person to make another person do something against their will, or the ability of one person to do something against another person's will. Power can be physical brute force, the power that a father and mother have over their children, the power that a man can hold over a woman, or the power of one race over another. The problem with power is that it is too often used - and too often used in poor ways. For example, in today's society obedience is considered a virtue in reference to a child's behavior toward their parents, but it is merely a submission on the part of the child to the power of their parents. In most cases the fact that most women care more about their physical appearances than men care about their physical appearances is a demonstration of the woman's submission to the man's power. The statistics show that white men still hold much more than their proportional share of jobs than black men do - and these statistics show that the black race is unwillingly in submission to the power of the white race.

Power as defined above would not exist in this society. The ability to possess that power would not even matter - for each and every individual in that society may have the capacity for possessing power (in the same way that each and every individual in society may have the capacity for becoming a mass murderer, but don't realize that potential). In this society, no one would want to possess that kind of power (in the same way that not one member in the society will want to become a mass murderer). No one would want this kind of power because no one would want to feel as if they were hurting someone, and no one would want to force someone into doing something against their will. No one would want to have a job if having the job meant that they were taking the job from someone who was more qualified, even if that person was from a minority group. No child would want to do something that would hurt their parents, and no parent would want to have to reprimand their child (and wouldn't have to if their child had not only their own,

but also their parent's best interests in mind). No man would want to force a woman into a situation that she did not want to be in, and no woman would feel the burdens of society to find a husband. People would no longer marry for economic reasons but for love.

The kind of power that would exist would only be an entirely self-contained power - a kind of power that we all possess but seldom actually tap and use to our advantage. The power that would exist would be a power that enabled people to accelerate and do the best that they could (for themselves and for others). It allows personal achievement to become a reality in the pure sense of the word, and it shows how the individual can move ahead if they want to and be proud of their accomplishments. This kind of power will not hamper others, and it involves no competition, but only the completion of personal goals. This kind of power would let people feel good about themselves, knowing that they as humans (even humans that stand alone) can accomplish almost anything that they want to.

Call it power, if you will, or give it another name so that people of this society don't get confused with this self-fulfilling power. Call it self-determinism. Call it the power over yourself, and not the power over others. Call it anything you want. Maybe in this society people wouldn't even have a name for it - maybe people would know that they have some sort of abilities without even giving them names. The most important fact is the fact that this is the kind of power that will exist and dominate in this society, and not the kind of hurting, oppressing power that we in this society are used to.

This power would lead to the most efficient society - it would be economically be producing at it's peak, it would have no crime and thus be a safe place for women and children as well as men to live in, and it would be filled with love for others instead of resentment, jealousy and aggression. A hierarchy of power to implement laws would be unnecessary, and prices of goods and services would not be unreasonable, therefore giving people more money to spend in the market and eliminate both unemployment and competition. The power structure that we see in today's society would not exist in this society. Power in any sense of the word would not exist. This "new" power comes from inside a person, and doesn't hurt others - it only helps others, as well as helping the self. Therefore, the only amount of power that would exist in this society would be as much that the members of this perfect society would want. Hopefully, that amount of power may be limitless.

I know, I know, this is a very hard sort of power to imagine, for it seldom exists in this society and it never exists in its pure form. I have a hard time fathoming how this kind of power may affect me, and what may be the end result.

So many times I set out to accomplish a task and I find that there is some sort of obstacle in my way that I have no control over. It may be something as simple as walking out at night alone (that I feel I cannot do because of a fear for my safety), or something as important in my life as trying to get the job that I want, but not getting it because I am a woman and there was a man almost as qualified for the job that took the job from me. An obstacle that has been created by the self can be eliminated and is therefore a problem that can be overcome. However, when there are factors that seem to be outside of one's own control that take precedence, it can become very frustrating. It often makes me feel

as if there is no point in even setting goals for myself when there is such a great chance of not being able to achieve that goal because of other people having unfair power over me.

With this sort of power eliminated, I can't help but wonder if there would be anything that I wouldn't be able to do. It's an exhilarating feeling, to think that I would be able to go through life not having to battle other people to accomplish my goals but only battle the person that is my greatest competitor - myself. If I didn't accomplish what I wanted, I could learn from my mistakes and set new goals for myself, not feeling any vengeance or resentment. If I was able to accomplish my goal, then I would be the better person for it. The sense of satisfaction would be great, I would have tangible proof of my achievement, and I would have done it all on my own, with the help or the hurting of no one. I would then be able to set new goals for myself and improve myself (and possibly the lives of others) even more.

With this outlook, I can't imagine how much better my attitude would be about myself. I would know what my potential was; I would have a better chance of achieving my full potential. There would be no regrets in my life. I would never have to be ashamed of myself, because I would be my best. Everyone would have this feeling of self-satisfaction. How could it not be a perfect society, if everyone felt this way?

In a society like this, with an outlook like this, everyone would have the same opportunities and the same goals. Everyone would then be treated equally, for everyone would be the best that they could be. When people are looked at for their ability, they are seen as capable people - and not as people that are inferior. There would be no need for discrimination, and there would be no need to look down on other people. There would be a feeling of total respect and honor for other people - you would honor every other person the way that you would honor yourself, for they - like you - would be able to achieve anything that they wanted. This philosophy would eliminate the differences that people see today in ages, races or colors of the skin, or genders. With the elimination of this kind of power, this weed that has infested society, the seeds of respect would be able to grow and flourish.

Yes, I know, this kind of society doesn't exist. People depend on using and abusing others in order to get what they want instead of depending on the abilities that they possess within themselves. Maybe the reason that people don't rely on themselves alone is because they are too afraid that they wouldn't be able to achieve all the things that they would want to. But they would, if they only tried. Maybe the reason the people don't rely on themselves alone to do the things that they want and to get the things that they want is because they feel that it is too easy to achieve their goals while stepping on others, since the opportunity is there. But there are others - the oppressed, the downtrodden - who would tell you another story. The people who are oppressed, who are being abused by this power, want to have the same opportunities that others have. And it wouldn't take anything away from the people in power now - if anything, it would only improve the lives of all. The only thing that this society would do is give everyone the opportunity to be the best that they could be. There wouldn't have to be hurting anymore.



photograph by janet kuypers
e u g e n e

kat e

by nancy l'enz hogan

The walking trip across the moors
gave some small rewards,
mostly the bell-shaped pinkish heather,
plus the usual mystery flora -
"See - " one of the girl hikers said,
flicking a finger at a rabbit,
"a fauna!"
Mare's tails trailed across the
gay blue sky (then a good word still was "gay")
Somewhere on the ground grouse drummed
and high in the distance a Lilliputian biplane
coughed and hung there in the air
"Hooray - look - it's a road! Let's find a
drugstore - I guess I mean a chemist, don't I?
They must have gauze for blisters there!"
Oh, shops! The girls bumped each other into the
chemist's door, pushing and laughing
"Hey, aren't you coming in, Kate?" -
affectionately, carelessly off-hand -
Good ol' Kate, hanging back, petting dogs,
whistling along with birds
She stood there waiting in the multi-scented air...
smiled, waved once at her friends inside
Her thick auburn hair glinted
in the leaf-filtered light
It seemed to reflect the flash of brass
on the gear of the horse
just topping the rise
in the road
where Kate waited

A man was reining the snorting horse
from the seat of a Gypsy wagon
The man's dark eyes and Kate's green gaze
met and melded and held
Lights flickered in his eyes
like torches in a storm
Her breath was quelled
and she was not surprised
to feel it stolen by the Gypsy's eyes
He motioned to the empty space
beside him on the wagon seat

When her friends emerged
from the chemist shop
they looked for Kate and called
all looked and called and looked
for their lost Kate...
but all were far too late;
she had found
the open gate

Face on the Sand by ben ohmart

His third day just walking along the border of the land. Feeling the slip of the water reach his toes and scurry away before the next footprint could be born. The sun was setting or rising so slowly it didn't matter, but the spray of the wind made Malm's shirt break open like the buttons on the loose, loud shirt were there for a joke. He was sad at being made of money and therefore quickly flammable. He had no problems but the sound of his heartbeat, and even the thought that that wouldn't last forever did not drive him to the pleasant feeling that problems weren't so far away.

Phone calls. Putting up with men who worried their lives. An hour a week. Tops. And then. Back at the beach. Back at it. Never thinking the waves rolled without him. Trying to go deep into himself so that he could find something. A problem even wasn't necessary. A joy or a reason for it beyond mere cash was a sacred quest. And Malm was not a component of a sacred quest.

The sun was full. Ready to be born or die. That was when the face in the sand, the face on the sand stared up at him. Mouth slightly apart. Eyes up in the wrinkles of a young forehead. Something resembling James Dean. Something James Dean actually, he noticed upon the kneeling position. The soft cheeks were dotted with the grit of soluble land. The eyes were there, full color, whatever it was. Then it blinked.

"Jesus," Malm said quickly, pulling back. Several steps away.

"hh..hh...hfffh..." the face said, but didn't go on. Without a good throat or any throat that much was enough. Too much.

Malm circled some sand. Chattered at himself. Cursed himself and things. Always coming back to a look at the face on the sand. And the water kept reaching its nose. Mouth. It had trouble breathing, even if it had no lungs to worry about. And the sand was hardly good for the eyes.

Without a thought of freak show royalties, the rich man could hardly just leave the damn thing there. What it needed was water. Water without salt, he thought, and then moved to try to discover a way of lifting it without touching the horrible thing...

The midget who ran the only hotel - the hotel that Malm owned and kept only as a personal retreat for some third of the year, renting out to others for the remainder - on the sand caught between waters never questioned where Malm was getting the

import of native girls from. He never looked up at a helicopter. Never heard a sound. So he wasn't about to concern himself with asking a question when the owner entered the all but palace carrying a wet saggy shirt.

It took a couple hours, but the face had its fill of water. Being dry all around the edges and in every part but the mouth, the face was feeling strength. A good deal of it.

"Hey. Can I have some food?"

Malm jumped. He'd been biting off excess fingernails, but now he felt compelled to answer the request. Like he was under some power.

That face could sure eat a mess of mess. Shrimp including shells, candy wine (made from aged to rotting peppermint candies), fish minus the eyes and skin, one-legged fried chickens, two boxes of old puddings, a whole ham served in six trips, and a goose found washed ashore one night, among other things.

"Where do you put it all?" the host asked as the face still worked on a last bite of pig. The question was laced with wonder.

The cheeks were puffy, but it could still smile. And when it opened its mouth to make the sound of a burp, or something close, Malm could see right into the bed-spread the face was laying on. "Oh, you know," was the answer.

"But who - uh, who are you? You look just like -"

"Yeah, I know," the face replied. "I get that a lot."

Malm thought he was seeing things. But it happened. It was happening. The curves of the visage - its borders ended where a full man's ears would begin - crept through the loud-pattern of the bed and inched its way along like some slimy creature would. For the face, it wasn't difficult, but still required enough concentration so that it was never an unconscious act. It was trying to sit up. To get to the pillow, and plant itself like a weed. Which it did, after some intuitive maneuvering.

"God..."

"What are you?" Malm yelled.

Instead of a tale which would explain everything, he inquired about playing cards.

"What?!"

The shock of the beach was slowing wearing off. "shwooo..... Uh. Cards. You any good at playing cards?"

Three months went quickly in the hotel. The small man had to content his life with working out the reservation book.irate customers had booked months in advance sometimes, but all the dwarf needed to know was Malm's desire once for having the place to himself just a little longer, and things were ultimately settled.

He took the face to the inland waterfall, and civilization. Civilization was the crowd of pelicans which fashioned a giant nest between some trees that weren't quite palmy. They watched movies coming in from the satellite dish almost every night, and Malm felt himself growing quite attached to the thing/friend which at alternate times gave certain insights into what it felt like to have the ultimate out of body experience.

ben ohmart

"It's like blowing bubbles most of the time," the face explained.

"Blowing bubbles?"

"Yeah. You know how it's nice to blow bubbles?"

"Yeah?"

"Well. It doesn't feel like anything. But it's nice."

That snippet alone was worth hours of silence for Malm who contemplated it like it was thousands of years old. He didn't know what it meant, but it felt closer to meaning something.

The only other person he could share the info with was his ex-wife who still lived in a part of NYC which wasn't called NYC but still held a similar zip code. He wrote her the Christmas card he'd been meaning to for a few years now, enclosing the bit of wisdom the face had offered, and three weeks later there was a reply via FAX which simply stated WHAT THE HELL DOES THIS MEAN?

Whether it was a feeling of enough unrestricted sunshine, or the fact that he still held unknown feelings for the only woman ever in his life, Malm felt she deserved an explanation of what he meant. And to be fair, the only thing that could explain it was the horse's mouth.

When he suggested the trip, to Malm's surprise the horse's mouth was all for it. "Yeah! As long as we can go by airplane. I want to go by airplane."

The helicopter was chartered - face said it was close enough to a plane - and they sped to the nearest spot of land that wasn't an island where they took a jumbo jet to NYC. Malm hated traveling with or against people, so he held all the seats' tickets, and this meant he could put the face next to him. Though the face complained about only being able to see the air blower above. Malm wanted to give him a view, but the one thing that hadn't changed between them was that he wasn't aBout to touch the face.

They'd agreed on that early on. It was just something Malm would Not do. But the complete man Was nice enough to order a team of stewardesses to alternate holding a book up for the face to read for 6 of the hours it took to get there; as long as they were looking away. No one else had seen the face.

A quick limo to his ex-wife's business, Malm sat waiting in the waiting room, with a spongy sack on his lap. The sack was very breathable. The receptionist tried not to notice that the sack was moving.

At the appointed time, he went in and placed the sack on her desk. After a hug that told them both things they'd forgotten, Malm quickly unwrapped the sack so that it fell to its most revealing. He was proud of the face.

But she screamed. And though the face knew it would have to happen, he winced and waited for the breath to run out of her.

It didn't take long. She was looking at it. Then she got past what it was. It reminded her. It reminded her of...

"What the hell Is this?"

"This is my face," Malm said.

"Hello," the face cordially tried. But it really didn't seem to care. All this was a favor.

The woman laughed, and it was a second before she realized there was call waiting going on. She buzzed her secretary with an order, then locked the door.

Malm said like a shy man, "He said it."

"He said what?" she asked.

"Ask it something."

What do you ask a face? She waited. She realized. "How do you breath?"

The face laughed. The sound was pleasant, but too high in the room. "You know, I don't even think about it."

It seemed simple. But more than that. She wasn't afraid.

It was working out the way he liked. The way he'd wanted it to. And she was growing proud of the thing he had brought her, Malm could tell. She even went so far as to request time alone with the face. So many questions. Too many questions that she'd never think of.

He agreed, and left for a poor man's lunch. Malm could never get over hot dogs. But they had to be draped in chili. A harder specialty to find. But he finally did. Blocks away. The cabs were scarce, but he eventually got back to the place where she worked.

The receptionist wouldn't let him in. Malm couldn't accept no's. He didn't have to.

He broke into the private office. Everything was there. But it didn't feel like it should. Of course there were no bodies - that was the surprising thing. But there was something.. odd. Too..

Kicking out of the room, he looked at the receptionist who was already cold with anxiety. She was shaking a little before she even answered the question. "I don't know where she is!"

It was true. The rich man could feel it, could sense it after a lifetime of playing the game.

He dreamed all the way down the elevator of finding the face chewing on her. Some part of her body. And they would both be groaning. And somehow it would all fit. Would all work. He would still be a part of that. But he hadn't anticipated this kind of betrayal.

Hours in the park. Walking. Shrugging. Misunderstanding. Kicking the birds to flight. Malm thought about detective agencies. Then tried a few. Always thanking them for their wasted time when he failed to give a description of his ex. Always embarrassed in the halls, because. He could never remember her face.

gabriel athens

backbone family act
by gabriel athens

I
tried
you
actress
part
you
cared
damn
you
feelings
emotions
daughter
nothing
motions
think
family
flashbacks
kill
forget
told
long
cry
leave
closing
more
part
worry
filled
backbone
family
act

Dragon salad by christophe brunski

Easy to compare our souls
To the very first flying machines
Trembling, unstable skeletons
We throw ourselves and each other
Off cliffs and hillsides
Pushed onwards in our actions
By the music of music blaring in our ears
And below our skin
Though with our bodies we are motionless while
Yellow paint and plaster dust
Trickle down the wall like domesticated rain
There is thunder at the door
The pounding fists of the Deus ex Machina
Whose entry we have forbidden
The three of us
She passes to me
As she would a cup and saucer
Her dog-blue eyes
And touches the other's eyelid
Feels it below her finger
Curved and supple yet slightly in retreat
Like an angel's breast
Fragility is ecstasy
A madonna and her sister
Sitting on the bed
With a Modigliani tacked to the wall behind them

The summer is a dragon
With green-leaf scales
And a woman's tongue
Which first deceives me
With promised warmth
Then pulls me into its
Belly of acerbic despair

Around the sandstone neck
Of the statue of the Asian Goddess
Someone had placed a dandelion necklace
A chain of stems and yellow florets
I used to look up at her
From across the café where
Ghouls dressed in chains and dreamt in black
With a mystical gesture she widened my eyes
And I, chewing my thumbnail already split from prying open
Locketts full of downward spirals
Struggled to compose a suitable dedication
And despite my vain attempts to perfect upon her silence
Her gentle smile never fell or faltered
Her look of consolation was as constantly unchanging
As the sentences which form the bottoms of
Innumerable
Bodies of
Water



photograph by janet kuypers
a n d r e w

on an airplane with a frequent flyer

by janet kuypers

"I was once on a flight to Hawaii and I was waiting in line for the lavatory. There was always a line for a flight this long, you know, it seemed the washrooms were always on demand on a flight this long. So I finally got into the washroom, you know, and I looked into the toilet, and someone, well, lost the battle against a very healthy digestive system and left the "spoils" in the toilet, stuck. Maybe it didn't want to go down into the sewage tank where all the other waste from this long trip went to. Can you imagine all the stuff this airplane had to carry across the ocean? Well, anyway, so I saw this stuck in the toilet, and I went to the washroom, and when I was done it still wouldn't budge, and so I opened the door and walked out into the aisle of the plane again. And there was this long line of people waiting to use this cramped little washroom, and I just wanted to tell them all, 'you know, I didn't do that.' And then it occurred to me that everyone, when they leave the bathroom on that plane, will think the exact same thing."

from autumn reason

by sydney anderson

7-2-82 10:00 p.m.

I took care of the neighbor's kids today. They're so cute, but I was feeling a little tired so I wasn't in the mood for them jumping around all day long. But we colored and made some pictures, they both made ones for you. By the time you read this letter, you should already have the pictures. Ellen, their mom, melted down old crayons and poured them into bunny molds, so now we have a bunch of crayons that are shaped like rabbits. The kids love them.

And I've been playing with my zen rock garden, too... I've had it ready for a while, but I never got sand for it. Well, I finally did today, and once I started to use it I loved it, so I learned how to use Dad's saws and made you one, too (but you already know that by now, too - I really hope you like it. It's quite addictive, and slightly creative - very relaxing). When I called Susan later on I told her that I made one and she said that she had always wanted a rock garden, so I made another one this evening. I feel like such a busy-body.

Let's see, what else is going on? There's still a bunch of things I have to do. See a professor about getting a job as a history professor... I don't know if I want to move to another city to do a job I'm not even sure that I want, much less can get.

I wish I had other options. I wish I could get on track. Sometimes I know what I want to do with my life, and I'm determined to let nothing stop me. But there are other times when I feel as if the entire world is pitted against me, that others don't want to see me happy specifically because they don't know what they want to do with their lives and they want to feel like everyone is in the same boat as they are. They want everyone to work in the same mind-set that they do, because they can only compete in their little world. If someone doesn't want to climb their little success ladder that they chose to climb up, others can't handle it because they don't want to believe that their standard is wrong.

It's like this: people don't know what they want with their life, so they do what is expected of themselves, climb the "ladder" of whatever career track they choose, mix in the appropriate social circles, work toward making money, even if they don't know if that's what they want and doing it doesn't make them feel any better. So then they see someone else that has decided to not even acknowledge the ladder that the people with

sydney anderson

no direction have decided to climb because they don't know what else to do. And this other person won't have as much money or as many friends as these ladder-climbers do, so it becomes really easy for the ladder-climbers to dismiss them and unsuccessful - and therefore they must be unhappy.

But I think that these ladder-climbers don't want to admit to themselves that they are jealous of these people that have found what they wanted with their life.

But in order to achieve their dreams (if they even chose to acknowledge them consciously), the ladder-climbers would have to give up their social circles, their prestige, probably some of their money. And they're too afraid of not succeeding, because they're only comfortable with the efforts that they have been putting forth in their ladder-climbing lives, they're so afraid of not succeeding and losing what they already have that they don't see the effort as worth it.

So they hold a resentment toward someone they see as a visionary - someone who does what they want with their life.

So then what? They make fun of them for not having enough money, for having no friends. They may even try to sabotage the plans of the creative one, solely because their value systems don't match.

It's amazing how people need a mob in order to have a belief in something. Shouldn't that be evidence enough that they really don't care about their beliefs, if they need the support from others in order to live with those beliefs?

Anyway, my point from all of that was... Well, I'm no visionary, and I haven't decided to chuck the whole system into the toilet. But I do want to use the system for my own needs, so that I may be able to do what I want to with my life, whether or not that fits in with what people expect. And I think that scares every person I meet, and I think others resent me for that, and I feel like all these artificial barriers are put up in front of me so that I may get discouraged and quit.

And the thing is, I know what kind of work I want to do, but I'm wondering if and how I can do it. Sometimes I feel like I shouldn't even try, like the odds are against me. And I have to try to fight that. It's a constant battle.

7-6-82 11:35 p.m.

You know, there was a man I knew once, he was the type of guy that tried to have sex with as many women as possible, a real sexist womanizer type, and one day we were talking about the fact that he's a republican, and he's so conservative, and then he said he was a good Christian and that he prays every night before he goes to bed. And all I could think was that this this guy was such a hypocrite for sleeping with anything that moved, then praying to his God every night before he went to bed. I wanted to ask him if he prayed in front of all the women he was usually sleeping with, but instead I asked that if he believed in Jesus Christ, how could he justify having sex before marriage? Then he proceeded to tell me that nowhere in the Bible does it say you can't have sex before marriage.

And the moral of that story, I guess, is that people can justify anything they want when

they don't live by a cohesive value system. This guy managed to pervert his values and the wording of the Bible in order to go against the vast majority of the Christian interpretations of the Bible in order for the value system he decided to adopt to jive with what he wanted to do at any given moment.

So I really want to do something now, I really want to feel as if I'm accomplishing something with my life. I feel like I'm in such a heavy state of limbo that I'm going to just fall off the face of the Earth and no one would be the wiser. I hate that phrase, "no one will be the wiser," but I just used it. I'm so ashamed. Anyway, I said something to Susan about you going back to school in the fall, and then we both made a really weird laugh. We've been so ingrained with the idea that we've graduated that it just seems so foreign to think about taking more university classes in the fall. I know I'll be there all the time, doing work there, going out and all that jazz, but it's just weird to think about going back as a full time student. I'm even thinking about being a teacher there, or at least at another university, instead of doing what I'm doing now, so that would definitely keep me back in the university system. But being a student again - it just seems so out of the question.

I just used another phrase I hate, and once again I'm ashamed. "All that jazz." What does that really mean anyway? And why on Earth did I feel compelled to use it?

Now this has got me thinking about all the strange phrases we use in our every day language. "What on Earth." "The whole ball of wax." "A hill of beans." Someone's probably written about book about these things.

Speaking of books on useless things, remember how I wanted to know why women's shirts button the opposite way men's do? Well, Catherine pulled out a book she had about useless facts and in there it explained why men's shirts button differently from women's. Men at the time buttoned their own shirts, especially if they were going off to war, but rich women had maids to dress them, which wanted the buttons the opposite way to make it easier for them to dress the ladies. Interesting.

And did you know that zippers were invented to replace not buttons but shoelaces? Very strange. Well, I've gone on long enough. I'll write more soon -

8-24-82

Here I am again, bored. It's still the first day, and I hate looking like I have nothing to do here. I have my own office and no one else is in it right now, but I'm afraid that someone will walk by and see my feet up on the desk and fire me or something. Geesh. I wish I brought some work from home to do while I was here. I wonder if this is what careers are really like - a lifetime of trying to find something to do so you look important. All this time I'm sitting here trying to figure out what photographs to bring tomorrow to put up on the wall in front of me, should I bring frames for them, how will I put them up on the wall.... I really can't believe I'm sitting here trying this hard to do absolutely nothing.

I'm starting to worry that this is actually what people do for all of their lives. That their occupation is trying to look important, or busy. Worthy of a raise when they're really not doing anything. This one guy, Tom, told me once that the trick to being respected at the

sydney anderson

office is to always look angry, always look like you're in a rush, that you always have a lot to do. Put extra papers on your desk, make it a little messy, always have stuff in your "in" box (even if it isn't work to do), always remember to make a phone call or jot down a very important reminder when someone is trying to talk to you. Always make everyone wait to talk to you - even if it is just for ten seconds - while you attend to some sort of made-up "business" - whether it be finishing up a fake phone call or writing something "very important" down. Act like you have to get up to do something, even if it's only getting coffee. And always have a furrowed brow. Sigh a lot, try to look a little tired, or a little sick (that way you are thought of as a "trooper" for coming into the office even when you're not feeling well). People think that you have so much work to do that they want to give you time off, even when they don't know what you're doing.

And neither do you.

Urgh. Is that what life is all about?

I can't believe that this person actually thought this way, that this friend of mine had actually put that much effort into trying to look like you're doing something when you're actually doing nothing. Don't you think that's a problem to actually get to that point?

But I think I'm starting to get to that point too.

I don't want that for myself. I want to do something I like. I'm driven, and I can't live like this.

Or does this just happen when nothing else in your life works for you, and you finally get tired of striving for dreams that never seem to come true?

I remember having a teacher in high school and he seemed really smart, but it just seemed like he got so tired of the screaming student, and trying to make kids care, that he always walked a little slower, never smiled, just gave us our work to do and then went to his desk to finish his work. And I remember thinking then that he was burnt out on the school system, that he tried for so long to make a difference, but faced one too many kids who just didn't care. And now he's like a robot, making almost no impact on anyone's lives.

Including his own.

Is this what everyone else in the world ends up like?

9-22-82

I had a bad dream last night - one where my mother died. I normally don't have dreams that are that violent, that vivid, that scary, or that hit so close to home. I woke up a 4 in the morning shaking. I had to wake Catherine up. I talked to her, she told me to think of something nice, to get my mind off it. I went to bed, and I imagined that you were there, and you were consoling me, letting me know that it was just a bad dream, that you were there. And I imagined you kissing me, curling up next to me. And I felt better, and I was able to go back to sleep.

I want you to be there in the future, curled up with me, making me feel better. And I want to do the same for you. I want you to be there when we pick out furniture togeth-

er. I want to have stupid arguments with you over nothing, and then I want to make up with you. I want to have all those dances with you. I want to go to bed every night and know you'll be there, too. I want all those little times in my life, the good times, the bad ones, I want to have all those times with you. But you have to be around long enough to let that happen. Please be around long enough. I love you.

10-19-82 7:45 p.m.

I can't stand Catherine. She's driving me absolutely insane, I've got a huge migraine from her (I mean, I can't even turn my head without being in pain), and she HAUNTS me. I mean, she won't let me be in a room by myself. I tried to start this damn letter to you and SHE came in, talking about something really pointless and stupid to me.

She's just such a moron. She can't do much of anything right, and then she gets so stressed out that she gets even less accomplished, and then she feel like she can do nothing, and she becomes less successful, and the vicious cycle goes on. But it's all her fault. And I can't pity that. It only makes me sick.

I designed a new resume today. You would almost think I was someone successful or important or something by looking at it, too. Someone who wasn't earning an income below the poverty level. I guess I shouldn't complain about Catherine's inability to succeed until I'm no longer living in the glass house, right?

Fuck. She just came in again. She keeps coming in and she keeps bothering me. Why does she think that I actually want to talk to her? It's like she has to be in the same room as me. I just want my privacy. Now Catherine just told me she wants to use my computer when I'm done. Nice of her to ask. Well, at least I know she'll be busy using the computer and I'll be able to just sit and read without her bothering me.

Fuck, she drives me nuts. I know I'm swearing a lot, and I know you don't like that, but I've got a lot of emotion here, and it's hard to let it out and feel better when all I'm doing about it is typing at a stupid keyboard. I'm very emotional, and this is one way to keep me from blowing up.

It's just so irritating to deal with a roommate that is so incapable of living or excelling when I feel so driven. But what am I driven by?

10-28-82 8:38 a.m.

I feel like I'm selling myself every day here. The work I do, if it's good, people don't appreciate it, if it's crappy looking, they're in love with it. They ask me to change the good stuff. I hate that. And I take it as a personal slam on me if they don't like what I consider to be good, and I know I shouldn't do that, but I can't help it. Everything I do becomes a part of me because I created it. And they tell me it's crap, a bunch of losers in this stupid business, and I'm not supposed to take it personally.

I don't like being at my apartment, either. Great - where is there for me to go around here that I can stand? One of my jobs, maybe? I think not. And I don't feel like socializ-

sydney anderson

ing around here.

Fuck, this is a pretty miserable life. And the scary thing is that I know it could be a lot worse. Something to look forward to, I suppose.

Why do I have to be here? Why does my life have to go like this? I want something good to happen, something to change in a positive way. I don't want to be depressed with my life. I don't want to hate everything I do. I don't want to feel like I'm settling for anything.

Isn't it amazing that I never talk about this when I'm visiting you? I never want to talk about my life while I'm there. It's a little escape.

11-10-82

I guess my determination in my work stems from the fact that I want to fight, I want to get over all these feeling I have. This is my way of doing it. But I think my depression stems from the fact that I've been taught all my life that my work isn't important, won't make a difference. That I won't succeed.

Now I've got a job that pays me under 10,000 once taxes are removed, I live with a roommate I hate, and people like my sister still hang around - people that I can't respect, people like her that have caused me to feel most of the pain I've felt in my life, who continues to give me pain whenever she speaks to me. How am I supposed to heal now?

I want to get on with my life. I want to get away from this limbo I'm feeling. I want to start progressing. I feel like I've already hit a huge brick wall and there's no way I'm going to get around it, over it, through it. I'm going to work here forever, live here forever, be miserable forever.

And then I feel so bad when I think of all the suffering other people go through. Jim tells me stories, other people tell me stories... Is everyone out there suffering from some sort of mental or emotional problem? Who am I to complain? I've got a roof over my head, I'm not on lithium, I'm not having panic attacks, I haven't had my car stolen, my boyfriend doesn't treat me like dirt. But sometimes I feel alone, even if I'm not. Sometimes I break out and cry, and I try to stop it, but I can't help it. Yesterday I cried in my office because William hit me on the back of the head. I thought it was rude, sexist and entirely unprofessional. But if I was in a good mood I'm sure it wouldn't have bothered me. It was a tap. He meant it as playful. And on the way home yesterday from work I just cried and cried. I didn't care what people in the passing cars were thinking. There was no point in worrying about it. There was too much else to think about.

And I flipped in a restaurant because they messed up my order. Big deal. But I started swearing, raising my voice, then I started crying. Why?

Why anything any more?

I went to a bar tonight with a few friends of mine. I've been there for a while, I just got home, I had a good time. They know nothing about me. That's probably a good thing.

I miss you. I want to feel your arms around me.

I was driving tonight and I thought about suicide. I mean as an option. I haven't thought about that since high school. Since I lived in my parent's house. I thought I'd break up with you, try to piss you off so he'd hate me and wouldn't be hurt by my killing myself, then try to kill myself when no one was at home. If they found me before I died, at least they'd know how serious I was. They'd know how much they hurt me, how much I hated them.

There are times when I wish I wasn't afraid of death.

There are other times when I wish I wasn't afraid of life.

11-20-82

Tomorrow I'm going to have Thanksgiving dinner with my family - everyone except my mother. She is out of town. Every family get-together is always pointless. We eat, maybe watch T.V., the women cook and clean, the kids fidget and leave the table early. It's not as if we bond in any sense of the word when we're together, if anything, I get bored or aggravated about something.

That's even how funerals are. You'd think it was a holiday the way my family acts at a wake. They chat and laugh, talking about current events or whatever. No bonding. No feelings.

I was almost 10 when my grandfather died. I was devastated. Someone died. I talked to them last week, now they're dead. The last thing my grandfather said to me was "you're the most beautiful girl in the world." My sister tells me now that he once held my grandmother and my dad at knife-point, threatening to kill them.

And I was at the wake, and everyone was laughing and talking about stuff that had nothing to do with where they were or what had happened. I just wanted to say, "Hey, there's a dead man in the front of the room. And you're related to him. Doesn't that bother you?" But I was 9, and I didn't know anything. My parents wouldn't let me go to the funeral because it was on a Monday and I had to go to school. They wouldn't let me take the day off to go to my grandfather's funeral. I thought they were heartless.

I just want to ask my family: you mean it wasn't obvious? Were you just that uninterested with things in my life, or were you actually afraid to think that someone actually did that to me? That you all did these things to me? Or did you care?

"Maybe if I don't think about it, it won't exist." Well, that doesn't work, everyone. It's still there, whether or not you try to ignore it. I'm a shining example of that. How much longer do you think you can avoid me?

All my life, whenever I dealt with my family, I felt like I could never say anything to them. They made me feel as if they didn't want to hear, they made me feel like I shouldn't talk back, they made me feel as if my opinions didn't matter.

12-20-82

I get tired of fighting. What am I supposed to do then? give up? I don't know how to.

I don't know how to change the way I feel. If I gave up, it would be me resigning and then losing all touch with reality. I couldn't do it any other way. I couldn't just become a cog in the wheel, and be happy with it, like all the fucking peons here at work. I'd die. I couldn't do it. I could never be happy here.

Is something wrong with me because I can't just be happy working, making money, and there you go, that's life? It doesn't seem right to me. I wish somebody could just show me the steps I'm supposed to take. I think I've proven that I'm willing to try.

2-18-83

Hi. I just set up the appointment with the new job prospect downtown. yes, it's downtown, and the computer set up they have is about 3 times better than the other place I interviewed at - at least 3 times better. In fact, I was looking at the two three-dimensional programs she has in a catalog today, to see which ones I would want to get.

I have to wait a week for the interview, though, and that wait is going to kill me. I'm going to put a ton of stuff together on my computer to show her next week. I want to show her how fluent I am on the computers. She's going to have me do work on the computer while I'm at my interview, too. Test me. Wow. Now instead of being depressed I'm going to be manic for the next week, until she turns me down, of course, or until the president hires a buddy for the job.

You know me, I just like to work, and I like to work a lot. I can just sit in front of a computer for hours doing one task and the time will just fly by. This is exactly what I want to do.

And i'd have access to all the great computer stuff. It's like having all the tools i'd ever need to do anything I want. I'd love it.

Lunch time. I should be social. If there was something here that drove me to do work, believe me, I'd do it, but until that day comes, I'll take my time at lunch with the girls. I'm sure there's so much more to say, but I think by now you know it all. I'll talk to you soon.

A Requiem for Sara, Dead New Year 's Day at age 44, 1995 by alan catlin

A remembrance to Sara who spoke of her strong will to live, also of her willfulness that authority of any kind. Also her warmth of spirit, her infectious laugh, her genius as an artist in a multiplicity of forms and of those penetrating blue eyes that stared through us in all those portraits hung about the room where we gathered to remember. Moose sang of a sad-eyed gypsy, flitting from town to town, job to increasingly meaningless job, staying out late into the night ordering, "Hey, Mr. Bartender, just one more drink before I go home." We stood in silence, so many bartenders, Moose included, who poured Sara those drinks for the road that stretched farther and farther into the night until there could be no end in sight but this. Looking at the 1995 calendars finished the day before you died, we wished you had partaken of some of the recipes inscribed on the pages instead of drinking Vodka in water glasses until you could no longer eat. Strapped on the useless life supporting machines what was left of your body completely failed and now there is nothing left to do but sit in dark listening to Mozart's Requiem wearing your Albany dead 1992 t-shirt and thinking of you laughing at just how pretentious this would be to you. Better that Gary and Moose played an original song in memory of Sara you would prefer to that definitely unfunky long hair music Sara, no matter what music plays, no one laughs when the requiem begins.

far ewel l , mich ael

by lois ann morrison

When you first told me, I felt as if my whole body exsanguinated. There was a loud ringing in my ears and I seemed distant, far away.

"I have a big mass in my lung," you said.

I sat down, immediately weakened and numb, trying to assimilate your words. "No!" I protested to myself. "You're only forty-seven years old. All you have is pneumonia and you're better now after taking the antibiotics. Soon you'll be all right, just fine." But I knew the implication.

"Did they tell you anything else?" This was all I could say, my voice strained and fearful.

"They say I have an obstructive pneumonia caused by the mass." You were in control but your voice was as fearful as mine.

I came to you then, took hold of your hand, your arm, and wrapped myself around you. We cried together, softly, a gentle mixing of our tears. We didn't know anything for certain yet, nothing was confirmed and nobody, including ourselves, had mentioned the "C" word. It was fear that made us cry.

But a biopsy confirmed it was cancer and our fear was made real. You were scheduled for surgery, a thoracotomy to remove the mass, a lobe and possibly the entire right lung. Looking back now, I find this time the most difficult to accept - your surgery and its recovery period, our futile interference with the inevitable disease process. Your pain, physical, mental and emotional, our separation during your hospitalization, these things were agonizing to both of us and gave this time an aura of estranged unreality. Thank God you never had to be hospitalized again. Together at home we gathered the strength to recuperate and face the ordeal which lay before us.

Your surgery was a success though, the tumor was excised with clear margins and the surgeon only had to remove your right upper lobe. You recovered well at home, regaining much of your previous strength. They recommended a course of radiation to your mid-chest nodes which you followed with relatively minor side effects. During this time we held on to a false hope, even knowing the statistics were against us. This was our form of denial, a defense mechanism we'd been perfecting. But the fear still hovered menacingly around every corner of time, waiting to jump us with the ultimate bad news.

I remember vividly one afternoon you sitting in your recliner, shaky and tearful after hearing new dismal statistics. "I'm so frightened," you said. It was brave of you to admit this openly. "I don't know where it's going to hit next." I wanted so badly to take away that fear but I was frightened too.

There was no more denial when you started having severe back pain and a bone scan revealed the cancer had spread to your bones. I remember that devastating phone call.

"The bone scan is positive in Michael's spine and left humerus," the oncologist said. "You need to come in so we can talk about the future."

It was the final blow. There was no future. You had three to six months to live. We clung to each other desperately then with open hearts. We cried for days, holding and touching, taking comfort in each others presence. We'd hit bottom now, with no more bad news they could give us. And curiously, that menacing fear dissipated, that fear of the unknown. We were now certain what lay before us though not of the details.

There is more than one way to beat cancer. For you and me, it was by not letting it defeat our spirit. This didn't mean there was no heartache or tears, there was plenty, but together we faced the cancer squarely and endured the pain, emotional and physical. The experience, fierce and horrible as it was, confirmed and strengthened our love; it didn't break it. Because we did not run from it and the cancer did not destroy our love or spirit, we were winners.

You did not give up or let go prematurely. This was your way. We spent more quiet and reflective time together, going for walks, taking day trips to Mt. Lassen and Burney Falls, and we had another Christmas together. We even made one more trip to Mexico where we'd been vacationing every winter. But mostly we reminisced and talked, talked about us, talked about your death and dying, and talked about what I would do afterwards. This comforted you, to hear my plans. You offered suggestions and helped me prepare. You had a need to feel a part of my future and I had a need for your involvement. You gave me courage to continue on and an unspoken permission to begin a new life. It's true, we frequently cried together freely and openly, but we also still found time to laugh together and moments of fun to share.

It was after our trip to Mexico that you started to look ill, like you had cancer. You began to lose weight and your color became pale. Your attention span decreased and you fell asleep frequently, often slipping into what you called the "red zone", a dream-like state in which you spoke nonsensically.

Your bone pain increased. You showed too much stoicism I believe and endured more physical pain than was necessary. But you did have a couple short courses of radiation, to shrink the bone tumors, which eased the pain and you started taking morphine continuously into your subcutaneous tissue via a battery-operated pump. The only treatment you accepted was pain relief. This was also your way, no oxygen, no blood transfusions, no forcing of food or fluids. You would die as naturally as you could. There were no more tests, even to confirm the further spread of the cancer. It wasn't necessary. Your appearance and physical decline were evidence enough and in

short time I could see and feel the enlarged liver in your abdomen.

The last thing people can do for someone they love is to care for and comfort that person as he or she passes from this life. I was honored to do this for you, Michael. Your dying and death did not repulse me but drew me closer to you. I know it wasn't easy, you wanted death to come sooner. Towards the end, there were many mornings you woke up crying because you were still alive. I could only hold you and tell you how much I loved you. And though it broke my heart, I had to admit that I wanted your death to come soon too. One morning between tears you looked at me and asked, "Do we ever laugh any more?" I answered you with more tears because at that point, no, we didn't laugh any more.

The hardest times were when your mind wasn't clear, after you'd become so physically weak, and you'd forget you had cancer. "I'm in bad shape," you said once between gasps of breath. "You've got to take me to the doctor." My heart ached as I had to say you had cancer and there was nothing more we could do. It was like telling you for the first time all over again. The anguish on your face was nearly unbearable.

Fortunately, these days did not linger long. You could tolerate little food and I remember your last. I'd fixed some hot applesauce with whipped cream and cinnamon. You took a couple bites then weakly protested, "Why do I have to eat applesauce?"

You didn't have to and you stopped eating anything after that. A few days later you were having difficulty swallowing water and when you stopped drinking, I knew your death was near.

On your last day, you couldn't even get out of bed, though you tried. You knew me, you knew I was there and you knew that I loved you. Your final request had been to die at home where you belonged and to be with the woman you loved. This request was fulfilled.

I was with you the moment you died and I sensed your spirit ascend into heaven. You didn't have cancer, Michael, your body did. I take comfort in knowing your spirit, the real you, is safe now in the presence of God. You won.

body talk

by joan papalia eisert

the eggplant's in the oven
the plants are watered
my face is washed
my hands are shaking my hands are shaking
shit shit i'm here
my head is pressured pain and strain
my throat is caught in swelling
while again again
my stomach is tumbling and shoving
the bloom of frozen terror nausea
to the limitation of my essential skin
working so diligently
sepecially around my arms
and my wrists my achille's wrists
they cry they cry
they lead the memories
they bagpipe the attack
they receive the command
to remember how it felt
with him on me in me consuming me
killing me
i can never go home
i can never go home
i'm dead i'm dead
even though he sent me home
he sent me home across the yard
how did i get there
how did i walk when i was dead
how could i go home
when i could never go home again
but i'm back i'm back after years
i'll go wash the dishes now
i've got to wash the dishes



photograph by janet kuypers
j o c e l y n

t empest

by jeff foster

I've been sapphic all weekend
winter burned weeds
of umber and penury
unsatisfied as the womb, fire and death

My emotions put on mules
and openly parade about
phlebotomized and behooved
as the goddess
in reliquary

Time filigreed
by myriad
like thoughts during sex
a ritual gourd and drum
giving substance to substanceless

mad ame b

by ro london

Stickly furniture. I'm sitting here and I'm thinking, my constitution should be so hard. I haven't seen her beyond a curtain of remembrances for more than two years. A song you haven't heard in forever suddenly plays somewhere within earshot and you recall how much you loved it once upon a time; deeper and deeper into it you go. You can't help yourself. And then it's over, replaced by a more popular tune. On the phone she told me that she was married now too. Like Madame Bovary? So here I am. I am fear.

A vegetarian. I'd heard he was rather wan looking these days. Carnivorous me set about looking for a place for us to eat. to sit. to talk. to look.

I faced the bathroom mirror but could not see to check for a stray lock of hair or a smeared lip; my too busy mind blurred vision. I abandoned the room and crossed the corridor. Would the faint click of heels on the flagstone tiles warn him?

A hazy image behind the glass in the entry door which had been manipulated to replicate the shape of gentle waves, perpetuated for a final moment the complicated apparition he'd become over time; so much like a eidolon, a thought and idea I could not touch.

I reached for the knob prepared that this was the last moment of my own charge. Holt stood when he heard the movement of the door. We embraced and then were horrified by it; by the knowing we must not invite capriciousness. The pillow of his fall jacket did not provoke anything familiar, but my prurient return to his shape - a puzzle piece found covered in dust under some heavy furniture - gave back the remembered beat of Like a Prayer and the tingle and scratch of taupe pile against my hips.

"I feel a little sick. " "I know these elevators do that to me too."

"No, I meant - "

"What did you mean?"

"I'm a dog."

The doors opened and a few bowed heads got on and moved slowly to shoulder into the space between us as though it wasn't truly free. At the last minute Holt tried to reach me but was too late. I stared down the eye of the hidden camera which showcased our neurosis in bluish gray flashes on for the most part unat-

tended monitors below. No one else cared. No one knew. I insisted he realize. I crossed half of the lobby before stopping to let him catch up.

Walking cross-town I heard little of what he said, more cautious of if he would swerve near or far to avoid oncoming pedestrian traffic, more aware of the equality of our stride or if he preferred to create the illusion that we did not share a destination.

At Fifth Avenue I trod down its darkened expanse flirting with traffic trying to hail a cab. I faced him and the growing headlights and then not while attempting a better posture for success. It went this way a block or so, weaving in and out, back and forth. He'd slowed his pace. I let my hand drop while waiting for the light to change.

"What?" I searched him in the dark back-tracking to better decipher his stance.

"I'm just watching those heels."

"Is anybody else looking?" I teased him for what was his reaction when without thinking twice I led him, as he regarded it, past the plate glass behind which Live at Five was in full progress.

I think he first began to uncoil when he affirmed that I'd made a good choice of galleries for our theatre. Significantly dark, trendy just to a point and only somewhat trafficked at this hour on this night. Though I'd needed his help locating its position on Waverly, Blind as a bat he remembered aloud with a chortle, I could not help smirk myself at its appropriate name. The irony graduated my smirk to a smile as I tore a match from the Apple emblazoned book to light the cigarette that bobbed between Holt's lips. Oh, will we be as doomed, or as infamous come meal's end?

We chose a table, square with a white cloth, not too near, not too far from the door. He sat with his back to the street. It was the seat he took. Our first meal had been shared across a table of about the same dimension. It bothered me that I had been taking care where I held my left hand so I used it to move aside my water glass and accept my first drink of substance. So that was how the inevitable began. He admired my red ring and described how his father shipped him his Oma's ring via Fed Ex from Japan. I took the high road when he then felt compelled to remark on its worth. And so, number by number we colored in a picture of one another's nuptials. Like a news segment; a terse Q&A. And this artistic collaboration was bland; we both kept hidden all the good Crayola colors and as it went on, our strokes strayed out of the lines.

I would guess that the dark haired, nose ringed gentleman that sidled up to our table was involved in the burgeoning alternative music scene in some way or was merely moonlighting as our waiter and worked by day for the art department of Tower Records. Maybe I only imagined traces of paint on his clothes. He and Holt certainly hit it right off since like-animals tend to acknowledge one another's mischief. A mantle of history draped Holt and me, made my tongue thick.

Later Holt would mention to him that while, yes, the meal was good, he failed

to find any of the promised Seitan in his dish.

"Sometimes Satan is hard to find," our waiter countered.

"And sometimes she's sitting right in front of you."

But this was much later, after Holt had depleted his cigarette supply and accused me of having smoked them all when I had never owned such a habit. Returning from the bathroom I found him hunched between a couple of cooing females fingering their soft pack. Their eyes had followed him back to the table under which I crossed my legs.

But the act of rinsing my hands at the wide vanity birthed a strange thought that progressed some distance before I was fully aware of it. I found myself conducting a vior dire of the distance from the floor to the surface of the vanity so as to pre-determine that if for some reason I were perched above it would it then hold me to_ high to be accommodating. My shoes issued a loud slap when they connected again with the ceramic floor. The evening had made its turn around the bend.

"All I ever wanted was time enough to talk to you about Everything. To swap ideas and opinions like spit. I mean, it's all I EVER wanted, really. The fact that your dick fit so well in my mouth got in the way, stole the focus. "

"It had all to do with timing."

"I'm sorry for that."

"I am too."

And in the cab en route to the commuter train that would take him and me in separate but parallel directions, in the cab, my hand slipped and he was swift to admonish "you're being bad." It took a moment for the recrimination to reach my ears, for the comprehension of language to engage and then for me to equate his statement with some type of action I'd been taking. Oh, my hand, that in the natural course of conversation I had slipped across the dirty vinyl back seat and under your thigh palm down, I hadn't felt it. Sorry.

I had so much to say, and finally, the forum in which to say it, that I remember that at one point I spoke with my mouth full so pressing was a sentiment or an issue to disabuse. You see, my urgency, volumed by more wine and more wine, had little to do with common desire. I can't now recall the clothes he wore. I can't conjure much of how he looked. But I do remember and was busy collecting that night, what was always my reactions to the sound of his voice.

I have him.

You have her.

Who has our memories?

us

by nancy l'enz hogan

I wish we had known Us as
little girls - you 'n me -
meeting first in kindergarten, maybe;
two pink little larvae
wearing grosgrain hair bows
being polite to each other's mothers
and miserable giggling under the adult
Eye;
ascending the grades together
through pets and bikes and bras and boys -
And yet, we're met, two ladies grown,
brimming with black coffee and with poise,
laughing in your patchwork garden
eating baby lettuce in the dusk and
sprinkling salt on silvery-tailed
marauding snails.

headache

by janet kuypers

whenever i get a headache
it's right behind my eyebrows
and it's a dull, constant ache

so whenever i say i have a headache
eugene takes my hand
and uses acupressure:

he pushes his thumb
right in the middle of my palm.
the pain disappears almost

immediately. but eventually
i have to tell him to stop
pressing my hand, that my

hand now hurts. he lets go,
and the headache, almost
immediately, comes back.

Modern Day Foot bindings and the Oppression of Women

by courtney steele

I have never been one to think about my predicament. It's a common predicament-- I have to face it every day of my life, and it indirectly causes me problems wherever I go. I can't walk alone at night because of it. I can't look a male stranger straight in the eye because of it. I have to worry about the kind of clothes I wear, the implications of the statements I make, and even the way I walk because of it. But I've never given it a second thought.

My predicament is that I am a woman. At first it doesn't seem to sound like a predicament at all, but the more one thinks about the lack of freedom sentenced to a woman solely because she is a woman, the word 'predicament' becomes more of an understatement. In this male-oriented society, women are reduced to objects: pornography sells more than the top news magazines, the videos that MTV broadcast flaunt the woman's body for just anyone to see, and instances of rape are at an all time high. Women today are held down by forces that are blind to many - society has evidently become a jail cell so large that its prisoners cannot even see the bars. But there are bars, and if we only look for them and see them for what they really are, we may then be able to make the changes that will make this society a more equal one. And a safer one.

In China, one man created the custom of wrapping up the woman's foot so tightly that it restricted the woman's walking because it caused so much pain. It was a way for men to be sure that women in their society were entirely dependent on them. In many third world countries, women are forced to wear dresses that cover up their entire body, for one man has no right to look at another man's possessions. They call it tradition. If this is so, then tradition dehumanizes the woman.

Even in the United States these bindings are all around us, and these indirect restrictions are so commonplace that we have failed to notice that they are even there, keeping us "in our place". I will only give one example. I feel that only one example is necessary.

I used to get a subscription to a women's magazine. I enjoyed flipping through the pages of Glamour, even if it did only make me feel inadequate as a

woman and as a person. As I read, as I flipped through the pages and saw the photographs of beautiful women staring me in the face telling me that I was no good unless I was beautiful and was able to attract the best looking men, I began to feel that I had to change my image in order to become the objectified model that society had typecast to be "the best". These women's magazines devote about one fourth of their contents to careers, and probably about three fourths of their magazines to looking good. These magazines focused on looking like the stereotypical woman, looking sexy, and doing this all for a man. That's half of the problem right there.

But just the other day I looked through a neighbor's recent issue of Glamour magazine, and I came to a startling realization. As I flipped through the colossal number of advertisements that appear in the first half of these magazines (you often can't find an article until you reach page 50), I looked at the women. I looked at the underlying messages that these advertisements were relaying. And I couldn't believe my eyes.

Here is an example that illustrates my point. "Every Valentine Needs A Hero." The quote itself, from one of the first ads that I saw, gives the impression that a woman needs a man in order to survive. As romantic as the ad may look, I couldn't help but notice the subtle signs: the woman is lying down on the bed, looking up at the man; the man is standing over her, looking down on her. Her back is turned to the camera, so that you can't see the expressions on her face and so that you can't see her humanness. The woman's arms are crossed, evidently covering herself. A rose is placed right in the middle of the tray (remember--nothing in advertising isn't planned). Yes, the man is the hero, and the woman needs him for support. How would she function otherwise?

"Valentine... I got you just what you wanted." This ad, as I looked at the couple plastered on the page, seemed to scream "submission" to me. As the woman's face is turned toward the man, she is turned away from the camera - and becomes more of a body than an actual woman. Her arms are folded around him in a way that makes the viewer feel that she is clinging on to the only thing that matters to her. Furthermore, the two wide silver bracelets on her hands give the impression that she is handcuffed-- attached to the man, whether or not by force. The man, however, is merely smiling (maybe "smirking" is a better word) as he looks away from the woman. His happiness seems to stem from the fact that he has this relatively valuable possession.

Even the words in this advertisement are misleading. How handy it is that the woman has given her man just what he wanted. And she should, too. It's her duty. She's a woman. And what exactly did she get him? Why, "she got him a year of..." wait a minute, let's put a little pause in there, one just long enough to make your mind wander... "GQ". This relatively innocent ad has taken on a different meaning altogether in this new light.

Then I turned the page and saw another advertisement--and it appeared to be

a centerfold. My only question was: how on earth is a clothing company supposed to advertise clothes when the clothes are barely on the model? Then, I'm afraid to say, I answered my own question. This company, like most others, isn't advertising for the product that they are selling, for their products have become the means to another end, as opposed to the end itself. They are advertising an image-- an image of the woman being dependent on her looks in order to achieve success. Keep in mind that this - good looks - is the possible extent of a woman's success. The concept of talent has seemed to fall by the wayside.

After looking at the images that bombarded me, I couldn't help but wonder if I was reacting rather harshly. But then I began to think: what about the images that you see on billboards? What about the flaunting of women on television programs and commercials? What are these images teaching the children of today - the adults of tomorrow that will shape society? I couldn't help but wonder if these signals were related to the increase in crimes against woman that are so prevalent today. If they are related, when will this ever change? Or will we be forever bound to the system?

Needless to say, I don't get those magazines anymore. I try to explain to others how women are metaphorically abused inbetween the glossy pages of these magazines. But it's only one source. One of many. And it seems that even if we as women were capable of removing one form of this degradation, other bars would still be up to keep us in our cell. Only until we break down the walls will we be able to say that we are free.

door frame

by gabriel athens

doorbell
hour
magazine
door

man
suit
hallway
briefcase
worn
flashed

tired
smile

almost
genuine.

rambled
what
wanted
selling
head
dizzy
confusing
words

nonsense
sense

heard
listen
door
frame
steady
thoughts
down

stopped
do
ask
ideology
poison

slammed
face
alone
frame
down

by Chris McKinnon

Well Bien
my good friend

fortune
has soured
you
on any good find

in the finding
of women
and
of well-fortuned
fame

and the flame
at the bottom
of your cup
may burn lower

and the stout
hardly flagrant
known gypsy
fall in his cups

and you
well-hung
(for a flame thrower's
fortune - good)

good fortune
be with you
great friend
of fat may

manny and belle by bernadette miller

When she was eighty five, Belle entered a nursing home, and abandoned Manny, her neighbor in the Lower East Side apartment building. At first, Manny, ten years younger than Belle, continued running errands for other tenants, mostly elderly widows. He'd refused to share his studio apartment with his only remaining relative, a widowed sister, who shouted at him, "Like I always said, still Mister Selfish - looking out for Number One!" In a burst of usefulness after her stinging insult, he bought groceries for Gussie in 312A and read to Flo, his blind next door neighbor. But he still lingered awhile outside Belle's apartment; for so many years they'd chatted and joked.

Belle's short, fat body was always stuffed into a house dress, the once naturally red hair now gray, the lively, self-assured voice eternally offering food.

"Manny, try my chocolate cake. I baked it fresh today."

"No thanks, I already ate." His mother had instilled in him the virtue of not imposing. Pushing up his shirt sleeves in the overheated room, one arm featuring an anchor tattoo, he leaned back on the green sofa, protected with plastic, like the opposite sofa and armchairs. The plastic squeaked when he moved, as if protesting any invader, and he scanned the immaculate apartment: the lace-covered dining table with cake plate; the spotless end tables with filled candy dishes, the clean green carpet. His blue eyes watered as his thin mouth twisted in a grin. "Belle, when's the unveiling? Your place is spic and span; you don't need to hide the furniture."

Ignoring his remark, she wagged a fat finger at him. "Okay! So you'd rather eat Gussie's cake, but everybody knows mine is the best!"

He laughed, his face scrunching up until his eyes almost disappeared in the pouches. "You know I always eat at home."

"Yah." Shrugging, she entered her tiny kitchenette, and soon emerged with coffee and onion cookies, which he refused.

"Belle, too much sugar's making you fat. You need vitamins and minerals."

"I'm not hungry for a regular meal," she mumbled between bites. "Besides, if I'm not a beauty anymore, what's the big deal? After poor Arnie died from Parkinson's and I struggled to raise Irv by myself, a husband now I don't need."

Her pale brown eyes narrowed with worry. "But, tell me, is your cataract ripe yet for an operation?"

He gazed at the family portraits dotting the freshly painted walls. "The doctor's all the way out in Brooklyn and I hate to ask my sister to go with me."

"What's the problem? I'll go."

"I . . . don't know. I still might not see too good."

"Manny, if your right eye needs an operation, don't make excuses. Otherwise, maybe you'll have no eyesight at all. Make an appointment right away and I'll take you."

He nodded, and watched as a neighbor arrived to examine clothes that Belle sold for Hadassah. Though it was voluntary, Belle worked hard selling sweaters, tee shirts, scarves, and blouses from shopping bags stored in the closet. Eager to help struggling Israel, she bulldozed potential customers into sales.

"Please, Gussie, I can't believe you won't buy that sweater. Look how nice it covers your hips. You look like a movie star!"

The tall thin woman with long pinched face and cropped gray curls studied her reflection in the full-length mirror on the closet door. "Well, I don't like purple, and all those stripes..." A hand fisted on hips, she leaned on her cane, and turned for different viewing angles.

"Gussie, you're a knockout! Buy it, all the mensch will chase you. It's so cheap, practically free."

"Okay!" Gussie nodded, and left with the sweater folded in tissue paper.

Manny laughed. "I don't know how you do it, Belle."

"It's for a good cause - helping hungry children."

They chatted some more and he left just before bed time, as usual.

Two weeks later, on a cold, wintry Monday afternoon, Belle accompanied him to the Brooklyn doctor. Bundled up in a heavy coat and scarf, her arm through his, she escorted him past treacherous snow mounds and onto the D train platform, then walked the few blocks to the medical building in Brighton Beach. She waited outside the office until he finally emerged. Reaching up on tiptoe, she anxiously studied the bandage over his right eye, and said, "So, how was it?"

He shrugged. "I'll live."

"Not bad then?"

He laughed and took her arm. "Why are you worried? I can see better with one eye than you can with two!"

"What a schlemiel!" she said, but she smiled, looking relieved. She helped him with his jacket, and guided him to the subway.

When it was time to remove his bandage, she again accompanied him to the doctor's.

As their relationship continued over the years, Belle began staying home every evening. Or she'd tape a note to her front door, explaining where she was. Manny didn't discuss their aging, but he walked more slowly because he still didn't see so

bernadette miller

well.

Belle continued joking and cajoling him about food, but sometimes she stared at the family portraits as though seeing something else. And she began dropping things: papers, buttons, forks, and finally dishes. She bought plastic plates.

"Belle, what's wrong?" he finally asked.

She shrugged. "I'm getting old." Smiling then, she extended a filled plate. "How about prune humantashen - just baked?"

One day her son called to tell Manny that he'd taken Belle to a hospital. "My mother's becoming senile - forgets where she is. It's very hard to take..."

Manny reassured him. "She's not senile! Just old. I'll visit her."

After hanging up, he took a bus to the hospital, while he told himself that Belle would get better. "Forgetfulness isn't serious," he said aloud.

In her room, she turned from the window and smiled when she saw him enter. "Manny! How's your eye?"

"Okay. Why're you here, Belle?"

She watched him pull aside the bed curtain and sit near her. "I don't know," she whispered, leaning toward him. "I had a blackout, didn't know where I was, and where the time went. I woke up in bed one afternoon with my clothes on. The grocery bag was still on the floor. The milk was spoiled. I can't remember nothing too good. So I called Irving."

"Do you remember two nights ago what we talked about?"

"Your sister?"

"Yah!" He smiled with relief. "You're okay. A little run down because of your age. You'll be home soon."

But weeks passed and she didn't return home. Manny finally called the hospital doctor who said Belle had been transferred to the Zuckerman Home for the Aged, near Grand Street.

Manny hurried to Flo's, who knew what had happened.

"Irving took her," the frail, white-haired woman said in the darkened kitchen while Manny unloaded groceries he'd bought for her. A veined hand groped on the tiled counter. "Belle told me she don't remember anything and cries all the time."

"Cries all the time?" Manny stared at Flo who stared back but couldn't see him. "Why didn't she tell me something was wrong?"

"You know Belle, poor all her life but always helping others. She hates bothering people, but finally she told me she forgets what day it is and it depresses her."

"It's just her age! They put her there because she's forgetful?"

After leaving Flo, he walked to the nursing home, sniffing the spring air. "Thank God Belle won't have to return home now in cold weather," he said under his breath. He found her upstairs in "Recreation," a short narrow room lined on both sides with patients. The only recreation was the corner television with fuzzy reception that nobody seemed to be watching. At the far wall, near the bank of windows, a patient sat buckled in a wheelchair, heavily sedated, head drooping as she stared

at the floor. Another woman cleaned and re-cleaned a tv table, endlessly rubbing it with her hand. The woman beside her folded a napkin into ever smaller pieces.

Belle sat near the door, staring at the patients, but smiled at seeing Manny.

"Ah, look who's here! Sit beside me, Manny." She turned to the patient on her left. "My son comes to visit. "

"Son?" Manny said.

Belle looked confused, then grinned with toothless gums, her cheeks sunken. "Ach, you know I like to joke. Like you, right?"

He nodded, and patted her plump, freckled arm. "Belle, where's your false teeth?"

She shrugged. "I lost them, and the ones Irv bought don't fit so good."

"So let him get another pair."

She nodded, then whispered, "Lately, I forget names of relatives. I forget where I am and who lives next door. Why can't I remember?" Her palm struck her forehead. "Stupid... stupid..."

"Ah, it's this place!" He frowned, hunching his thin body in the padded chair. "You don't belong here! Tell your son to hire an attendant and take you home."

"Okay..." She smiled at the lady in the wheelchair, and leaned forward. "Manny."

"I'm here, Belle," he said, and touched her arm.

She turned toward him. "I know that!" She reached down past her huge house dress and touched her walking shoes. Mechanically she patted the thick treaded soles and unfastened and refastened the large velcro straps - like the lady rubbing the tv table.

"Manny, bring me chocolate cake," she said looking up suddenly. "The nurses won't give me any."

He tried to smile, thin lips broadening in a forced grin. "No, Belle, cake makes you too fat. See how skinny I am? It's from meat and vegetables!" He patted her soft, wrinkled cheek. "I'll make you eat right - for a change."

"I eat right, but I like cake." She stared at the wall, and mumbled something.

Manny leaned closer to hear. "What did you say, Belle?"

She continued staring. "My husband is home from work and I have no food to give him. I bought groceries yesterday but he didn't come, and now -"

Manny patted her hand. "It's okay. You don't need groceries. I'll take care of you, Belle."

On the way home to Pitt Street, Manny dropped by Gussie's apartment to ask if she needed anything. When her married daughter suddenly appeared to cook for her, he dropped by Flo's, but she was visiting her son. In his apartment, Manny shoved aside his plate of hard boiled eggs. "Why can't Irv let her come home?"

During the following weeks, he visited Belle every day, after a meager breakfast of orange juice and coffee.

In Recreation, she said eagerly at seeing him, "So, Manny, tell me the news."

bernadette miller

But when he started talking, she leaned toward a patient and said, "Manny."

He sighed. Her attention span was shrinking to brief sentences; she couldn't concentrate on a normal conversation. One evening, after being assured by a nurse that it was okay, he finally joined Belle for dinner in the dining room downstairs, the corner plastic-covered table with her name on it, and escorted her back to Recreation. She waddled, carefully putting one foot before the other as if trying to remember how to do it. Manny shook his head. If Belle were back home, she'd get well instead of getting worse!

Before leaving, he said, "I'll be back tomorrow morning." She nodded, smiling, and he walked the few blocks home.

In his apartment he stared through the window at Pitt Street bathed in dusky shadows. He'd quit reading to Flo; Gussie was away. Below tenement apartments, the Spanish stores sprayed with graffiti were closed by heavy metal grating to prevent nightly burglaries. Cars drove past playing rock music. He sighed. It don't seem right, Irv depriving Belle of her apartment just because of forgetfulness. "I could buy groceries for her, clean, and read the newspapers aloud. She'd be happier."

He tried explaining that to Irv the next time they visited Belle in the room she shared with an older, wheelchair patient who sat beside her bed and stared at the wall.

"So, Irv, selling a lot of fabrics?" Manny said, trying to be friendly before pleading his case.

"Just scraping by." Irv's lips pinched together. "My mentally-retarded son's in a home, and now my mother."

Manny nodded sympathetically and watched Belle waddle toward the bathroom. When she closed the door, he turned toward the slim, middle-aged man sitting beside him. "Listen, Irv, not being a relative, I don't like butting in, but why not get a home attendant for Belle? She's not happy here."

Irv sighed deeply. "Before we took Ma to the hospital, my wife found matches in the oven and silverware in the refrigerator. It's not safe to leave her in the apartment. She wouldn't know what to tell the attendant. She might set the place on fire, injure herself. I've been tormented about it, but the doctor said her mind will continue deteriorating. There's nothing anybody can do."

"But I'd look after her," Manny said. He leaned forward eagerly. "I'd be there all the time, like I'm here! So, Belle's forgetful - who isn't?" He scratched his thinning white hair. "I hardly remember some things, myself. I remember growing up in Lithuania, and coming to the States and joining the navy during World War Two, and going back after the war to look up relatives. Most of them died in concentration camps - some things you never forget. And I remember working in the leather factory on Delancey, and my pretty wife before she died years ago, when I was still young. I remember my sister - but her I don't want to remember. I forget things, like Belle does. Who can remember everything?"

Irv's dark eyes dampened. He hesitated and said, "Manny, it's worse than forgetfulness... The doctor said she's partly brain dead -" He broke off as Belle staggered from the bathroom, her dress hiked up to her waist. He rose from the chair and straightened it. She immediately hiked it up again. "Ma, don't do that, please. Leave the dress alone."

She paused, scanned the room, and began mumbling. She sat down at Irv's coaxing.

"Belle, what do you want?" Manny said helplessly.

She looked bewildered, pale brown eyes vacant, then finally focused on him. "I don't know," she whispered.

Irv touched Manny's veined arm. "Ma told me during a lucid moment that she enjoys visitors. Thanks for coming."

"She's not as bad off as the others," Manny said, grizzled jaw thrust out determinedly. "She should be home." He rose, hands jammed into baggy trouser pockets, and stared through the window at the budding trees shading the benches across the street. He turned to Irv. "I'll be back tomorrow. You know, she's my best friend. Took me all the way to the Brooklyn doctor when I almost lost my sight. Now she needs me."

Irv said softly, "I know, Manny, but you can't devote your life to her."

"She needs me," Manny repeated and smiled at Belle who smiled back, then looked at him vaguely, as if she might have forgotten who he was.

The next morning he breakfasted with her. After he helped her to sit, she stuck her hand in the fried egg and tried to lift it to her mouth.

"No, Belle, use the fork."

She stared at him, not comprehending.

He fed her, and she didn't protest. After that he fed her at every meal. He sliced the roast beef very fine so she could chew it, mashed the vegetables, poured sugar in her tea and stirred it. If she remained still, staring at the wall, he urged her to eat from the spoon he extended.

"Have some vegetable soup, Belle. It's good for you."

She nodded and occasionally smiled, as if she appreciated his efforts but couldn't express herself. Then, he helped her upstairs to Recreation and talked to her, gossiping about the neighbors. Sometimes Belle whispered so softly he bent close to hear, but in time she shocked him by babbling intimate details: during her Polish childhood a Hebrew teacher touched her where he shouldn't and she never wanted to get married - stories she hadn't revealed during their twenty-five-year friendship.

He finally told Irving about the teacher during the son's Thursday visit.

Irv had brought his mother outside after dinner that warm summer evening, and they sat on a bench across the street from the nursing home. Birds on overhead branches chirped; the flower beds smelled fragrant with carnations, azaleas, and sweet pea; the mellow sun warmed bare arms-everything fine, as if the world had-

n't turned upside down.

Manny, shaking his head at life's contradictions, sat beside Belle. "Irv," he said, "the love between me and Belle isn't in a romantic way, like husband and wife. We were just good friends who looked out for each other. And now..."

"But you've got to accept her condition."

"I can't..." Manny stared at the sidewalk. "Without Belle, it seems like I got nothing to look forward to."

Irv nodded and rose. "Thanks for being so good to my mother," he said, voice faltering.

They chatted and walked Belle around the block, and back to the nursing home lobby. Irv hugged her and kissed her cheek. "'Bye, Ma, I love you. See you next Thursday."

She nodded with a vague smile.

After he left, Manny escorted Belle into the elevator. She walked laboriously, clutching his arm as if terrified of falling. She'd gained more weight - probably due to lack of exercise. Upstairs, he embraced her thick waist and eased her into the chair.

"That's right, Belle, sit down, right here. Easy does it..."

She stared vacantly.

"Don't you know me?" he said, and waited for her scolding to such a silly question.

Instead, she replied, "Irv, why didn't you visit yesterday?"

"Belle, it's me, Manny. Not your son, Manny!" he shouted, and stopped, but the other patients ignored him.

"Sit down, stop shouting," Belle said, suddenly coherent, as though her condition weren't abnormal and she was home. She patted the empty chair. After he sat, she leaned toward him. "Manny, don't think I forget everything, but sometimes it's hard..." She looked toward the windows. "I was in his class for Hebrew lessons," she said abruptly.

He sighed deeply. "Belle, tomorrow we'll walk around the block a couple of times. You need exercise. Then, we'll have lunch in the dining room and take another walk. Then, we'll sit awhile on a bench under the trees. You'll like that because you can watch people pass and it's good to have something to think about. And then, it's dinnertime already. And after that we'll catch a little television, and before you know it, it's bed time and I'll go home." He smiled, brightening. "Little by little, Belle, time will pass."

sobering

by alexandria rand

I must admit
that there's a definite proportion
with how good you look
and how much alcohol I've consumed
yes you are important to me
too important
and I think that scares me
for I don't care what you say
but the only person
I can lean on
is myself
and I don't want to frighten you
with my coldness
but I've been hurt
too many times before
and I'm sure as Hell
gonna try to stop it
from happening again
I've had to realize
that you can't be my crutch

yes
I do care about you
too much
it is unhealthy
for when we go our separate ways
and I know we will
it will kill me
I know that you love me
and I know that you want to protect
me
but I need to know
if there are other people
who care for me as well
I am not an animal
in a cage
and I have a life to lead
I know I'm being cold
but it's what I have to do
call it a defense mechanism
call it sobering up

Virtuoso Performance by the Left Hemisphere

by Alan Catlin

The pitcher reads all the significant
signs, considers the runner, the plate,
winds up, throws a line drive off
the centerfield wall that bounces onto
the artificial grass, the ball could roll
forever, just beyond the fielder's reach,
rounding second, the runner trips,
the crowd is cheering, all the runs
must score or else the game of life is lost,
the four men in blue are folding
their arms close to their chests, considering
the man who fell to earth, clutching
his torn thigh muscle, the rolling ball
in the outfield, the best way
to call for the end of time.

the twin within

by janet kuypers

The music was still blaring, even at 4:30 in the morning, it was a movie opening after-hours party, Hollywood style. All the top models were there, all holding cigarettes in one hand, drinks in the other. The lights were pulsating in time with the throbbing music, dancing in the smoke rising to the ceiling and the condensation dripping from the outside windows. Some movie stars were there, all in little groups, trying to look more important than the rest. Of the few musicians left, the ones that were not still on the dance floor were in corner booths of the club, tossing white bags at each other. Some of the cast made an early escape, but the leading actor was still there, at a corner table with a few agents and lackeys.

His date wasn't in this film, but her fame was great enough that she was still the most wanted at the party.

They were the perfect couple, the tabloid writers thought, two starlets of the silver screen, partying together, winning all the awards together. The young actress knew just as well as the young actor that their relationship was only for the cameras, they knew that this was the price they chose to pay for the lives they had.

For the money, for the fame. The loss of who they were.

It bothered Veronica less than it bothered Alan. He needed to cover his homosexuality in order to get the roles that would make him famous, and their relationship for the press worked perfectly. And she knew that with this man by her side at these parties, she would be guaranteed more media coverage.

Not that she needed it. She had won awards for two films in three years, her newest film hit the box offices three weeks ago and was still breaking records in ticket sales, and everyone under the sun wanted her in their new movie. She was gold, and she knew it. But she was a business woman at heart, a marketing agent, and Alan was added security.

She didn't have to mingle at this party; people came to her in waves. She knew she made enough appearances for the night, besides, it would be breaking up soon, and she signalled for someone to make sure her limousine was out front, then walked over to Alan's table.

"Alan, honey, I'm going to go, are you going to be all right?" she asked.

"Sure, honey, go ahead. I'll talk to you when I get back." Alan usually used the

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same term of endearment for her that she used for him if he couldn't think of one on his own. No one noticed.

She left the building, and the two bouncers at the door escorted her to the door of the limousine. Even at 4:45 in the morning a small crowd waited for her.

She crawled into the back, opened her purse, found the half-pack of cigarettes and tossed them to the floor. She only smoked when she was at these damn parties. Thank God I don't have to go on the set tomorrow, she thought. As soon as one movie is over another one begins. Can't even enjoy the riches for a minute.

"At least I have tomorrow off," she groaned aloud to the empty back seat of her private limousine.

If there is a God, she thought again. She rolled her head back against the car seat and tried to find some stars in the early morning sky as she rode through Manhattan.

The driver escorted her to her door before he parked the limousine. She got into her home, kicked off her shoes, left them where they fell. She could do that, she thought, because she was famous.

"Maybe I am God," she said aloud to the empty, well-guarded house. She walked upstairs.

12:30 rolled around this particular Sunday afternoon when Veronica rolled over in her bed and reached over to her phone. She dialed her chef, asked for a good amino acid breakfast shake. She then dialed One World Spa, the best place in town, the only place that happened to have a standing reservation for her. She said she'd be there at 1:30.

At 1:40 her limousine driver escorted her out of the black Mercedes and to the front doors. The afternoon was needed for rejuvenation, she thought. She used facial peels, but avoided the mud baths and favored the massages and water tanks.

Back home she went, after shopping a little. She told her staff they could go home for the rest of the evening, so she could have the house to herself. She told her chef to have a pizza delivered before he left. That always irritated him.

She went upstairs to find her shopping bags waiting for her in her bedroom. One by one she pulled out her purchases and spread them across the bed. She tried on one straight silver dress and walked downstairs. The house was so quiet when she walked through it and no one was there. No chefs, no maids, no guards, no landscapers or decorators. The heels of her shoes clicked against the marble hallway floor. She stopped, watching the shadows her furniture cast over the walls. She turned around and watched her own shadow. It must be fifteen feet long, she thought, and then she stretched her arms over her head in a triumphant arc, watching the shadow stretch even further.

After surveying the house in her first outfit and seeing that no one was there, she walked upstairs, back to her bedroom, to her safe in her bathroom. In the back of the safe was the key she needed; she closed the safe door, covered the safe with the wall panel, and walked to the end of the hall to the top of the stairs.

Her staff knew the two doors at the top of the stairs; one was to the roof, which only she was to go on, and the other was for the storage attic. Tonight, instead of sipping champagne and watching the east coast from her rooftop, she opened the second door.

She told Monica the coast was clear. She reached over and turned on the light by the door; it was a small light that only half-lit the attic. The kitchenette and bookshelves were well-lit now, but the back half of the mini-apartment was still in darkness.

At last, as if making her own grand entrance the way only Veronica would, Monica slowly walked toward her, out of the darkness.

"God, Ron, could you have waited any longer to get me out of here?"

"Just come downstairs," Veronica replied, "I bought some new dresses."

They sat on her bed, three hours later, Veronica wearing her new silver satin dress and Monica wearing a black strapless cocktail dress, eating the last bites of the pizza.

"Oh, I'm stuffed," Veronica moaned as she threw her body back on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

Monica got up, and walked over to the mirrors. "I think we look good in this black dress, but we have so many. No one can tell this one apart from all the others. Couldn't you get something more contemporary?"

"They can tell it apart, Monica, and we can buy as many dresses as I want."

"You're being frivolous. And selfish."

"I'm being whatever I want to be, because I can."

For a while, the silence in the bedroom was only broken by Monica turning from one side to the other in front of the mirror. Veronica remained face-up on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

"Ron, why don't you let me out more?"

"You know I bring you out whenever I can. It's tough to get the entire staff out of here. We have to be careful."

"I know, it's always careful. But I fidget up there. I could take your place more - you know you could use the rest."

Veronica looked at her twin sister in the mirror, and wasn't sure whether or not she was looking at herself.

"Monica, you know that's not a good idea. You'd go out there and look like me but not remember a thing that happened the day before. I can only brief you on so much. We agreed that the only time you'd replace me was when I was ill and needed some time to recuperate."

"Well, you've been Veronica for a while. I can't stand it up there. You're getting to call all the shots out there." Monica walked closer and leaned over the comforter. "I want to live, too."

Veronica sat up on the bed. "Monica, you know it's better this way. We agreed."

Monica sat on the bed next to her and looked at her twin sister. They looked over to the mirror and stared at themselves. Veronica put her arm around Monica's shoul-

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der and smiled.

"Besides, we both reap the benefits of this success," Veronica told her sister. "You're up there now, but when we get enough money for the both of us to retire we can get away from here and live in luxury and never have to worry about a thing again. You want that, don't you?"

Monica paused. "Of course," she said under her breath as her eyes darted away. She knew she couldn't argue with Veronica, even if she wanted to. Even though they were twins, she always thought she couldn't fight her.

"There, that's better. Do you want to stay down here tonight? I can set the alarm early so that things are clear before the staff comes back."

Monica didn't know what to answer.

She realized it didn't matter, that she'd still have to go back sometime, whether it was now or a few more hours from now. "I don't care," she answered.

The next day was back-to-the-set day, Veronica worked the next few days, but after the fourth day she felt very tired and wanted to stay home. This isn't like me, she thought, I never get sick.

Monica pushed a little harder every night in her attempt to get outside. "Look, Ron, you're obviously not feeling well, and you don't want to mess up filming at this point. Let me fill in for a few days. I mean, you said that that is what I'm here for."

Her arguments were winning Veronica over, and two days later Monica slept in the master bedroom while Veronica stayed in the attic. Before Veronica moved into her secret hideaway, however, she made a duplicate of the attic key.

"I'm making an extra key, Monica, so don't get any ideas."

"Did you really think I'd do that, Ronnie? I told you I'm doing this for both of us. Now, don't worry, I won't screw anything up, and I'll check up on you tomorrow night when I call off the staff, just like we discussed. Now get some sleep, honey - you've been so exhausted, you probably just need to sleep this illness off. There's vegetable soup for when you're hungry, just use the hot plate to heat it up." Monica paused.

"Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah, sure."

Without another word, Monica walked out of the attic and became Veronica.

The new Veronica walked down to the basement, to the second bar, and dropped the wrapper from the jar of sleeping pills in the trash can. She couldn't have Veronica find them while she was staying behind the second door upstairs.

For the next few weeks they went back and forth, and although people noticed a difference from day to day, the main difference was mood change and slight forgetfulness. That everyone attributed to the stress of filming. And possibly the trouble Veronica was having with Alan.

The tabloids were revealing the fact that Alan was getting more and more destructive in his lifestyle, and more and more depressed. Everyone else thought that

had to be having some effect on Veronica.

And one day Monica - Veronica - went to see Alan to make sure he was okay. They usually didn't bother getting together unless it was for appearance's sake, but his behavior was starting to affect Veronica's appearance in the public eye, so off she went.

Alan was sitting in his living room. His apartment was clean to the point of being antiseptic - the walls were white, the couches were white with black accents, the tables and cabinets were black with white and chrome accents. The walls were bare, except for one black painting framed on the north wall, above the bar and adjacent to the entertainment center. Mozart was playing through Alan's speakers. Alan, holding a low-ball glass with his fingertips, was sitting in the center of his couch. The ice spun around with the thick, clear tan liquor when he moved his hand.

Monica - Veronica - walked into the living room. Alan sat slouched, head leaning back, instead of sitting upright, as he normally would, paying attention to his posture, his appearance, or his guests.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Don't do this to me, this affects me, too. Tell me what's going on."

"Oh, as soon as it affects little Veronica, oh, then we have to do something."

She stood in silence next to the couch. She didn't know if she should stand or sit.

A moment, or a minute, or ten, passed. She finally sat down on the couch next to him.

"Really, Alan, I want to know. I wouldn't be here if I didn't."

Alan turned his eyes toward her. He let his drink slip out of his hands on to the carpet, spilling all over the floor. He didn't move.

"Veronica, we put on this show for everyone, and all the while I have to hide my lover, hide who I am. Do you know how that makes me feel?"

She didn't answer.

"Do you know how it makes my lover feel?"

She could have answered, but didn't.

"I'm tired of this, Veronica. I don't know how much longer I can go on with this game."

She looked over and saw a shattered bottle on the adjacent floor; streaks of tan liquor dripping from the black painting on his wall.

Monica came home, ordered the staff out immediately. Within ten minutes they were gone, and she made her way for what was normally her bedroom.

"Ronnie - get out here. There's a problem."

Veronica stepped outside into the hallway.

"Alan is thinking about going public. He's freaking out."

"What - why? Was he going to tell me?"

"I had to fight to get it out of him. Ron, do you know what this means if he comes out?"

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"It means I'll be the laughing stock of Hollywood. 'I didn't even know my own boyfriend was gay, and had a lover.' It'll destroy me." Veronica paused, in exasperation, and leaned her head against the hallway wall. "Shit, what do I do?"

"You mean what do we do, Ron. I got you this far, and -"

"And the more we mix roles the better chance we have of getting caught. We've got to stop this, so let me get to Alan, I can shut him up for a while, I can call him tomorrow and -"

"And nothing, Ron. We're not playing it your way anymore."

"And since when did you get so cocky?"

Monica paused, then turned to walk away. In a quick moment she turned back and pinned Veronica by the neck to the wall. "Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear." She let go of Veronica and walked down the hall to the staircase.

Walking down the hall, Monica continued: "A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet." Her voice became more and more quiet, more and more calculated with every word she spoke.

She took the first step down the stairs at the end of the hall, then stopped and turned back. "And I'm not disappearing anymore," Monica said before she walked away, leaving Veronica bruised and shaken at the top of the stairs.

The next day Veronica was on the set, she got to the studio at four-thirty in the morning for make-up and was in front of cameras by seven. They filmed at the studio and on location in the morning, and by eleven-thirty she was starved and ready for a drink. She walked over to her trailer, her make-shift dressing room and second home. Inside she poured some bourbon into a glass and sat in the only chair not covered with costumes.

Someone knocked on her trailer. "Who is it?" she asked. A young male voice responded, "Hi, my name is John, I'm a really big fan. I just wanted to say hello and tell you how good your work was."

She knew every male thought she was beautiful, and no male thought twice about her acting. She got up and moved her way to the door. As her door creaked open, she saw a handsome young man, nervously grinning from ear to ear.

"Well, you can say hello, but actually talking to me will cost you."

The young man stood there, a few steps below the trailer, dumbfounded.

"Look, kid, I'm starved. Get me a sandwich and I'll talk to you while I'm eating before my next scene, okay? I could go for a falafel or something. There's a place down the street that makes them - would you mind?"

"No problem - I mean - I mean, it would be my pleasure. Falafel - okay, cool, no problem. I'll be back in a minute -" and the young man turned around and ran off toward the next block.

Waiting for some food was killing her. She rummaged through her mini-refriger-

ator and found some white bread and cheese slices and gave up on the young fan. She was getting used to fast food and hard liquor for her lunches, hard liquor and cigarettes for her dinners. She didn't want to go home much anymore. Monica got a hold of the extra key, so now anyone could take over, if one of them would slip up and let the other take over. The longer Veronica stayed away from the house, the longer Monica had to stay there to protect their secret - and the longer Veronica was Veronica.

Her fan never showed up with lunch, but she didn't care. Someone else will always get her food. But she liked the idea of talking to someone new.

At eight-thirty at night, after working sixteen hours, Veronica sat in her trailer again, this time eating a rice cake with her bourbon. A knock came on her door again.

John appeared as she opened her door and let the fan into her trailer, even without food.

It was nice, she thought, to have a fan adore her like this. Even if it was two in the morning.

For hours John sat there, leaning forward, eyes widened in amazement that he was actually talking to Veronica. He would ask a question, and Veronica would tell him all about life with fame, what this actor was like, how she got into show business. It was nice, she thought, to have someone think so much of her, to pay her so much attention. He was just some nobody to her, she couldn't even imagine what he looked like, even though she was sitting right there with him, staring him in the face.

But she didn't care what he looked like. What she cared about was that she was still loved, for one reason or another. And so she gave this fan what he wanted - time with her. And she talked.

And after two in the morning, John left. And Veronica passed out in her trailer.

The next thing she realized was that someone was knocking on her door. She woke up. Looked at the clock. It was already eight-thirty in the morning, she had no sleep, her make-up wasn't ready, and someone outside was expecting her to shoot the next scene. She couldn't even remember what scene the crew was filming today. She dragged herself out of her make-shift bed and got to the door.

"Ms. Phillips - are you ready for the first scene?" asked a young stage-hand. He was wearing a t-shirt, jeans, a baseball cap, a crew badge around his neck. He was holding a pot of coffee.

She looked at him in silence, leaning on the door frame. She was barely conscious.

"Oh, Ms. Phillips, did you hear the news already? Oh, you don't look very good. Why don't you sit down - I can get you some coffee."

"What news?" she managed to say.

The stage-hand then realized that she hadn't heard the news, turned and ran away.

It was the director who came to her trailer with the morning paper. He poured her coffee as she read that Alan died the night before of a drug overdose.

The next three days were a blur to Veronica. She had to act sad, and although she didn't want him dead, she really didn't care about him, either. So she put on her actress face and did her best mourning job, wore some of her best black dresses, and gave up being social. Besides, all she really wanted to do was stay at home and drink herself to sleep.

But Monica was more concerned about their future. "You don't think any of Alan's sexual past will be dug up, will you?"

Veronica leaned against her bar and rubbed her face in her hand. "You know, I really don't know. What would anyone have to gain from that?"

"Ron, you mean to tell me Alan's not going to have a bunch of male lovers popping out of the woodwork saying they have a right to part of Alan's estate? What do we do if that happens?"

"Well, there's nothing we can do now, is there? If Alan's reputation gets smeared there's really nothing we can do about it."

Monica paused, then went to the bar to get Veronica another drink. "There's got to be something. And if I were you, I'd mourn a little more. If some of his lovers do come out of the woodwork, you'll look like a jealous ex that found out he was gay."

"And what difference does it make?"

"Just keep our bases covered, and we should be fine."

"I have nothing to cover up, Monica. Besides, there was no foul play involved - he just killed himself."

Monica leaned back and lit a cigarette. "All I'm saying is that you could stand to look a little more clean."

Veronica put her head down for a moment, then got up the strength to get up and go to bed. She reached the end of the room when Monica spoke.

"Oh, and Ronnie - you look like hell. I'll cover for tomorrow."

Veronica just turned away and walked out of the room.

At 5:07 the next afternoon Monica slammed the attic door open. "Veronica, turn your television on. This is it."

Veronica walked over to the set, turned it on, and stood there for a moment while Monica changed the channel. Veronica tried to fix the reception while they both listened to the press conference on the evening news.

"I have every reason to believe that Veronica Phillips murdered Alan. Coroners found traces of cyanide in Alan's bloodstream, and Alan didn't do drugs - he was a drinker, but he never shot up."

The press standing below him roared with questions. "But why do you think it was Veronica Phillips?"

"She was nervous about her career being shattered if her boyfriend - Alan - came out of the closet - which he was contemplating doing."

Another roar from the crowd ensued. "And how do you know all of this?"

"Because I am his real lover," the young man said.

"Change the channel," Veronica said. When Monica did, the police chief of the local county police department was being questioned. "With the findings from the Coroner's office, we definitely agree that there was foul play. As for Veronica Phillips, well, we'll be contacting her to answer some questions, but that is all we can say at the moment."

Veronica got up and turned off the television set, then sat back down on the bed. Monica lit up a cigarette. "Well, you better call the lawyers," Monica said as she took a long drag.

"But I didn't do it," Veronica mumbled under her breath. She dropped her head into her hands.

"No, of course you didn't, Ronnie," Monica said. She took another drag. "You know that, I know that -"

Veronica looked up. "Oh." She sat in silence.

Monica sat in silence with her.

Veronica figured it out.

"Oh my God," whispered Veronica. Veronica couldn't say any more. Monica picked up her head and looked at Veronica and waited.

"Monica, you did it, didn't you?" she finally asked.

Monica then looked down at the cigarette she was inhaling from. She pulled the cigarette away from her lips. "Well, honey, I've got to take care of you, now, don't I?"

Veronica jumped up from the bed. "I can't believe this! I can't believe you did this to us! Now you expect me to cover this up? What if someone saw you there, or saw you going there? Or what if someone from staff here saw you? God, Monica, this is why I'm the one on the outside most of the time, this is way out of control! You can't go around killing people! Do you think this is going to make my life easier? Monica, we need to have only one of us on the outside at a time - oh, God, and now I've got to figure out a way to get us out of this? Take care of me? You call this taking care of me? You've turned our life upside-down, you've possible destroyed our only chance for the future we wanted, and you call this taking care of me? And another thing, I'm the one that takes care of you, not the other way around. I've managed perfectly well so far, I've managed to not kill anyone, and then you go out when you're not supposed to and do this. And what if we have to go to jail?"

"First of all, Ronnie, only one of us can go to jail. The other one would have to go into hiding. Remember that there's only one of us on the outside. Second, this is a perfect time to have both of us on the outside. I went there at twelve-thirty or one in the morning, and since you weren't home I knew you were at a club, so you'd have a room full of witnesses to back you up. You have an air-tight alibi, Ronnie. Third, Alan was only going to be trouble for us later on, and -"

"Monica, I wasn't at a club, I was talking to a fan in my trailer until two in the morning. Jesus Christ, I can't even remember his fucking name, it was, oh shit, it

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was -"

"Veronica, you didn't go out that night? Damn it, Ronnie, you can - but wait, the fan, just remember his name and he'll come forward."

"Um, I think it was John."

Monica sat for a moment in silence.

"John." Monica paused. "John - that's all you can think of, John? No last name?"

"He never told me his last name."

"So what we're saying here is we're supposed to go out on a search for a fan named John in all of California?"

"Well, don't blame me, I'm not the one going around killing people."

Veronica put her head back into her hands. Monica got up and walked to the door. "Well, you will be blamed if you don't find this mysterious John. So tomorrow, you go to your lawyers, tell them the whole story about John. Then talk to the police, with the lawyers, of course, and tell them exactly what you did. The more details you give, the more convincing it will be. Then have a press conference, looking for the fan. I'm sure he'll show up to get more fame, to see you again, and... To save his damsel in distress."

Monica opened the door and checked to make sure the upstairs hallway was empty. She leaned back in the room. "And yes, Ronnie, remember that you aren't the one going around killing people. I am."

Monica turned away and shut the door behind her.

Veronica watched the cigarette smoke Monica left behind glide up toward solitary ceiling light. "But if this doesn't work, which one of us goes to jail?" she spoke out loud to the four empty, cold walls.

The next day went perfectly according to plan. Veronica got her team of lawyers together, and she explained everything. She put on her most conservative suit and went to the police without being asked. She had her lawyers set up a press conference for five o'clock in the afternoon that day.

As everything was happening around her, all she could think was that if this didn't work out, if Veronica Phillips was going to go to jail, then she would go into hiding and let them drag Monica away.

But five-o'clock rolled around, and the room was filled at Veronica's press conference with news reporters, photographers, other actors, anyone who could get a badge. Veronica looked out from the edge of the stage, and wondered if they all came because they loved her or because they hated her.

This would have to be her best performance yet, she thought, sound intelligent, look sweet, act conservatively, use emotion, but not so much that it is unbelievable.

Her head lawyer went up on stage first, delivered a seven-minute speech, then fielded questions from the press. They questioned him for nearly ten minutes. Then he handed the stage over to Veronica, and she started her carefully prepared speech. Explaining that she wasn't alone but talking with a fan in her trailer on the set, all she asked was for that fan to step forward. Hot lines were set up, toll-free phone lines

were activated, all he had to do was call. John was the only thing that could prove her innocence to her, and she was sure he would step forward.

At least that is what she said in the press conference.

Veronica went home that night feeling worse than in the morning. She delivered her speeches to the lawyers, to the police, to the media flawlessly, but no John had stepped forward. She waited at her lawyer's offices, waiting for John to call, for hours. He never did.

"What if he never comes forward?" she asked herself over and over again in her limousine ride home.

Hordes of media were waiting at the edge of her driveway, following her car in after eleven o'clock that night. The police cars that followed her home pushed the media away long enough for her to get into her home. She had her lawyers call for bodyguards and security for 6 a.m. the next morning.

Veronica went upstairs, and a moment later Monica came back down. She asked her staff to close all the shades that weren't already closed, then to go on a small vacation. The less people around, the better. "I'm sure you understand, and I appreciate your consideration during this time for me. When I need you again, I'll call you all back," she told her staff.

Within twenty minutes the house was empty. Veronica went downstairs to the bar and poured herself a glass of bourbon. She sat at a chair, with her elbows on the bar, her left hand on her forehead. She couldn't move.

Monica circled around her, pacing back and forth. "Well, we're going to have to come up with something. And you, Ronnie, you look like hell. That better be an act because we need your mind sharp when you're out there."

"Monica," Veronica responded, "Alan is dead, you killed him, and everyone thinks it was me. I look like hell because I'm in it."

She looked down, swirled the bourbon around the bottom of the glass, and finished her first round.

Veronica poured herself another glass. Monica started to walk out the room when Veronica spoke.

"So, cyanide, huh? How did you give it to him?"

"In his drink. He was already sloshed."

Veronica paused. "Did you take the glass with you?"

"Of course. And yes, I wore gloves. Don't worry, Ronnie."

Monica walked up the stairs.

Veronica wondered how many opportunities Monica had to lace her drinks, too.

For the next few days she had the lawyers call her at home and visit her instead of going out herself. She had security posted at every doorway, and a few monitoring the windows around her property. She felt like she was already in prison.

During the third night, while Veronica sat in her living room with a glass of sherry, Monica leaned over the back of the couch and whispered in her ear, "Are you beginning to see how I've felt all of these years?"

Veronica closed her eyes. She was afraid to say anything to Monica anymore. Monica walked away, whistling.

The fifth day was when the phone call came. John called at noon, and they immediately arranged a press conference for five o'clock in the afternoon. By three-thirty, John was at the police station with Veronica's lawyers. Veronica stayed at home and prepared for the press conference.

She only first saw him when he came on stage to join her. Her eyes turned into saucers when John walked on stage, but she quickly regained her composure. They answered a few questions, then Veronica took her lawyers, and John, out to dinner. By eight o'clock that night, the police issued a formal statement that Veronica Phillips was not considered a suspect in Alan's death. A celebration was in order.

Everyone went back to the lawyers' offices and drank from their private bar. At nearly two in the morning, they decided to leave.

Veronica stayed in the parking lot with John while her lawyers, one by one, drove away. In a few minutes, the two of them were alone.

She turned to him. "You're not John."

"Yes I am, Veronica, John Lowry. I-"

"Sure, you're John, but you're not the John I met."

"I know." He paused. "I was wondering what you'd say."

"What are you doing? Why did you come forward and say you were the man I was with?"

"Miss Phillips, your fan wasn't coming forward. I know you didn't do it. I know you couldn't do it. And I'm sure you were with a fan. I couldn't let the police drag you over the coals, and they were about to do it."

"But where were you then? Could someone identify you as being somewhere else at the same time?"

"Miss Phillips, I live alone, I have no family around here, and not many friends, either. I work as a pool cleaner in Beverly Hills. No one knows anything about me, and no one saw what I was doing that night. I was alone, in my darkened apartment, on the phone with no one. I was reading a book, in my bedroom, which doesn't even have any windows. You have nothing to worry about."

"But what if the real John comes forward?"

"Miss Phillips, if he were going to come forward, don't you think he would have done it by now? I think you feared that he would never show up. If you didn't, you wouldn't have remained silent during the press conference."

Veronica leaned against her Mercedes in the parking lot. A street light illuminated the ground behind her car, leaving the two of them just out of the spotlight.

"But why did you do it?"

"I told you. I know you're innocent. I know you wouldn't do that. And -"

"And what?"

"And... I'm a big fan, too."

They sat in silence together, both leaning against her car.

"I don't know, just to be able to meet you, to talk to you, that's a big enough thrill, but I thought, hey, it would be an honor to help you when you needed it."

"But I don't know how to thank you, I mean, I could give you something, but then it would look like I was paying you off, and -"

"I'm not asking for anything. I mean, I got something - I'm the only person that could save you, and I did."

John looked up at the insects circling around the street light.

"Maybe, Miss Phillips -"

"Yes?"

"Maybe you could keep in touch. A phone call, or dinner once or twice a year."

"I think I could do that, John. But one thing -"

"Yes, Miss Phillips?"

"You have to call me Veronica."

John looked down as a sheepish grin came across his face. "Sure, Veronica."

She gave this stranger a hug before she got into her car and drove away.

Veronica called her producers the next day and told them that she would have to take a few days off from filming to recuperate. She stayed in bed late.

Monica walked into the master bedroom at eleven-thirty in the morning. "Why aren't you on the set?"

"I called in and told them I needed a few days for myself. They understood. I told them less than a week."

"Ronnie, why the hell did you do that? I could have covered for you. You don't want people to wonder what's going on."

"Monica, people will wonder if I'm able to just go right back to work after all this happened. It's natural to need some time off after something like this. It's traumatic."

"You are such a whiny bitch, Ron. You should have checked with me first."

Monica walked out of the bedroom, but popped her head in for a brief moment.

"Oh, and get this, Ron, the morning news updates say that Alan's lover is now the primary suspect. What a riot. Now the little fucker will get his for pointing the finger at us, right?"

Monica started to laugh as she left Veronica's bedroom and walked down the hallway.

Veronica spent the afternoon drinking. By four-thirty in the afternoon she decided to make a phone call.

"Doctor Wolcott's office."

"Yes, I'd like to make an appointment to see Doctor Wolcott as soon as possible. It's a bit of an emergency."

"Have you visited with Doctor Wolcott before?"

"Yes, but it hasn't been for a few years. Look, is there anything available in the next day or two? Tell him it's Veronica Phillips, he'll remember me."

"Oh, Ms. Phillips, let me check with the doctor and see what we can do."

janet kuypers

She made an appointment with her psychiatrist for the next afternoon.

"Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear. A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet."

For the rest of the evening Monica's words kept pounding through Veronica's brain.

From the living room she heard Monica walking down the stairs. "Veronica, I'm going out to the clubs tonight. Don't go anywhere, will you?"

"I won't," Veronica answered. "Try to look like you're shaken up, will you?"

"Don't worry, darling. I'm a great actress." And with that she turned around and headed for the door.

As Monica walked away Veronica listened to her footsteps. The heels of her shoes clicked against the marble hallway floor. The front door opened, closed. Veronica looked around at the shadows her furniture cast over the walls. She sat with her feet up on her couch. Her drink was almost empty. She reached over for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Tony?"

"Yeah, who is this - Veronica?"

"Yeah, hope I'm not calling too late."

"No, honey, I was just going to go out in a bit. What do you need?"

"Well, after this whole fiasco with the police I feel like everyone's watching me a little more closely. I feel so unsafe, even in my own house. I know you offered this to me before, so -"

"You want a gun for your house?"

"Yeah, Tony."

"Well, first you gotta learn how to shoot the thing."

"Would you be interested in teaching me?"

"Sure, Veronica. When do you wanna do this?"

"As soon as possible. Can we get together tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but only at like noon. Do you want me to pick you up?"

"Sure, Tony. And thanks."

"No problem. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah, Tony. Oh wait - I might be going out to the clubs, so if I see you out tonight, don't talk about this. I don't want other people knowing I'm getting a gun."

"Got it, honey. See you later."

"Bye, Tony."

She laid the phone down on the cocktail table. She got up and walked into the bathroom. She turned on the light and stood in front of the medicine cabinet. She stared at herself in the mirror, noting the new wrinkles she gained over the past two

weeks. She opened the cabinet, found every package of codeine and lithium, as well as two jars of sleeping pills. She walked upstairs and did the same in the master bathroom. She then walked down the stairs into the kitchen and hid everything in a crock pot, and put it in the oven. Monica couldn't poison her, she thought, if she couldn't find the drugs.

She straightened herself up, left the kitchen, walked into the living room. She looked around her quiet house. She used to like it when she let the staff go for the night, she like the feeling of being alone. Never before did it feel unsafe, or even lonely. She got her glass, and walked to the bar. She had twelve more hours to kill before seeing Tony.

The next morning went perfectly. Since Veronica was in bed when Monica came home, and probably because Monica was still drunk at dawn, she went to the attic to sleep. Veronica got up, took some aspirin, and got ready to see Tony.

When she saw Tony pulling into her driveway, she walked outside. She got into his car and they made their way towards the shooting range.

"Hey, Veronica, in the back seat - do you like it?"

She looked in the back seat and saw a .38 special laying in the back seat. It looks like it was just thrown there nonchalantly, she thought, by someone who didn't know what it was capable of doing.

"Is it loaded?"

"Nah. Thought I'd teach you how to do that once we got to the range."

She reached to the back seat and picked up the gun.

"It's a beauty, ain't it, honey?"

She didn't answer; she just sat there in amazement at how heavy the gun really was.

Tony explained everything to her, and after two-and-a-half hours she felt calm and focused when she shot her new gun. He brought her home by three-thirty, which gave her just enough time to hide her gun in the pot in the oven, change clothes, and take her limousine to her doctor's appointment.

She walked through a back entrance into the office to avoid the exposure. She walked in with a calm she thought she couldn't have until after she talked to her old doctor.

Doctor Wolcott's previous appointment had already left, so he was waiting for her when she arrived. She walked into his office and immediately sat on the couch. He got up from his chair, walked around and sat on the corner of his desk.

"Ms. Phillips, it's good to see you again."

"Monica's getting out of control."

Doctor Wolcott paused. "The last time we talked was a few years ago, but then you said that Monica wasn't bothering you."

"Well, she's come out of hiding, and she's on a rampage. I'm scared of her. I'm afraid she's going to try to take over me."

"Why would you say that Veronica? You're a strong woman. You know you can

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handle her, you've done so before."

"You don't get it, Doctor Wolcott," she answered. She paused, took in a deep breath. "She killed Alan."

Doctor Wolcott leaned his head back. His smile faded.

"It was her, doctor. I swear, it wasn't me. I wasn't there. She did it, and I had to cover it up." Her eyes started to water; she put her hand to her cheek, brushed her hair back behind her ear. "And she's been threatening me, saying she's not going to stay in hiding anymore, that no one will miss me if I'm found floating down the river two weeks from now by the police. God, I really think she's going to kill me."

"Veronica, she's not going to kill you. She needs you. She needs you to be alive. What she wants is to take over your spirit and rule your life. What you have to do is fight that, fight her will."

"No, Doctor Wolcott, you don't understand. I think she fed me sleeping pills a couple of weeks ago. I keep finding codeine and lithium in the medicine cabinets that I didn't put there. I've had to hide it from her. I'm really afraid she's trying to kill me off."

"Veronica, I'd like to admit you somewhere to get some rest. You could be away from Monica then, you'd have time to recuperate, time away from work, time to fight her and win yourself back."

"Doctor Wolcott, if I do that, then she'll definitely take over my life. She'll get out, there's nothing I can do to stop that. And she'll make it so I can never get back out. She'll never let me out."

"Then you have to fight her will now, Veronica. Let me help you."

Veronica's tears slid down her face in quiet desperation. "I have to fight her. I have to get rid of her."

Doctor Wolcott responded to her comments, but she no longer heard them. For the rest of the hour all she could think was that she had to confront Monica, do it reasonably and rationally, make it a test of wills. She always won in the past. She has to do it again.

At six o'clock, Veronica left the office and stepped into her limousine. She checked to make sure there was some liquor in the back. She told the driver to drive around. She didn't want to go home yet.

After two hours, she told her driver to stop at a liquor store and buy her a bottle of red wine. When he got back to the car, she asked him to drive her to the shore.

He drove her to a hill near the shore, so that she could watch the sunset without having to leave the back of her car. Veronica sipped her wine as she watched the glowing red sun slide down into the cool blue waters, illuminating the sky with oranges and purples.

"You know, I haven't watched the sunset in years," she told her driver as they pulled away from the hill and headed back to her home. Inside, she wondered if it would be her last.

Veronica walked into her home at nearly ten-thirty that night. She heard classi-

cal music playing from upstairs. She hoped she could avoid her confrontation for just a little while longer. She kicked her shoes off at the front door and started to head for the bar when she stopped.

"God, I haven't eaten all day," she thought, and turned around and headed into the kitchen.

The light was on in the kitchen, and she walked around the island to her refrigerator to grab a piece of cheese. She set the block of cheese down next to the refrigerator and grabbed a piece of french bread from the counter, ripping off the end and shoving it in her mouth. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the oven door slightly open.

A wave of fear fell over her. In a mad panic, she ran up the stairs to her bedroom.

She grabbed the door frame at her bedroom to stop her forward motion. Monica sat in the center of the bed, bottles and packages of drugs and boxes of bullets fanned around her. Veronica's gun was resting in Monica's lap; Monica gazed intently at it as she repeatedly ran her fingers along the handle. She didn't look up to acknowledge Veronica's arrival.

Veronica stood in the doorway, holding herself up with the door frame, panting. Monica continued to stroke the side of the gun.

"I'm so disappointed in you, Ronnie. Did you really think I wouldn't find this?" Her eyes never left the gun in her lap.

"I just bought it. I was afraid of freaks trying to hurt us because of Alan's murder."

"And that's why you were collecting the drugs, Ronnie?"

"No, I was afraid you were going to hurt yourself. We've both been under a lot of stress, and I didn't want you resorting to -"

"Do you really think I'm stupid, Ronnie?"

Veronica stopped making up an explanation and just looked at her. Monica picked up the gun from her lap and got up from the bed.

"I mean, do you really think I'm that stupid?" She asked again, this time louder, almost screaming.

Veronica stood motionless in the doorway. Monica walked up to her. Their noses almost touched.

"I'm smart enough to know that the two of us can't do this any longer, that the two of us can't go one being one person any longer. One of us has to die tonight, for the sanity of the both of us."

They both stood in silence, waiting for the other to make the first move.

"Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear. A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet."

Thoughts raced through Veronica's mind. She finally spoke. "You're the one who

decided that one of us has to die tonight, not me. But I'm not going to -"

In mid-sentence, to catch her off-guard, Veronica pushed Monica down and ran out the room toward the stairs.

Monica quickly jumped to her feet, picked up the gun and ran after her. She caught up in the living room. Monica started to yell.

"What, Ronnie, going to get another drink? You can't drink yourself away from this one, Ron. I'm not going away. I'm not blowing this entire career because you can't handle it."

Veronica started to cry. "I thought we were a team. I thought we needed each other." Veronica slid to the floor and leaned against the bar.

Monica crouched down next to her. "It's got to be this way, Ronnie. You know it does."

"But I don't want to die," Veronica whispered. She looked down at the carpet.

"One of us has to go away in order for the life of Veronica Phillips to move forward. All of her work will be forgotten if we're fighting on the sidelines."

Veronica looked up. "I'm Veronica Phillips," she said as she swung her right arm and punched Monica. Monica fell back, but jumped back and lunged for Veronica.

From two blocks away, a pair of joggers heard a single gun shot during their daily run.

It was two mornings later when the police entered the home of Veronica Phillips at the request of Doctor Wolcott. They found assorted pills and drugs scattered on Veronica's bed. And they found Veronica Phillips laying dead on her living room floor next to her bar, with her gun in her hand.

"I should have done something," Doctor Wolcott said under his breath.

"Did you have reason to believe she was going to kill herself?" one of the police officers asked while a plain-clothes officer took photographs of the scene.

"No," Doctor Wolcott responded, "but she was afraid her other personality was going to kill her. She saw me two days ago, she made an appointment for the first time in years. When I worked with her before I knew she had multiple personality disorder, but she had been in extensive therapy with me and she said that Monica - the second personality - wasn't around anymore, wasn't bothering her. So, I never admitted her anywhere. And just two days ago she came to my office, saying Monica was back."

Doctor Wolcott stood back while the paramedics carried a stretcher into her home.

"And now she destroyed both of them," Doctor Wolcott whispered.

On the set, her director got a body-double to finish the film.

On the other side of town, John was waiting for Veronica Phillips to call.

The Girl Left Behind by jane butkin roth

I was made to be a good girl
To be seen, but never heard
To never let a man
See me with no make-up
To dream white picket-fence dreams....

And I held them -
Long after his words, not his fist, took me down

I was made to be a good girl
To make peace at any price
To always set a pretty table

But how does a girl learn to speak when
It's time to be a woman when
She was made to be
Seen, but never heard?

I lost my own voice, only
Heard myself through others
I was even grateful for the role
But it took me down

Not fast, but far and low

Til I came to my crossroads
And was made to sing my own song
Martyrdom will never find a home in me again



photograph by janet kuypers
j o s e p h

without religion by mackenzie silver

God doesn't make sense

there are other, more rational, possibilities
prove to me to make me believe
be provable

morals, virtues, values
are not based on religion
people see no consequence to being "good"
unless the consequence is a God

people are afraid to face death
people really don't want to believe
death is an end

it is an end
you simply cease to exist

people claim to have beliefs
but don't live by them
they're not beliefs
they lack a belief system they understand

God is your answer
to all of your questions
not the right answer
but an answer

"But God loves you"

If love is unconditional

sisters of mercy by ann alexander

Allison Ward administered the lethal combination of the narcotic and barbiturate cocktail which Eric Johnston consumed willingly. He then lay back in his bed, his young body emaciated with disease and he waited to feel the effects of the drugs. Eric was tired, too weak to continue the struggle against a relentless disease and he welcomed death. It was his choice and that of his mother, Elizabeth, the only family he had for support. He had come home to be in familiar surroundings and now he took comfort in being so near to those things which had once been such a big part of his life.

His high school graduation portrait, so full of youthful vigor and eagerness to begin life, still hung on the wall. Below that was the Bidwell High School Class of '79 gathered together for a final picture on the bleachers edging the football field. He wanted to reach out and touch them as his mind filled with the memories of football games, parties, and Friday night cruising. It all seemed so real yet so distant.

He continued to view the evidence of his life as through a video camera, an interested observer but no longer a participant: He'd always been a 49er fan and the team's red, white and gold banner stretched over his old dresser. Eric even had a red and white jersey with the number 16 printed on the front and back, Joe Montana's number. He would never see them play again. A large, stuffed Snoopy dog stood in the corner beside the sliding closet door. The white was now a brownish color, one ear was ripped and both eyeballs were missing but Snoopy had been given to him for his fifth birthday by his grandfather and had been his companion through his childhood years. Eric's eyes roved about the room, taking in the faded curtains with their torn lace, the tinted blue light fixture centered on the ceiling, the printed wallpaper of little boats and trains. He was at home.

Eric's thinking started to fog and he began to have trouble focusing his eyes which now rested on his mother. She was trying to smile through her tears as she held tightly to his hand.

"Don't cry, Mama," it was hard for Eric to speak, "This way is best. We'll meet again on the other side." Those were his last words before his mind entered unconsciousness.

Elizabeth Johnston's tears flowed freely as her son's respirations became less fre-

quent and more shallow but she continued to hold his hand. Allison Ward held onto Elizabeth's other hand, attempting to offer tangible strength and comfort. But these were not the only attendants at Eric's bedside. Allison and Elizabeth were accompanied by Barbara "Babs" Carson and Misty Yerrington and these four women all joined hands while gently beginning to sing, "Jesus keep me near the cross...."

The evening light had faded into night leaving the bedroom aglow in soft candlelight from votive candles lit in memory of others who had died a similar death. Giant shadows moved in reflection on the walls as the women swayed in time with their singing, finishing the old hymn "...till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river." And Eric Johnston breathed his last.

The room was silent for a long while, each woman alone with her individual thoughts and prayers. But the deed was done and it was time to disperse. Allison left first, followed by Babs then Misty at fifteen minute intervals. Elizabeth was left alone with her son. Though her heart was anguished, she knew she'd done the right thing. Eric's suffering was over, not drawn out for agonizing months just waiting for the inevitable. He was at peace now and though Elizabeth took comfort in this, she could not hold back the tears which she shed over her son's deathbed.

When Elizabeth regained enough composure and self control, she made the appropriate phone calls to the doctor and the local mortuary. Eric had been under a doctor's care and there would be no cause for an autopsy. The direct cause of death was a pneumo carinii infection.

After they had taken away her son's body, Elizabeth was left alone in her house. This is what she wanted, to be alone in her grief. Allison, Babs, and Misty had all offered to come stay with her but Elizabeth had refused. Alone now, she wandered through the house, turning on the lights, letting past memories fill her as the light did their home - Eric's little-boy laughter and cries, the pitter-patter of his bare feet, the loud music of his teen years and worry-filled late nights. He'd been a happy boy yet she'd known he was different and Bidwell, his home town, was too small for him. So as a young man, he moved away to "The City" where his heart and talent could flourish, where he could keep his pride and self-respect intact. But when he finally returned home it was in defeat, stricken down in the end stages of Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome. And Bidwell was still too small for him. There were no support groups for him or his mother, his old friends had made themselves scarce, and their neighbors were afraid of him. So Eric and his mother, Elizabeth, were isolated in their time of physical, emotional, and spiritual need.

But they had a choice and could score one more victory before going down. The disease was destroying Eric's body but he would not let it destroy his mind and spirit. He chose his time of death when there was no more purpose or pleasure in life. Elizabeth supported his decision in philosophy as well as in deed. For them, this way was best.

No Hope Except Re-Winding the Movie And Praying for a Different Ending

by mary winters

A kingdom with stiff fines for leaving:
Shangri-La.
The beautiful young woman
turns old
leaning on the fence at the border.
Weeping farewell to the visiting scientist
who has nothing to fear
not being five hundred years old.
Who won't wrinkle up at the gate,
lurch forward withered and bent.
Hair scraggly and white against a cherry tree
in full bloom.
It was true love but you know what
the pop psych manuals say:
beware of an age difference of more than ten years.
It's probably a neurotic urge
to marry your parent.
When you could just have sex with them in a dream
and be done with it.

(Stiff fines the kind of thing that captures
a kid's imagination.
The kind of kid who loves counting things up.
It's not so sad if you know
exactly how many hours Dad's going to be away.
A scientist visiting Shangri-La.)

The movie ends,
the woman a cloud of swirling dust.
Her long, incredibly romantic
white silk kimono
wrapped around a fence post by the wind.
The sash waving good-bye.

decatur 38

by david caylor

Decatur, Illinois. Todd was fourteen years old, and his family - his mother, his ten year old half-brother Cory and himself - were medium-poor. They always had food but never went out to dinner. They never went on vacation. Todd and Cory had the same mother and different fathers, and Cory had another half-brother. Ron was nine years old. Cory's father was the same as Ron's, but Ron had a different mother. They lived four trailers down in forty-two. For a long time Todd thought Ron was his quarter-brother because the math made sense to him. Now he knew this wasn't right. "But still," Todd thought, "Ronnie is Cory's brother so that's something." Most of the time Todd thought none of this mattered because all three of them hardly ever saw their fathers.

Todd was sitting in the living chair wearing an old U.A.W. t-shirt his father had left behind. The shirt had just started to fit this summer, Todd realized he had grown at least two inches and gained weight. Cory hadn't put a shirt on all summer and was lying on his stomach on the floor. He held his head up with his hands to watch television. During the middle of this, their uncle pushed open the front door with a twenty pound bag of potatoes.

"Where's your mom at?" the uncle asked looking down the hallway that led from the living room to the boys' bedroom, the mother's and then the bathroom, in that order.

"She went to that lady's house. Her friend." Cory said, still holding his head in his hands.

"What's she doing there?" the uncle said, swinging the potatoes onto the kitchen floor.

"She went there this morning probably for all day," Cory said. The man grabbed an envelope from the stack of mail to write a note.

"Todd, make sure she sees this," he said scribbling. Todd didn't look away from the television. "Todd, show her this note," he waved the envelope in the boys direction.

"Yeah, alright, I will. Don't make such a big deal about it," Todd said pushing the hair out of his eyes. The uncle cleared his throat and leaned against the counter for a minute.

"I gotta get back to work," he said. The man left the trailer, and Todd got up right away to read the note.

Jane:

School starts for the boys on Wed. I left \$50 on the refrig. get the boys a haircut and stuff for school.

Steve

Todd slid his hand across the top of the refrigerator until he found the bill.

"Hey Cory, come look at his fifty," Todd said holding the bill out in the air. He held the bill between them with two hands as they stood on the kitchen floor looking down at it.

"Who's Grant?" Cory asked.

"I think he was in the army, then he was president."

"Is it mom's?"

"Steve left it here for us to get school stuff with," Todd said. "Haircuts too."

Teachers in Illinois schools can tell who the trailer park kids are. These kids get put in low level reading class, wear jeans that are either too big or too tight, don't join sports teams, have older brothers, steal their parents' cigarettes, have long hair and some get free hot lunch. They squint at the blackboard from the back of the classroom, move in groups, and never talk about dogs because a dog won't fit in a trailer.

But the thing is these kids don't cause that much trouble; that's just a rumor.

Cory was back in the living room, sitting in front of the television again. Todd stood in the kitchen longer, put the money back on the refrigerator and also went back to the living room.

"What are you going to do tonight?" Cory asked.

"I'm gonna go swimming - if mom will give me the fifty cents and I can find that tape I borrowed off Woodward. He's gonna kill me if I don't give it back to him sometime today."

"You still got that?"

"Yeah. Well, it's around here someplace," Todd said looking around the messy trailer from the e-z chair, but really still thinking about the money.

"Is he gonna beat you up?"

"No, he just thinks I lost it and is pissed off. Change the channel. This is stupid." Cory reached up and switched from four to seven, to a game show where the first person gives clues and the second tries to guess what he is talking about was on.

"Go to twelve," Todd said.

"No, I like this." Todd picked a magazine up off the floor and started flipping through it.

"What tape is it anyway?" Cory asked.

"Lynyrd Skynyrd."

"Is he any good?"

"It's a whole band not just one guy."

"Are they any good?" Cory asked, turning his head toward Todd.

"Yeah, they're these Southern guys. They're really cool. Their plane crashed, and a couple of them died." The game show ended. The team of one man and one woman beat the team of two men. Cory got up and went down the hallway of the trailer.

He was back a minute later wearing a white t-shirt and carrying his tennis shoes.

"When do you think Mom will take us to get that stuff?" he asked.

"I don't know. Tomorrow, maybe."

"I'm gonna go tell Ronnie."

"Tell him what?"

"Tell him we might go tomorrow."

"What for? He's not going with us," Todd said.

"Yeah, he'll go with us with the money Steve left."

Todd waited to make sure that he understood. He was always explaining things to Cory, how to open a combination lock, how to bend a snow fence so you can crawl under it. How, if they are going to test your eyes at school and you don't want to have to wear glasses get in line behind a kid already wearing glasses and just repeat the letters they said when it's your turn.

"No, Steve only left the money for me and you," Todd said.

"For Ronnie too."

"No."

"Why not," Cory asked flipping the hair out of his eyes by jerking his head back quickly.

"Because me and you are brothers, and Ronnie is your brother, but he's not mine. Steve is Mom's brother," Todd told Cory. He's our uncle," he said pointing back and forth between Cory and himself. "Steve doesn't have anything to do with Ronnie."

"But Ronnie is my brother, he'll get something too," Cory said.

"He's your half brother, same as me. But Ronnie's not my brother at all. Me and him have totally different moms and dads."

"He's your cousin," Cory said pulling up his loose jeans.

"No, he's not even that. Listen, mom is our mom, mine and yours, and we have different dads from each other," Todd said.

"Right," Cory said.

"So Mom is our mom, and Steve is only mine and your uncle. So the money is only for me and you because it's from him."

"Still Ronnie gets some of it because of..."

"Just forget it. I'll have Mom tell you when she gets home."

"I don't even want her to," Cory said, slumping onto the carpet.

morning

by helena wolfe

I'm alone
no one interrupts my senses

The food is bad
It is loud in here

silverware clashing
into the washbin
by the conveyor belt

chaos
disarray

something is doing
something wrong

unsettling

You can hear it pour
rain falling
A light rain
marbles falling

mumblings of a crowd

cracking
lighter, and quieter

The metal
clanging
loud echo

no picnic

by bruce genaro

I sit behind the wheel of the convertible, silent, focusing on my driving while Sarah plays with the radio knob. Pop, rock, news, classical. Finally she lands on a popular station that plays songs from the 50's and 60's. Buddy Holly and the Crickets are singing "That'll be the day" and Sarah cranks it up full volume, singing along, her bare feet up on the dash board, her hands slapping her knees in rhythm. Sarah's usually soft voice is belting out "Yeah that'll be the day-ay-ay when I die." I glance sideways at her with a quizzical (O.K., snide) look, hoping she doesn't see it but she does.

"Don't give me that look" she says.

"What look?" I reply, "and don't give me that attitude!"

"That condescending look and I'm not giving you attitude," she says as she pulls a magazine from her satchel on the floor and starts flipping through it in that way that she has to let me know that she is irritated but is not about to discuss it. Sarah is all too quick to give the silent treatment, to shut down and pull a Laura Petrie "Well if you don't know, I'm certainly not going to tell you!" So of course I have to drag it out of her which is exactly what she wants. "It wasn't a condescending look it was a quizzical look." I say this in a desperate attempt to lessen the fury I know is brewing behind her pale green eyes. Eyes that seem so soft and inviting that I am usually taken by surprise when she throws one of her (all too frequent these days) tantrums. "I was just surprised that on this beautiful sunny day as we're headed to the park for a leisurely picnic lunch, you chose Holly over Mahler."

"Depth and range, that's what you lack Mitch, depth and range." Ouch! We drive for the next ten minutes in silence, because rather than lower the volume or concede and change to a classical station, she turns the radio off with a dramatic flick of the wrist. She sits there quietly, nervously playing with a gold crucifix that hangs from a chain around her neck. Her other hand and her mouth are actively involved in some enterprise that involves the ends of her hair and a rhythmic movement of her head.

My silence isn't sulking, just thinking. I had planned this picnic in the park to break off our engagement, something I had been trying to do for weeks. It would have been easier if we were not in the throes of making arrangements; if the wedding weren't just a couple of months away. With everything that was going on, I could never find just the right moment. Or if I found the right moment I couldn't find the courage. The idea of being in the country I thought, some classical music playing, a basket of gourmet food, the peaceful serenity of the lake, would somehow civilize the whole thing. We could discuss it like mature, rational adults, slicing up Brie and pate instead of each other. And here she was turning into a teenager on me, and turning into a hostile, temperamental one at that. Lately her fuse had gone from short to none. An only child raised by a devout Catholic mother and an authoritarian father, she learned to steam roll her way through life, know-

ing exactly when to employ guilt and when to use intimidation to get exactly what she wanted. She often lacked the ability to see both sides of an issue. But, as any good Army Reserve sergeant will tell you, it's the skirmishes that make all the training worth while. I may not have depth and range but I know a little about detente. I gently take her hand in mine. "I'm sorry," I say, as I press her palm to my lips. She leans over and kisses me on the cheek. "Me too." We make it to the park without further incident.

The blades of clean green grass tickle my toes as I stroll down to the waters edge. I kneel down, my eyes scanning the few rocks on the all but barren shoreline to find the smoothest, flattest one for skipping. I find one that is close to perfect. A small nib on one corner might affect the balance of weight slightly, but otherwise it's ideal. I stand up straight, draw back my arm as far as possible, bend my knees a bit, hand just above the shoulder, swing it forward and with a snap of the wrist, the small stone leaves my palm and goes sailing across the water. Nine, ten, eleven. Eleven circles in the water, each getting larger, each overlapping the other, like wet sound waves, before it disappears beneath the surface.

I stroll back to the blanket where Sarah is sitting, sipping white wine from a plastic tumbler. She looks so lovely and relaxed in the afternoon sun. She is wearing an outfit similar to the one she had on the first day we met and for a moment I falter and question if I'm doing the right thing. "What talent!" She giggles as I approach. "I'd pour you some wine, but you're obviously in training." I sit down on the blanket and pour my own glass of Chardonnay from the half empty bottle. "Don't be so quick to dismiss the benefits of rock skipping my dear. It takes great skill and concentration. You have to find just the right projectile. Then one has to assess the perfect height to throw from based on the weight of the stone. And then there's the problem of currents and wind factor to take into consideration. All in all, not quite as simple or mundane as one might think." "And this little 'sport,'" she says sarcastically (making little quotation marks with the first two fingers of each hand) "gives you some sense of satisfaction? Of accomplishment?"

"Dear Sarah, I thought you of all people with your yoga classes and your Buddhist friends would see that it is not a sport at all but rather a form of meditation."

"So did your mother tell you about her ideas for the reception?" she says, changing the subject to our impending wedding in a successful attempt to annoy me. "Now there is a person who should learn how to meditate," I say, tearing off a piece of a baguette and smearing it with Brie. "I think the band she's chosen is going to be perfect," Sarah continues brightly. How does she do that? Go on with her own agenda, as if my part of the conversation makes no difference. I pinch my arm in a mocking fashion but the inference is lost on her. At times having a conversation with Sarah is like talking to one of those stuffed childrens' toys with the prerecorded messages where you're forced into answering a set series of questions. This does however jar me back to reality and makes me realize that I am just stalling the inevitable.

I want to tell her how I feel but I always get sidetracked. I had meant to tell my mother the truth as well, to prevent her from making all of those unnecessary arrangements, but they seem to be made from the same mold, barreling through life like a tornado, pulling up trees, houses and trailer parks, leaving in their wake destruction while they pick up force and speed. It has always amazed me how they can be so oblivious to their surroundings, to other

bruce genaro

peoples' feelings. Women and mothers were supposed to be nurturing and comforting. Is it years of oppression and feminism that has caused this shift in all women or do I just sub-consciously attract and encourage this type of aggression? Granted, I like a challenge as much as the next fellow, but I don't like it all the time. I appreciate - like, in fact - strong women, but not ones who feel they have to prove their strength. I get enough of that crap in the reserves and on poker nights with my old frat brothers. I look across the blanket at Sarah and wonder how someone so pretty, feminine and kind can also be so castrating and self absorbed.

It's knowing where to start that's the problem. What do I say? I've something to tell you? We need to talk? There's something we need to discuss! It's silly really, to fret about it I mean. No matter how it's approached the end result will be the same. I like to think that I'm worried about hurting her feelings, which I am, but the real reason for the hesitation is that I want everybody to like me. I spent my formative years silently apologizing to people for my mother's aggressive and often combative ways and have never quite freed myself from the role of diplomat. Suddenly I blurt out (mumble really as I still have a mouth full of bread and cheese) "Why do you want to marry me?" I don't know why I ask this. Perhaps I hope she won't have a good reason and I can suggest that maybe we should postpone the wedding for a few months till she's sure this is what she really wants. Instead, she answers without hesitation "Because I love you silly!" And then she makes the mistake of asking me why I want to marry her. "I don't," I say with little or no emotion in my voice. I saw an opening and I took it. Silence. I want to explain, to soften the blow, to keep talking, rationalizing, as if that might soften a bad reaction. But having said it, I become mute while waiting for the counter-attack. She brings the glass to her lips and takes a sip of wine while she tries to calculate if I'm joking or not. She puts the wine glass down on the blanket, folds her hands and places them in her lap. She looks me straight in the eyes and says, also with little or no emotion, "You're not kidding are you?"

"I wish I were."

"Is there someone else?"

"No."

"Is it that you don't love me or that you're just don't want to get married?"

"I don't know. I mean I know that I don't want to get married, but I don't know if I love you. I know I did, I just don't know if I do."

She takes another sip of wine before saying, "So where does that leave us?"

"I don't know really. I just know that if we went ahead with this wedding we'd be making a terrible mistake. I'm not afraid of commitment Sarah, I'm just afraid of making a mistake, of hurting you."

"So you'd rather hurt me now than later. That's a cop out Mitch. You should know by now that I can handle anything except being patronized."

I shake my head and break into a nervous smile. "Look, this is no picnic for me either, if you'll pardon the pun."

She doesn't. She glares at me. "O.K. Mitch, no bullshit. What's the real reason you don't want to get married?"

"It's not as simple as that. I didn't wake up one morning with a list of reasons why we shouldn't get married. There's no definitive answer. It just feels wrong."

"And how long have you felt this way? Maybe it's just cold feet. Perhaps we should talk to a counselor."

"I'm not against doing that, but I don't think that's the answer. You've changed Sarah. We've both changed. But right after we got engaged you seemed to become another person. Maybe it's the time you've spent with my mother making all the arrangements. Maybe it's parts of your personality I overlooked until I thought of making a life-long commitment to you. And maybe I'm just the spoiled brat that that Gestapo of a mother always said I was. It's not anyone's fault. I've changed too. What ever it is it just isn't right between us anymore."

Sarah looks at me for a moment, her eyes glazed over as if there's no thought behind them, then turns her head and looks off across the lake. We are not alone in this park but it feels as if we are. Sarah's eyes seem to linger on a family of four, a father and his son playing Frisbee, a Golden Retriever jumping up to intercept. She watches them as if in their solidarity they have all of the answers to life. I fix my gaze on a group of six playing volleyball, marveling at the way they volley and serve, in-tune with each others movements, as if each can read their team-mates minds. They are independent and yet a team. Watching them rotate and set up a serve, it's clear that they have the advantage of playing a game that has rules, roles and boundaries. If only life were that simple. We sit there like this in silence for a few minutes that feels like a few hours until she says, definitively, "Take me home!" "We haven't really discussed this yet," I counter, hoping to soften the blow I feel is yet to come. Sarah gets up onto her knees and starts busying herself packing up the picnic basket. She looks at me and makes a conscious effort to keep her bottom lip from quivering. "I've heard all I care to hear. Take me home."

Sarah walks back to the car alone leaving me to gather the remains of the picnic and my life. When I reach the car, she is sitting in the passengers seat, arms crossed over her chest so tightly I'm afraid she's going to cut off her circulation. Her shoulder is butted up against the door and she's looking straight ahead through the windshield, her eyes glazed over as if she's in some drug induced trance. I put the basket in the trunk and take my place in the driver's seat. I sit there for a moment, just quietly looking at her. When I realize that she's invested too much in her anger to talk to me, I start the car and begin backing out of the parking lot. Her silent treatment makes me furious. To relieve some of my own tension I press the gas pedal to the floor. Tires screeching, dust flying everywhere, I just miss backing into someone's brand new Range Rover. When I slam on the brakes the car stalls and it takes three tries before I get it going again.

Out on the open road, I try one more time to come to some sort of resolution. I fear if I drop her off at her apartment it will be weeks before she answers the phone or consents to talk to me. "Sarah, at the risk of having you bite my head off, these tantrums you throw and this refusal to communicate when your angry is one of the reasons I think we should call off the wedding. What kind of marriage would we have if we couldn't talk about things?" Suddenly she starts to cry. Not sniffing and wet eyes, but convulsive sob-

bing. Her body is shaking, tears are streaming down her face and a wail is coming from somewhere deep inside of her. I pull the car off onto the shoulder, turn off the ignition and wrap my arms around her. I am surprised and glad that she doesn't resist. Neither of us say anything. The odd thing is that I know that this has little or nothing to do with what just happened. The kind of emotion she is releasing is something that has been stored up for years if not lifetimes. We are all just walking around stumbling through life waiting for something to trigger us so that we can let go and release the pain that has been built up by horrible parents, bad luck or past lives and lots of negative karma.

She composes herself just long enough to say, "I don't blame you. I can't even stand to be around me these days. I feel so out of control. Work's got me crazy, I'm not going to make partner this year. I'm ready to strangle your mother and yesterday I found a small lump in my breast. And now you tell me something I've been suspecting if not fearing for months." I give her this panicked look when she mentions the lump thing, but she just puts up her hand, palm straight up and shakes her head as if to say it's nothing and even if it is she can handle it. Surprisingly, she continues. "I feel like I haven't stopped moving forward since I was six. Wanting to please my father and afraid of ending up like my mother living in his shadow. At some point, I just started going after the things I thought I was supposed to want, never stopping to consider if I really wanted them. I envy your courage to do what you did today. I know it was hard. That's one of the things I love about you. You know what you want and you arrange your life accordingly. The sad thing for me is, and don't take this the wrong way, but I'm more afraid of failing at something than I am of losing you. I've had doubts about what we were doing, but I never stopped to look at it on an emotional level." She buries her head in my chest as the tears continue to flow. I kiss the top of her head and stroke her long blond hair.

I am amazed and touched that she has finally let me see this vulnerable side to her. This is unfamiliar territory for me and I fight against saying such trite things as "There, there" and "Everything will be fine." I am cautious against falsely reassuring her. Cars that pass us on the freeway are slowing down to get a better look at what's going on in the blue Mustang on the side of the road. The heads of passengers turn to watch us, their little faces getting smaller and smaller as they carry their speculation about what they've just seen into the future. They watch because they are glad it's not them and yet fearful that whatever dreadful fate has befallen us might be waiting for them around the next corner. The difference between "us" and "them" is always closer than we realize. We all spend so much of our time trying to avoid pain that in the process we don't notice that we also stop feeling pleasure. Sarah wipes her eyes dry, straightens up in her seat and says that she's O.K., that I should take her home. There is a calmness about her and a softness that's been absent for months. As I put the car into gear and pull back out into traffic, I glance over to make sure her seatbelt is fastened. She sees me do this, gives me a faint smile, rests her head on my shoulder and I think, "now this is someone I could fall in love with."



photograph by janet kuypers
e l l e n

pr o s o d y

by christoph brunski

At least one Sunday out of every three successive weekends my father would spend the entire day fixing any one of the three Peugeots owned by our family. The cars seemed almost to be waiting in line, spread along the length of the driveway in a tri-colored ray of automotive despair, ready to submit to tools and techniques that would procure a repair that was, in the end, the product of wasted hours, since the duration of the repair's effect was by far dwarfed by the stretch of time spent in its process.

This unfair ratio, effort to effect, is so common. But perhaps this was, in itself, the magnet that drew my father and me so often to the brinks of mechanical frenzy. From the edge of one cliff to another this thin yarn of a common mission was hurled across the depths of silence which separated my father and me yet proved that we were built of common tissue. (Shared sweatshirts or not, the polarities at which my father and I stood were endless, and forever ornamented these scenes with a subtle, ironic complexity.)

These sessions spanned the seasons, connecting the days when the driveway would scorch your hand to the touch and the days when relentless winter cold threatened to lock wrenches, bolts, or other various vehicular components in closed fingers until springtime arrived.

And what remained constant, constant, constant was the unrelenting steel fist clutching with insurmountable strength any real words we could have spoken, choking them like death-bound doves, and letting them fade before they ever arose. Sadly, our characters were based on an aversion to communication. Thus my father lost himself in the task at hand, and I just lost myself. For as often as my father, on his back, would slide himself underneath the sickly automobile, I would picture myself as an altogether formless entity, floating high above the entire scene and gazing down onto a gem of tragicomedy. Maybe my laughter was the wind and my crying was the sunlight. In the drama that I watched a mute character, seated like the Buddha alongside the locus of repair, nodded insolently to obscene remarks and blankly handed tools into a rectangular shadow whose shape moved from one side of the car to the other as the day walked obstinately onwards to its own demise.

This silence became a vase to be shattered only by derision or mockery: every

opportunity was taken by my father to damn the French for the Peugeot. This man, a product of hand-worked American soil and cultured through an early marriage, would say to his son, who was a future ex-patriot, "If you ever make it to France, I want you to kill the bastards who designed these fucking cars!" At the moment of such assaults, everything accented with the Language of Love became the object of merciless perdition. "These people better be good at something," said my father, throwing to me a glance I did not return, "Because they suck at engineering." The words in my father's phrases so often stepped apart from one another to allow room for profane neighbors. My father, it seems, had never read Flaubert, had never been graced by Rimbaud. (Incidentally - shall it be mentioned? - a friend of mine once dubbed our Peugeot station wagon as La Voiture Ivre.)

Once I asked him, "If these are such miserable cars, why do we own three of them?"

My father made a choking, repulsed sound: From some hidden point in the engine, a disconnected hose had begun dripping a viscous fluid, and a globule had splattered to his forehead. He mopped it off with a dirty rag. "Why don't you just hand me that 30 mm socket, all right?"

The entire history of these hours passed by we two, this mal-aligned apprenticeship centered around faulty masterpieces, is sewn with the scarcity of our conversation. In the middle of silence framed only by extraneous noises - the clatter of wrenches, children playing in the street, a plane flying overhead - I recollected earlier scenes from this compendium of moments which, through incessant repetition, has led us up to the present.

Once, when I was very young indeed, my father had given me a bolt to hold on to while he grappled with some other demon in the engine. I clutched it so tightly that I must have squeezed it out of existence; for when I opened my hands again, or, rather, when I became aware that my hands had already opened, there was no bolt. I explored the ground around me. Had it secretly crept into the grass? Had my father already taken it back with his own, invisible hands? No, and when at length he asked me for it and I declared it lost, he stood there with a look of dismay and near-puzzlement, like a surgeon unable to account for the absence of an organ on which he had just been operating. And as though this all were transpiring in the era before the splitting of the atom, I was left bereft of any understanding as to how such a small constituent could play such an important role to any end-effect.

Those were days in which I should have foreseen that mundane mishaps would have to be taken symbolically if they were to be understood at all; when things can't be discussed, they must be interpreted. Nonetheless, trying to understand exactly how my attitude was derivative of my father's - how I was derivative of my father - instills in me the uncertainty of purpose one feels when measuring lines of poetry.

Effort to effect.

Is poetry so greatly enhanced by the recitation of Greek numerical prefixes? Come, now. I recall school days, the voices of classmates chanting in unison, 'iambic tetrameter, iambic pentameter' followed by a rhythmically demonstrative series of 'duh' sounds; these voices were blurred and glassy to my ears, as I was already far too drunk by the music of words to understand or care about the measurements of intoxication.

Is the distance of time made less turbulent by the subdivision of years and hours? And does conflict loosen its reign simply through being handed down to us from the fathers we modernize through the continuation of our own distinct lives? Time does and undoes its own process; and distance and proximity are caught for a moment, guilty of holding hands.

So it is that when I think or write about my father I have the inclination to dub the word with a capital 'F' in order to demonstrate distance and to escape the task of recognizing the interpersonal link I can neither define nor deny.

There is plastic toolbox in which my father stores the plethora of minuscule Peugeot parts, replacements or spares - the knee-deep tide of seemingly superfluous details that is the by-product of the conflation of electronics and automobiles. One evening as he was sealing shut one of the plastic zipper-bags which contained these trifles, he paused before he threw it back into the box. In his palm he bounced the bag, (in which lay six centimeters of rubber hose imprinted with the Peugeot Lion), considering it, and said, "You know, a lot has changed since I was your age."

Had I said nothing, he would have said nothing, so in loco nihil I asked him, "How?"

He opened the lid of the toolbox and tossed the little bag in among twenty-odd others. "When I was your age, helping my father fix cars, all these little parts and pieces came in metal canisters."

It was astounding to me that the same observation could be used to prove two completely contrary ideas - his, and my own, which for once I made heard as I said, "What? What you mean, then, is that nothing has changed!"

sen ses

by helena wolfe

dry
compressed powder

a factory
how temporary it is

It's destroyed
reused

a wheat field after a rainstorm
wet paper

days of dissent by stephen kennedy cook

I. May, 1971

Pitch a penny, watch it spin
Heads you lose and tails I win
Follow us to the rising sun
All the way to Washington

The angry red light atop the obelisk blinked at me with a hypnotic rhythm. In the morning mists, the solar disk silhouetted the Capitol dome, turning it from white to black. The air smelled wet and thick with river decay and ripening pollen. I stopped mouthing the dumb ass ditty that had rattled my brain since we left Chicago and switched on the radio, where a live-talking DJ shut up long enough to play Country Joe and the Fish, "Be the first one on your block to have your son come home in a box." By the time the Fish finished, I'd rolled past the bronze buffalo on Memorial Bridge.

Hordes poured from busses and vans as I hunted for a spot to park Dana's battered Beetle in a lot next to the Lincoln Memorial. They flowed around us, a current that pulled and repelled like the poles of an electro-magnet. Fearsome in afros or hair to the shoulders, wild mustaches and beards, and faces gaunt from study and drugs, they were no older than we. Red-checked bandannas tied about foreheads and necks gave them the look of latter day pirates. Like us, they wore patched and embroidered blue jeans, heavy boots, blue pea coats or green canvas army jackets stenciled with black peace signs or the clenched red fist of resistance.

The drive from Chicago had left me worn, gritty and greasy. Dana popped from the car as soon as it stopped and whooped with joy on the parking lot's pavement. His copper colored curls flashed in the rising light. Pixie eyes and a mouth turned

up at the corners gave my friend a look of perpetual bemusement.

"Hey there people!" he shouted to the throng. "Sweet home Chi-town has arrived. Cain't start no trouble without us." He whooped again and walked around the tiny car to open my door. "Didn't I tell you, bro'? You're a lucky puppy that I talked you into coming. You'll thank me when you tell your freakin' grandkids how you kicked ass at the Days of Dissent."

We'd grown up together, two white boys on Chicago's South Side. Somehow the same forces that made me a depressed neurotic shaped Dana into the coolest guy I knew, cool in the specific sense of that time: unfazed, perfect without trying. Dana "got political" during the 1968 Chicago Convention in the same way that some people get religion. He turned his talents to recruiting every person he knew -- especially me -- into the "kick-ass arm of the people's revolutionary movement." When I said I'd come with him to Washington just to observe, he told me, "Can't just come to see, got to be."

A woman's loudspeakered voice echoed eerily against the blocky stone buildings surrounding Washington's Mall. A tide of thousands washed over the streets and parkland toward the sound of her voice, too distant to be understood.

People packed the Mall a half mile solid from Constitution to Independence. Dana threaded through the gathering mass, pulling me after him, greeting people he'd never met with embraces. We got as close to the speaker as we could, yet we could barely make out her words. I remember the spicy smells of unwashed bodies and Patchouli oil.

"Dissent, people dissent. D-I-S-S-E-N-T. Know what that spells, people? Huh? Dis-

sent. It spells I-aint-gonna-take-your-war-no-more. No!" The crowd roared. The frizzy haired woman standing at the microphone was white but she talked as black as Rap or Eldridge.

"Dissent, people. Who knows what that means? Huh? Means I-aint-gonna-take-your-

racism-no-more! DIS-SENT, dudes! Means don't dis' me no more or you gonna get sent!" Another roar, louder this time as the throng warmed up in the dawn.

"Dissent! Means close down the war or we'll close down the government! This is the day, people. The Days of Dissent. The Days of Dissent have come! There's no turning back. Power to the People!"

"Power!" the crowd roared back and she stepped down to let another speak, a white youth who would run for Congress twenty years later as a Republican. After him came the Black Panther who had been chained and bound in a Chicago courtroom during the trial of the Seven. No one listening to him that morning dreamed he'd end up a barbecue chef in Philadelphia.

The throng paid little attention to the words. We listened to the speakers' rhythm, nodding our heads and shouting at the right moments, losing ourselves in

stephen kennedy cook

it. Claps and chants rippled through the crowd like the thunder of a gathering storm.

Heads I win and tails you lose
If we make the evening news

By ten the sun had warmed the earth enough to free the smells of wet soil and mown grass. Our friends at home would be stretched out on a lawn reading a book or napping in the intoxicating air on a morning like that but we had no time for spring.

From the platform the speaker gave a signal that Dana and I did not hear. The mass moved as one toward the northern end of the Mall where Constitution Avenue passed between square gray government buildings. We poured onto a street cordoned off by a row of squad cars flashing their lights and a blue line of riot-helmeted police wearing fatigues.

In the distance we could see the White House. I wondered if Nixon was watching us from behind its shaded windows. Antennas bristled from the roof that held machine guns and Stinger missiles, according to Dana.

The march route marked by flashing police cars and police on foot and horseback led away from the White House toward the Capitol end of the Mall. At the sight of the President's house the mass stopped spontaneously. An angry roar erupted from thousands of throats, growing louder as those behind us took it up.

Beside me Dana howled longer and louder than most. His eyes flashed with excitement and he could not stand still even when the march halted. He scampered through the ragged ranks slapping backs and giving hugs, as if by touching others he could share the runaway energy that charged his body.

The march started up again, not turning on its assigned route but heading straight for the police line. I closed my eyes and I was on the highest roller coaster in an amusement park. The restraining bar had just lowered to lock me in. No longer could I escape. Ahead the track soared to straight to the sun until it fell into loops of terror. All I could do was hang on and grit my teeth.

Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh
Dare to struggle, dare to win!

The chant began in a single bullhorn and echoed back from ten thousand voices. Fists jabbed at the sky. Viet Cong flags with their yellow stars unfurled for the TV cameras. From Georgia came a wagon pulled by mules and the Hog Farmers from California danced around us in their whacky clothes and painted faces.

A monkey-like man with a wispy beard inched his way atop an equestrian statue. He carefully mounted the horse's back, sat behind a forgotten Civil War general, and stripped naked. A woman joined him and like a pair of nude circus rid-

ers they posed together in the sunshine.

Only a few yards separated us from the police. An officer on horseback bel-
lowed at us through a bullhorn to remain orderly. Ahead the crowd took up an
angry shout, but I could not make out the words. Dana took me by one hand and
formed those around us into a phalanx of bodies clasped together and moving
relentlessly forward into the maelstrom.

Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh!
Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh!
Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh!

The first gas canister sounded like a distant pistol shot when it exploded. I
flinched and looked around me. Instead of running from the sound and the
smoke, the mass moved toward it.

"It's not tear gas, man," screamed someone. "It's CS!"

"CS!" shouted another. "It's CS!" I had no idea what CS was.

Bandannas went around noses and mouths. I had none.

The gas stung our eyes and throats but didn't stop the mass from advancing on
the police line that separated us from the White House fence. The second or third
whiff made me cough. Up close, the gas became tiny white crystals sparkling in the
sunlight. I remember thinking that it didn't smell any worse and looked prettier
than Calumet City on a windless day. Now and then a brave fool picked up one
of the smoking canisters and heaved it back at the police lines to the crowd's
delight.

The streets belong to the people!
The streets belong to the people!
The streets belong to the people!

Behind Plexiglas shields and plastic helmets, the police linked up and moved
forward to clear the street. The front line stopped. Dana's phalanx dissolved. In
the gas and the chaos, people began to panic. Some fell to the ground, gasping for
air. Others doubled over and vomited or sat down in the street, unable to move.
Those who fled ran into each other or into the police line. Threatened, several
swung nightsticks. Blood flowed from foreheads and tears from eyes. An order was
given and more sticks fell. Police grabbed struggling protesters by the arms and legs
and hauled them back through their ranks to be arrested. Soon the mass backed
away and once more a no man's land of twenty yards separated the two sides.

Above helicopters circled. Clouds of white gas made it look as though war had
come to the nation's front door. Television cameras mounted on nearby buildings
zoomed in on the action. Microphones picked up the screams of sirens and
wounded. Parents watched their children rioting in the streets of Washington and

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tried to understand.

The shock of the first encounter wore off quickly. We grew accustomed to the gas and we learned to give the police their space. Back and forth across Constitution Avenue the tide surged all day hours but never got any closer to the White House. A steady stream of gassed and bleeding youths made their way to groups of soft-eyed men and women wearing red cross armbands. By four exhaustion consumed both sides and the action ceased.

"Man, you blew me away," said Dana as we dangled our sore feet in the shallow water of the Reflecting Pool. "Robby Right On, that's who you are. You're a righteous dude."

I still remember how his praise made me glow. I had met the test and been accepted. For the first time in my life, I felt full membership in my generation and it was glorious high.

Pitch a penny, watch it fall
In the middle of the Mall.
Heads I win and tails you lose
Til I get those homesick blues.

In the evening we joined a group from Florida in a ramshackle camp called Peace City pitched near the Tidal Basin and the Mall. A bottle of sweet Annie Greensprings wine from the Floridians passed around the circle. Like warriors after their first battle, we told our stories of the day, small deeds that through time would grow into legends. We talked until the sun set.

I wasn't surprised when Dana left the circle and returned with a woman. Her name was Fiona Thompson. She had an English accent, a slight figure and blond hair cut short like a boy's. Fiona worked for the British Ambassador as an au pair to his two children. She'd come to witness the demonstration.

Dana told stories of Chicago's streets, the Convention and the Days of Rage, the trial of the Chicago Seven and the sit-ins that shut down the schools. Fiona listened enraptured. As hard as I try, I cannot recall the features of her face except for the way her eyes laughed easily. In the dusk we dined beneath a fringe of pink blossomed cherry trees on granola bars and brown rice cooked over a Coleman stove.

From the Floridians, we learned that the first day had been a feint to confuse the authorities and to sort out fellow travelers. On the morrow the real D-Days would begin. The secret plan was to close down the city of Washington by blockading the choke points of a city built for carriages: the bridges across the Potomac, the circles designed by Pierre L'Enfant. When government employees could not get to work, the government would be forced to close until Nixon ended the war.

We ended the night at Fiona's Georgetown apartment, the converted basement

of a Nineteenth Century town house on a quiet street of gas lights and shade trees. When she invited Dana into her bedroom, I took the living room couch.

I awoke early morning to see her standing above me, taking off a terrycloth robe. She had left Dana in the night to come to me. We made love on her couch, neither of us speaking, afraid to break the spell. Without saying a word she returned to Dana. The next morning I wasn't quite sure that it hadn't been a dream.

Dana ran into someone he knew from Chicago who knew someone who knew someone else high up on the Days of Dissent steering committee. Seems they needed a courier, someone they could trust with a car, to deliver strike orders to the headquarters of units camped out all over the city. In Dana's car, we kept watch in the afternoon outside a church basement where the shadowy leaders met secretly to draw up the targets and assign them to cadres of protesters. By six, we were one of two couriers navigating through rush hour traffic with duplicate sets of orders.

With the help of a drug store map we located each of the camps by midnight. A misty spring rain softened the night air and fogged the windshield. I rolled down the window, stuck my face outside and sniffed the air like a dog, smelling the exhaust and the sensual perfume of lilies of the valley. Washington's streetlights threw a warm yellow light that somehow seemed friendlier than the harsh blue-whiteness of the South Side.

Find a penny for good luck
 Watch your back, you better duck
 Heads I lose and tails you win
 Round and round we go again

We returned to Fiona's to sleep when the route was run. Again that night she invited Dana to her bed and again she left him early in the morning to come to me. This time she didn't leave. At first light she went for a paper and day-old bagels and returned to me. We ate them with coffee and talked until Dana awoke. He seemed to guess nothing about our secret tryst, nor did we tell him.

The nearest D-Day target was Key Bridge, a long bridge over the Potomac that feeds into Georgetown. We set off on foot, not sure what we would find. Dana was unusually quiet, as if he had a premonition of the coming disaster. By the time we arrived, Days of Dissent had failed.

The police and army had arrived first and cleared every demonstrator from the bridge. The same happened at every site and by nine a.m. traffic flowed smoothly throughout the city. Somehow the cops had learned our targets and were waiting when the demonstrators showed up. Every jail in the city quickly filled so they shipped the rest to RFK Stadium.

In disgust, Dana arranged to have himself arrested and sent to RFK. I stayed with Fiona the two nights he was in there and took his place in her bed while he

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spent the time huddled beneath a Red Cross blanket near the fifty yard line. I'd been with only one woman before her and she must have found me to be a challenge.

Dana and I drove back to Chicago before the first rumors began to circulate about Dana in Washington. Someone powerful fingered him as the spy who provided the target sites to the authorities. When it was discovered that the other courier's list included only ten of the twelve sites that the police shut down, his guilt was assumed.

Toss a penny in the sky
Heads I live and tails you die.
Who's the loser fair and square
When death brings peace and life despair?

A week after we returned home I joined Dana for a beer at a Hyde Park pub called the Golden Eagle. From the moment he arrived, something had him very upset. At first I was worried that he had found out about my affair with Fiona. I knew he had called to invite her to visit him in Chicago. Had she let something slip?

I was relieved when he told me what they were saying about him in Washington. His eyes snapped angrily about the room as he talked and his jaw clenched when he sipped his Special Export in the dusky light. We drank late, made a dinner of beer and french fries, and said good night a block away on 54th Street about eleven.

That was the last time I saw Dana. Half an hour later he stumbled into the courtyard of his mother's apartment building four blocks away where he died in her arms, bleeding from more than twenty stab wounds inflicted to his throat and chest by a six inch blade. The next day, tears streaming down her face, she scoured clean the flagstones stained with his blood. The police had no difficulty retracing his bloody steps to the site of the attack, a trash choked lot halfway between Dana's mother's house and the spot we had parted.

The absence of clues, witnesses and motive puzzled the investigating detectives, two white men from the West Side who wore their hair slicked back and shoes with pointed toes. My long hair placed me on their suspect list. They called me into their district headquarters for a polygraph test, to which I foolishly agreed. They strapped me to a machine and questioned me at length about Dana, including our relations with women. My metabolic reactions registered enough movement on the graph paper to create confusion and heighten their suspicions. For a week afterwards they called me every day or so with questions, often ones I had already answered, to see if they could trip me up. Mysteriously their calls stopped and I never heard another word about their investigation.

II. May, 1996

I left Chicago a year after Dana's murder and ended up living in Washington after bouncing around the country for several years. A nervous breakdown a decade ago ended a failing marriage and a frustrated career in journalism. Since then it's been severe depression, institutionalization at St. Elizabeth's, halfway jobs that put food in my mouth and halfway houses like the one I live in now.

Fiona Thompson phoned me yesterday. She's flying in from London this evening and wants to see me. I had not heard from her in all the intervening years. I have no idea how she located me or what she wants from me.

Her call reminds me that this is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Days of Dissent. I cannot keep my mind from wandering back to those events and opening old wounds that never healed. I awake in the darkness, dress and walk two miles to the Mall.

By the light of another May dawn I kneel and touch the gritty pavement of Constitution Avenue to feel again the way it felt when I dropped to the ground to avoid the gas. When I close my eyes I still hear the chants, the screams, the cries of sirens. I sit on the curb and I narrow my eyes so that only slits of light enter. The scene around me shifts back in time, like an old film strip of washed out colors and jerky motions that flicker in the half light. I see again the young marchers, the television cameras, the grim police, Dana's beaming face.

Why are there tears in my eyes? The doctors say that the scar tissue on my soul is a good thing. It's there for a purpose. They've told me to leave it alone.

I rise and walk away. A grove of flowering trees planted since that time beckon me. Along Constitution Avenue near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, veterans sit at a table to sell pins, patches and big black POW-MIA flags. I sit on a park bench and watch a father and son browse for souvenirs. The father's belly bulges over his belt and the son wears a rock group tee shirt and an dangling earring.

"This wasn't here in those days, you know," I overhear the father say. "None of these trees. No Vietnam Memorial, of course. But this is where they gathered for the Days of Dissent twenty-five years ago."

I am not the only one who remembers!

"They came down the street right here, a hundred thousand of them. The gas was flying like a shit storm and the police started breaking heads, yes they did. I was there. I saw it."

They walk away from the souvenir stand and I follow them. Had he lived a happy life? I wanted to find out.

"Cool," says the son.

"Over there they carried Viet Cong flags and chanted Ho Chi Minh."

"You didn't believe that horseshit, did you?" asked the boy.

"Are you kidding? Gimme an M-16 and I woulda showed them what I thought of Ho Chi Minh."

I stop walking and soon they're out of earshot. It is now noon. My reverie pulls

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me away and I follow my feet to Georgetown, a long but pleasant amble that ends in blocks of elegant Victorians planted with azaleas and tulips.

In twenty-five years I have never returned to Fiona's apartment and I don't remember the exact address. I find the street and the building still sports flower boxes and fine brickwork on its eyebrows and doorway. I close my eyes and memories flow into me when I run my hand over the bricks as if they have lain enchanted in the masonry waiting for my touch.

I hear the noise of a front door closing. I look up to see Dana Cartwright walking up the steps from Fiona's basement apartment. He looks just as he did the day he returned from incarceration at RFK. He is still young and vibrant, though his face is streaked and his tee shirt and bell bottom jeans are filthy from a night on the ground. The vision doesn't frighten me. In an odd way, it seems quite natural. If there are such things as spirits or ghosts -- a question I've never much explored -- there could be no more fitting time or place for Dana's to appear.

"Have you seen Fiona?" he asks me in a matter-of-fact way, as if she's just gone out for breakfast rolls. No question could upset me more. I take a step back from the apparition. Has he found out about us at last?

"I-I. No," I stammer and my voice quivers a little. "Haven't seen her at all. Nope."

"Nothing's really changed, has it?" he asks.

I have no idea what he means. "Umm. What the hell is going on?"

He walks up the steps from the basement and sits down on the building's front stoop. "Maybe you should tell me." He flashes the famous Dana smile, white teeth and dimples.

I stay standing before him. "Well, I'm got less hair and more belly," I joke. Fact is, I've only a wispy fringe of collar-length hair left and I've added fifty pounds around the middle. "Guess you don't have to worry about male pattern baldness."

"No, man," he laughs. "Sure don't. You're going to see her this evening?"

"Yes," I say.

"Good. That's what I want to talk to you about."

"Oh." Fear prickles the back of my neck.

"Haven't you figured her out yet after all these years?"

"Fiona? Figured what out?"

He laughs. "Jeez and I used to think you were such a brain. That she was the spy, of course, the one who gave the targets to the cops. Yeah. At first, I thought it was you. Kinda made sense. I mean, you were so tense about D-Days and everything. Even after the first day, you didn't lighten up. Too weird for words, man. That's why I had to have a beer with you that night. To look into your eyes and see if you were the one."

"I wasn't."

He laughs. "Jeez, man, I know. That's not why I'm here."

"It's been twenty-five years," I say.

"Well bake me a cake. There's something else you need to know before you see her. You see, I knew all about you guys, man. I mean, you don't think it was her idea that first time, do you?"

"First time?"

"Man, don't lay that trip on me. It's me, Dana, your main man. I sent her to you, dude. She was your reward. For crossing the line that day. You know, sort of a rites of passage thing?"

My reward? "No wonder she spied on us."

"Hey, she didn't have to go to you. Jeez. She wanted to. The second time, now that was her idea. As for her spying, I didn't know about it at the time." Dana stands up from the stoop and yawns. "Listen, I gotta go. You take care. You haven't been taking very good care, man. Gotta do better."

I back away to give him room.

"You've been stuck in time, man, stuck in the past. That's not good."

"I've had my problems," I admit. "But I've tried to do my best to remember, to honor those days. The things we believed in, the things we did. I've tried to keep the faith. Seems like everyone else has forgotten."

Dana smiles. "I know you have, man, but look at what it's done to you. I never had a chance to move on with my life. If I had, I don't know where I might have gone with it except that I woulda moved on with the times. I mighta ended up like that fat dude on the Mall, lying to his kid."

"He was lying?"

"Sure was, man. His name is David O'Hara. He was a member of the People's Banner, the secret hit squad. He's the guy they sent to Chicago to kill me."

Before I can digest what Dana has said, he's gone, just there one minute and gone the next.

III. Fiona

Despite its name, the Public Eye seems a good choice. It's a quiet restaurant with decent food handy to the downtown hotel where Fiona is staying. Best of all, they know me and I can count on a secluded table.

The maitre d' brings Fiona to my table. I recognize her instantly, for the years have been kind. Hair silver, no longer blonde, still is cut short but stylish. Her figure is trim from diet and exercise. Lines wrinkle her forehead but her complexion still glows youthfully and her eyes light up just as I remember. She wears a tailored business suit that flatters her legs and an expensive perfume. I notice no wedding band.

She gives me a hug. We order cocktails. She inquires about me politely. I tell her very little of the tragedy that my life has become.

"It's been a long time," I say, to kick things off.

"You must think I'm bizarre to call on you after all these years. Especially since

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I never kept in touch at the time."

She drinks her martini nervously and I say nothing. "I'm buying, by the way," she says.

I nod in thanks and drink my beer.

"You see, I couldn't get in touch with you," she says. "I was not what I seemed. But I liked you a lot and if conditions had been different, who knows?"

Her question can't be answered, so I don't try.

"I've come to tell you that, and more. You've a right to know."

"I'm not quite sure what you've told me so far."

"Robby, people will tell you that I was the spy, but it's not true. It's soon going to come out that I was working for the FBI in those days, and that part is true. I'm mentioned in a pending book based on files that have recently become available through the Freedom of Information Act."

"Why? What did you do?"

She avoids my eyes. "Nixon thought the ambassador secretly supported the anti-war movement. He wanted all the dirt on him that I could get. So they hired me. I got a lot."

"You spied for Nixon on your own nation's ambassador?"

"I'm no more English than you are. In fact, I'm Irish. The Bureau found me at Georgetown University, set me up with my cover and trained me thoroughly to play the role. It paid my way through college and I had a job the day I graduated. I don't live in London. I never left Washington. But I wasn't the D-Days spy."

My head spins. She didn't make love to me because she wanted to -- nor because Dana sent her to me. I was her mark, a source for information. She's ripped open the soft tissue of my soul. I'm surprised to feel no pain. When the shock wears off in a minute or two, then it will start to hurt.

"You, you did it for the money?"

"No, I did it for the anger. It was the only time I had to be young. I felt cheated, Robby. My twenties were to be my dream years, the time when this little girl from a little place you've never heard of would wear pretty dresses and dance all night on the arms of handsome, wholesome men. Then she would marry one of them and raise babies. But no. You people had to fuck it up. My world became a raging inferno of drugs and politics, hate and tension. I lost the only chance I would ever have in my life to be young."

"You still sound angry."

"I'm still trying to deal with it."

The waiter hovers over my shoulder and we order. She wants grilled tuna and I ask for a rare steak with french fries.

"It was the only youth I had, too, Fiona. It was the only time any of us had. I guess it didn't work out very well for either of us."

"Well, don't blame me. I fought with every ounce of energy in my being to save a piece of my dream, just a small corner where I could go and live the life I'd

planned. But even that was impossible. Everywhere, everything, everyone was for the war or against the war. There was no time to be young, to kiss on a street corner, to make love on a golden hillside in the springtime. No. Springtimes were for demonstrations. Hillside were for rallies. Streets were for people. Except for this person."

She speaks with such startling vehemence that a couple at an adjoining table stops talking to eavesdrop. Fiona notices and calms herself.

"So why are you telling me all this now, Fiona? Why did you search me out? I don't get it."

"Robby, you're not the only one who's stuck in time."

Her use of that term surprises me. Has she too seen Dana's ghost?

"No, I didn't give the list of targets to the Bureau. There never was a spy. The Bureau didn't need one. Those steering committee jokers were so badly organized and their security was so lax, we just had to pay attention. Hell, anyone who drives to work in Washington could figure out where the targets would be."

A frightening thought occurs to me. "Did you know steering committee suspected Dana of being the spy? Did you know about the Red Banner?"

"Hey, there was no Red Banner. That was just Movement tough talk. I'm the one who tipped him off when he called to invite me to visit him in Chicago. I told him to be careful. So what does he do? He goes out drinking with you until all hours of the night and gets himself killed. What else could I do? When Dana died, I felt so guilty. I managed to get the Chicago police off your case, it was the least I could do."

I don't know what to say so I say nothing. I think of the fat father at the Vietnam Memorial. Our food arrives and we eat in silence.

"They arrested some street punk a year later," she says. "They found Dana's ring on him."

For some reason, I feel better. Perhaps its knowing the truth after all these years.

"Hard to believe it's been twenty-five years since all of that," I say.

"Yes," she says. "I think that's long enough to mourn, don't you?" The check arrives and she pays it with a gold card.

"I think so," I reply. "Do you think that there's time left to dream again?"

"I don't know," she says. "I thought you might have the answer."

"I don't know either. I'd like to find out. Can dinner be on me next time?"

The smile in her eyes gives me my answer.

slate and marrow

by janet kuypers

No one could understand, it was like every morning I couldn't find a reason to wake up. The world felt cold, like slate, like the marble tiles in the front hallway of my parent's house, that floor was always cold, oh, how I'd like to feel the cold against my feet now. But there I was, in some eleven by twelve apartment, room, running from my past, my present. Every morning I would wake up, and I would wake up from that night again - when he came uninvited, or did I invite him? The haze of the drunken nights from then on, wearing the dress, knowing the faceless faces couldn't care less, as long as they could have their way with me later that night. What would my parents think of me now? I'm no longer their little girl. I could feel myself getting older by the minute, I could feel my skin wrinkling, my joints getting stiff. I could feel my bones, the marrow drying up, my bones crumbling away. And every morning I still put on my clothes, got my work together, headed out the door. Could I ever get out of this

cycle? And it was if I had never realized that all this time I was looking for a purpose. And it was you.

When I strolled up to the street singer, I stopped because I saw your face. Why on earth did you think you could tell me your secrets when we only met fifteen minutes before? And just being in your presence made me break down, made me hate everything, made me love everything, made me want change. I'd hit you in rage, I'd lean on you, my slate, and you let me. And it was as if the marrow was back. I could just lay in bed at night and feel the blood running through my body, I could feel the oxygen as I inhaled hitting my bloodstream. I could even feel the marrow, all the cells in my body moving faster and faster. My skin would tingle. I suddenly had power - I could make blood move to any part of my body, I could make a pain go away, I could turn myself into stone, not so I was cold and unfeeling, but so I was strong, immovable. And I did it for me, but don't you dare think for a minute that I didn't do it for you.