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Laughter Past

Jennifer Kircher
St. John Fisher College

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Laughter Past

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The sun was shining hot that day, but the cool breeze made it bearable. It was one of those days that you brave the fact that you're growing older. It saddens you to recall days of carefree innocence, when the only thing that mattered was that you had a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. And you realize that someday you'll be looking back, trying to recapture the feeling of today."

Cover Page Footnote

This prose is available in The Angle: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol1991/iss1/16
He plopped with a sigh into the back seat of the O'Connor's Chevy and looked out the window at the blowing rain. Mr. O'Connor stole a look at him in the rear view mirror and quickly glanced away as their eyes met. How could this have happened, John thought, as he watched a hearse crawl slowly in the traveling lane. They pulled into the parking lot, and the car came to an abrupt halt.

maggie was tired and emotionally drained; she decided to rest after she came home from the clinic. Later that night, when he found her doubled over in pain, he held her and told himself everything would be okay. He rushed Maggie to the hospital, but she had only been in the emergency room an hour when the resident physician approached him, his head hanging.

"I'm sorry, John. We did everything we could. She just—"

"What!" cried John. "What are you saying, man?" He grabbed the resident's shoulders and shook him. "Jesus, out with it! What, what, what!"

"Please sit down." He hesitated. "Maggie didn't make it, John. The complications from the procedure...they were just too much for her." John noticed the nurses at their station laughing. How can they laugh at a time like this, he thought as his stomach turned sour. Responding to the desperate, imploring look in his eyes, the doctor continued.

"Apparently, her womb was perforated, and the solution used...we'll, her system wasn't able to clot blood. She bled internally. It's rare, but it does happen. I'm so sorry," he added, shaking his head.

This can't be happening, John thought. He rubbed his hands roughly through his hair and sat down. The bastard, he thought, what did that butcher do to my Maggie? What did I do to her? I tried to talk her out of it. Yeah, I did. No. God, what the hell have I done? His whole body shook with grief, as he cupped his hands in his hands and sobbed.

Every other life in that hospital, including his own, seemed out of place. It should be in the Garden, he thought. He rose and walked toward it, stretching his arms until the bark met his touch. Then he leaned on its sturdy trunk and wept.

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John stepped from the car and hesitated.

"Uh, I'll be in a minute," he said. But there was no one there to answer. They were already gone.

He turned toward the somber, gray building but stepped away. I have to just sit for a minute, he thought, as he wrung his quivering hands. And then he noticed it, bent so by the wind its branches nearly touched the ground. There on the busy, crowded street, it seemed out of place. It should be in the Garden, he thought. He rose and walked toward it, stretching his arms until the bark met his touch. Then he leaned on its sturdy trunk and wept.

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The sun was shining hot that day, but the cool breeze made it bearable. It was one of those days that you brave the fact that you're growing older. It saddened you to recall days of carefree innocence, when the only thing that mattered was that you had a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. And you realize that someday you'll be looking back, trying to recapture the feeling of today.

I remembered last March, when I decided to end things with him. It was at this same spot, this same beach. I could hear this same ocean as I wiped away my tears of frustration. But, in making that decision, I was filled with an incredible high I could barely put into words. It was as if I had been scraped free of all excess, enabling me to run faster than in all my dreams I'd imagined. Free.

In a different lifetime
You held my heart
We were so certain of ourselves
We built a common dream.

Ten months later, and I'm laying in the sand, watching the tide. An older couple is attempting to take a dip in the water. They're both slightly overweight; she's wearing a pink bathing suit made for the "fuller figure," with a little skirt. He has kind of wild looking white hair, like he forgot to comb it, then stepped into the wind. He's got jean shorts on that are cut off at about the knee, and a white V-necked undershirt, that turns nearly see-through when splashed. Just as they step further into the surf, a wave crashes violently at her feet. The force catches her off guard, and she starts tipping back. The man grabs her elbow with a supportive hand, stopping her fall. He smiles, and gives her a peck on the cheek.

My dear friend
We've lost that dream some time ago
But I'm quite certain it was real
I could touch it, breathe it, live it

A young girl is walking down the beach with her grandparents. They are each holding a small, tanned hand. The breeze picks up, rustling her sunstreaked hair. It flies into her face, catching in her smile. With an easy toss of her head, her hair is taken by the wind behind her. I can't hear their words, only the steady pounding of the surf and the sqaukwing of the gulls, but I can see their laughter. It is full. The air is thick with mist and the girl breaks free of her grandparents' hold and runs and it feels like slow motion. A flock of seagulls swill over her head, encompassing her in a flurry of wings. She stretches her arms, as if trying to gather their strength, and join them on the breeze.

What is that wind of change that comes along
And blows your dreams away
Still, the spirit of that time
Lurks forever in a corner of your heart

An older couple walks past slowly, soaking up the midafternoon sun. They're holding hands. He looks at her and smiles. I'm hoping I'll be happy for so long.

Good-bye old friend
I knew you for one moment in all of time.

For a strange moment, I wonder where you are. I wonder where I am.