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Marty Steed
Jean Wallace
Laurie Ward

Typesetting
Valerie Pasquarella

Copyediting
Audrey Bradley

Cover Art
Keith E. Hahn

Faculty Advisor
Bill Soleim

Special Thanks
The Writing Center
John Palattella
Bill Soleim

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MARTY STEED

The Color of Summer

Dawn's first breath
then bright breeze flies
hue perceived as feeling
embraced by my young eyes

The first a crystal light
reflected just above the blue
fleeting darkness is now gone
wherever the sky's smile flew

Three colors I then saw
arching across a field
over bouncing waves
which beneath white mountains reeled

The first green set on laurel
upon a conquering glance
the essence of triumph at cost
philosophy inbred in a stance

The next a cooling gold,
in eyes that pierce the day to come
her heart tells her all will be well
not knowing where hope is from

The third a regal purple
set within a gift given free
a sense of honor where there was none
not expected shines brilliantly

The three joined all the others
coalescing in a sky of lights
only a few of many
lifting the world into the heights.
I watched you lean against the bar in an alcoholic haze. Your hand clutched the beer bottle as your eyes struggled to focus. A smug grin escaped your mouth as blue eyes scanned the length of my body. The scene so familiar, the crowd so blurred. Three years of watching you destroy yourself had passed. Friendships had been destroyed, lives lost. Yet, still you clutched the beer bottle. As I watched you struggle to keep your balance against the bar, a scene flashed through my mind. The night we met, both of us leaning against each other thinking we had found true love. Wasted nights of watching you lose reality to your best friend, the bottle. My self-esteem trickling down a drain as we both drowned. I looked at you and felt pity. Tonight, I stand in front of you with a renewed strength. The cruel words and silent mind games no longer affect me. The boy I once knew didn’t grow with the girl. The girl became a woman, but the boy stayed a child. I reach out to hug you and a tear escapes my eye. You were so lost, you didn’t know it was good-bye.
Foggy Mists and Illusions in My Sleep

A spell is weaved, by the unseen
As Dust of the Damned is sprinkled over my face
No resistance is made, as I fall into an unescapable,
Deep slumber.

The more I inhale,
Further and further I descend
Into the unknown darkness of my awaiting fate.

I awake in a moon lit room, very familiar to my senses
Memories from the past, suddenly overcome me,
As I look around my floating form.

An uncontrollable urge
Takes hold of my sanity.
Something wicked has entered my head.

Flopping like an empty old rag doll
From random convulsions in mid-air,
What’s happening to me?

Mental pain from the loss of control
Causes my wall to break
Letting my burning anger flow.

As my flaming rage engulfs all restrain
I grab for the long silver tooth
Hidden well, but easily accessible by the bedside.

I’m a madman now,
Looking for prey to rip apart
With my toy.

Swinging the blade wildly
At anything that moved in front of me
I start stalking the house.
Trailing the being
That had the gall
To intrude upon me.

Flying swiftly through the halls
I sense an uncomforting presence
On the level below me.

Down the stairway
I thrust my hovering form
Now it's my turn.

Revenge is mine now
Time to draw blood
From the foolish entity
That took control of me
Only moments before.

Into the living room
My unexpected appearance is made
Adrenaline ready for death
With my dagger raised.

My heart stops suddenly
Weapon drops to the ground
All energy leaves my system
As I look around.

Two cats and a dog
Eyes glowing neon green
Looking straight through me
Then waking me from my dream.

The Green Dragon had his way again
Casting his spells of control and illusion upon me
Then entering my head
As I rest helplessly in a magical unawakable sleep
That only time could cure.

The dagger symbolized power
And the animals love as well as peace
Dragons are only fantasies
I am told by others.

But I don’t know that for sure
For what my eyes can see
And what my mind visualizes
Are two different things.

Reality is made by denying
Deciding whether something exists or not.

Fantasy is real
But it exclusively exists in an individual’s mind
Only reality will make one reject its true existence.

Who am I to judge
What is real or fictitious

For my vision is very narrow
And my knowledge quite shallow
Compared to one who is older and more worldly than I.

Dragons may really exist
As far as I know
Despite what I am told by others.

Because I know...

Most men suffer from an unalterable blindness
That does not allow them to see reality
As it precisely stands.

Their repressed senses filter its pliable images
And ignorantly design others.

Never knowing the uncensored truth
Living a veiled life of lies and delusions.

Cast by the Green Dragon
Every night
While they doze off to sleep.
The Party Never Ends

Alison McCay darted through the door, shut it quickly and locked it, pushing her weight against it to make sure it was shut tight. She threw her keys and the black sunglasses Dr. Kane had given her on the dark grey carpet and checked the lock once more before she flopped down into the fire red bean bag chair which lay beside the window of her dorm room. Her tears were hot, and she could taste the salt on her lips as she let the streams flow down. She was too tired to wipe them away. Her head was heavy, too heavy to hold up, and it dropped back against the bean bag. She wanted to sleep, but the fear of Ed coming back overcame her each time she let her eyelids close for more than a minute. The moon was bright and golden and the light shone through onto her pale face. Black mascara formed big half circles over the puffiness around her eyes. She kept trying to think of ways to tell Shane and her parents what happened. She was terrified they’d blame her, that they’d tell her she was stupid and naive. She didn’t want them to know, but she knew keeping it inside would be too hard to handle. She knew she wouldn’t be able to say the words, she couldn’t even think them.

"At least I was smart enough to go to the hospital," she thought. But the thought of what they’d done to her made her nauseous. The way they had poked and searched, gathering hair and sperm, asking her who he was, what he looked like, how it happened...examining her inside and out. They had made her feel like some wild animal that they were bringing in to research. The bright lights that blinded her vision, the sterile smell of the gown they made her wear, the way they touched her and started at her...she jumped up and raced to the bathroom holding her hand over her mouth so she wouldn’t get sick on the carpet. She lay her head against the cold porcelain and waited. As she threw up she tried to keep her tangled blonde hair from getting in the way. The floor beneath her felt cold and dry and she curled up in a tight ball, hugging her knees to her chest. Her body was sore all over, the bruises on her wrists and legs were dark purple. The color reminded her of the grape Kool-Aid her mom used to bring her when she was a little girl. Whenever she was sick with the flu or a cold she never asked for anything, only the Kool-Aid.

"It makes my tummy happy," she used to say. She wanted to smile at the memory, but the cut on her top lip wouldn’t let her; it only reminded her of what she’d been trying to forget.

She stood up and turned on the shower. Peeling her clothes off she realized Ed had ripped the short-sleeved, emerald green blouse she had borrowed from Jen before she went home for the weekend. A few buttons were missing and the stitching around the left sleeve was torn, leaving a huge hole. She tried to figure out if she could fix it without telling Jen before she came home, but when she looked in the mirror she saw the blood on her collar and knew she’d have to throw it out.

"I wouldn’t be able to look at it again anyway," she said aloud. The blood must have come from her lip. Her eyes moved from the green collar to the darkness of the dried blood on her lip. It wouldn’t stop bleeding on the bus that she caught down the street from Keith’s, and when she finally got off at the hospital her soft white Kleenex was drenched with red. Dr. Kane had put some stuff on it, some ointment like Vaseline. Above her right eye another bruise, this one a little less purple than the ones on her wrists and legs. But it was puffy and swollen, and it hurt like hell. Her hair was a mess, much of it was in knots, kind of like her stomach. Her eyes began to fill again and she turned away, disgusted with herself. She knew she wouldn’t be able to hide the cuts and bruises from Jen.

Turning back toward the mirror Alison began to shake. Her mind flashed scenes from her childhood. She remembered being on the beach at Cape Cod with her parents. Her father had handed her two beer bottles, pointed out the big blue garbage barrel down the shore a little ways and sent her on her way. She had felt so mature, walking on the beach with no one by her side. She smiled and giggled as she passed all the other fathers and mothers and kids as they watched her. They smiled back at her, admiring the way she waddled across the thick sand, her head held high. She kept her eyes focused on the blueness of the barrel, and as she approached it she felt more and more proud of her accomplishment. She stretched to reach the opening of the barrel, and, one after the other, she dropped the bottles in, jumping slightly when each hit the bottom, making thundering booms. She giggled again and spun around to head back to Mommy and Daddy. It was then that the panic hit her. There were people everywhere, so many people. She saw big umbrellas with rainbow colors, sand castles being washed away by the incoming tide, little kids running back and forth, kicking sand at one another or snapping each other’s bathing suits. Moms with bulky, floppy hats and dads with brown thong sandals sat back in their chairs sipping lemonade and reading magazines. No one was looking back at her anymore. No one was smiling at...
her. No one cared that she was lost. She stood, not moving, as her eyes scanned the beach, searching and searching. Her heart throbbed like the bottles, pounding harder and harder as each second passed. Her nose tingled as she fought back the tears, and she reached up to rub it. She was lost. She had failed. The journey could not be considered successful unless she completed it. And she couldn't complete it if she couldn't find her way back. She was hurt, and she couldn't understand why no one was helping her. Where were Mommy and Daddy? Why weren't they coming for her? She was alone in a place full of people.

She slammed her fists into the mirror, breaking it. Sharp, tiny pieces of glass jutted out of her knuckles, and the blood poured out. But she didn't care. Her whole life was falling apart, and there was no one to help hold the pieces, no one to hold her. The steam from the shower began fogging the broken mirror. She grabbed two clean towels. Blood was dripping on the floor, splattering all over the rug. Jen's rug. She quickly wrapped a thin hand towel around her left hand first, then her right. She looked like a boxer getting ready for the big fight. And she had the face to match; a boxer's face when the fight is all over and his eyes are nearly shut from the swelling. She had the cuts and bruises to prove she had put up a good fight. But her opponent was too much for her tiny 105-pound body. She had lost. And he, after rejoicing in his victory, had asked her if she liked it.

With the towels still wound around each hand, she pulled her black mini skirt off, and kicked it into the far corner of the bathroom. Ed had torn her black stockings to pieces while trying to pull her skirt above her hips. Her squirming only made him more excited, and he tore the nylon material, ripping the stockings to shreds.

The last article to remove before getting in the shower was her underwear. She tried not to look at them as she flung them into the garbage and covered them up with tissues, stuffing everything way down so she couldn't see it from where she was standing. She opened the shower door and stepped in.

The water was hot, almost scorching, but she got used to it, and she liked it. "The hotter the better," she thought, knowing that her body would be cleaner, hoping that her soul would be, too. Lathering the soap in her hands, Alison began to scrub. Scrubbing harder only made her feel more dirty, and so began her frantic washing. In her mind she saw Ed's sweaty face, smelled his breath. She knew he had been drinking, had seen him with a bottle of Captain Morgan's in one hand, a Coke in the other, to wash down the booze. She had wanted to find Brenda to make sure she was alright, to see if her fight with Keith was over. She searched the upstairs of the house, looking in each bedroom. When she didn't find her there, she headed for the barn out back, remembering that Keith often brought Brenda back there when his parents were home, and he wanted privacy with Bren. The barn was cool, much cooler than the hot autumn air outside. She was glad she'd asked Jen for her blouse. It was thin and light. There were no lights in or around the barn, but as her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she could make out stacks of hay, the rusty Chevy pickup, and a figure propped on the hood.

"Brenda? Is that you? Are you okay?" Alison asked. "All?" It was a deep voice, a guy's voice. "It's just me—Ed. Brenda's not in here. I saw her get in Keith's car. I think they went for a drive."

She could hear the slurred words, knew he was drunk. She turned to go, but he had asked her to stay. Alison knew Ed, not too well, but well enough she thought. After all, how well do we know anyone?

She spent the next half hour listening to him in the dark. She liked that he was talking to her, spilling his guts about his breakup with Debbie. She liked the smell of the hay, the dirty, musty smell of the damp ground. But after awhile, she wanted to see if Brenda had come back to the party. Ed begged her to stay, but when she told him she'd be right back, he grabbed her by the arm.

She shrunk to the floor of the shower, braced herself against the wall, curled her knees up under her chin and rested her head. The water poured down all around her, and she pictured herself standing naked on a big flatrock in the forest, underneath a sparkling waterfall. She had dreamed of waiting. And Shane had respected that. He questioned why, though, telling her that if they loved each other, it was okay to make love. But he never forced her. And she loved him even more for that. A few times they had come close, but she was scared. She had told Jen just last week that she was beginning to think she might say okay, even if they weren't married. Jen was busy making weekend plans, though, and never really listened. Alison had decided to wait a little longer.

Now she wished she had gone home for the weekend with Shane. But she knew the party would be a big one, and all her friends would be there. Shane understood but decided to go home without her. God, she wished she'd gone with him. He was never going to believe her story. Ed was cute, everyone at college seemed to like him, although Alison thought he was a little too macho for her. That's why she liked that he'd confided in her, showed her his soft side. Shane thought he was a little too macho for her. That's why he liked that she'd confided in her, showed her his soft side. Shane would be hurt. He'd be angry that she did it with someone else. What if he didn't believe Ed rapped her? Why would he? Ed could get Debbie back in a minute—everyone knew that.

The steam cleared her senses that had been blocked from crying so hard. But her mind was still a jumble of thoughts, memories, dreams and fears. Her fingers were wrinkled, like raisins, and she ran her thumb over the ridges. She wanted to sleep there, under the warm water. She wanted it to do more than clean her senses, more than cleanse her body; she wanted it to wash away the pain and fear.

She heard the door slam shut and knew someone was in her room. Her eyes widened, and her heart pumped so loud she could hear it.

"How the hell did he get in?" she thought. Leaving the water running, she grabbed a towel and got out. Frantically, she unwrapped the towels on her hands, barely feeling
the stinging from the cuts. She snatched her robe from its hanger on the door, threw it on, pulled the strings tight. Whipping open the door to the medicine cabinet, she found nothing to help her defend herself, only a can of shaving cream, a toothbrush, some toothpaste and dental floss, and a bottle of aspirin. He was going to do it to her again. She had no way of stopping him. She listened at the door for a voice, but heard none. Her eyes caught sight of something shiny in the junk basket on the back of the toilet. Dumping everything out, she grabbed a pair of hair-cutting scissors. It wasn’t much, “But I’ll jab his goddamned eyes out,” she thought. There was no lock on the bathroom door, so if he wanted her, he could get her. She fought the tears, stiffened her lips and clenched the scissors with both bleeding hands. Biting her bottom lip made the top one bleed again, but she didn’t have time to notice. She could bleed to death for all she cared as long as she stuck the scissors into the son-of-a-bitch’s eyes.

Standing behind the door, she felt the cold tiles of the wall behind her. She knew this was it. She’d kill herself before she’d let him rape her again.

She watched the doorknob turn and the door began to open slowly. She felt her body go stiff, but she was ready. “Kill the mother, kill the mother,” she kept thinking.

“All?” It was Jen. She poked her head in the door and saw Alison’s face, the blood, the bruises, the swollen bump above her eye, and the blood dripping from the fists wrapped around the pair of scissors she held high above her head. Alison didn’t move.

“Oh my God, Al. What happened?” Jen screamed. “It’s just me. Put the scissors down!”

Alison felt paralyzed from head to toe, except for her eyes, which kept blinking, trying to move the tears out of her way so she could see her target. But there were too many tears and not enough blinks to clear her vision. She closed her eyes and dropped her arms.

She remembered the beach, remembered how she prayed for someone to find her. She remembered the joy that washed over her when her squinting eyes finally focused in on her father’s smiling face, his hands waving high in the air. She remembered the tears falling harder, the relief of someone finding her, and she ran faster with each tear that fell until she reached him, his arms sweeping her up, holding her tight, keeping her safe.

“Please don’t let me go, Jen,” Alison whispered, pulling Jen’s arms around her, making them squeeze all the safety in the world into one big hug.
THOMAS J. SEITZINGER JR.

The Play of Life

My life beckons me to change  
As the pages in the back of my mind  
Once memorized  
Are forgotten

I must relearn my lines  
Again  
For my role in the production  
Has been edited  
As everything is through time.

Five years ago I was a child  
Five years from now I could be married.

The person I am today  
Did not exist yesterday  
And will be dead tomorrow

Then who am I?

I do not know.

Probably won’t,  
Until the last day of my show.
MEGAN M. CAVANAGH

Overpopulation

she stands so close to me,
I cannot breathe too well.
I can see that she and I are in the same situation inside us both grows another life
the children we bear now will be born into a world of flesh
for that is all that is left now, only people, just millions of members
of the human race. A tear is falling down her face, or is it mine? I cannot tell you see, I feel her fears,
I know the anguish she feels for her child and the many others but
I cannot breathe too well
she stands so close to me.
KRISTEN BASI

Changes

Spring’s arrival. Birdsongs wake me at sunrise. Dusk creeps in a bit later each day. Newness surrounds me. The freshness of life is a sharp contrast to your painful absence from my world. The summer is not far from reach, but you are. Bitterly, I wonder why I can’t see you once more, why I can’t go back...

Summertimes past. A vision of you on the upstairs porch, smoking cigarettes in your favorite chair. Warning me not to get too close to the railing. I can smell the bowl of homemade soup that you set on the windowsill to cool. I can hear your clumsy guitar strumming. I think your song was the first I ever learned. You never really knew how to play, but to me, it sounded like music. Driving around in your convertible. I was too young to think those days could end. Now I wish for their return...and cry out in frustration, for I know those kinds of wishes are just wasted.

And in my real world, today, Spring is here. What a long winter it was for you. You lived for the times I would breeze through your door. I would try to fit so many hugs and kisses into each visit, as if each was to be our last. I wanted your final thoughts of me to be so sweet. I wanted to tell you that the world hasn’t forgotten you, and I never will. I wanted to give you just a little more life. I always wanted to stay, but I had to go. Now I wonder: where was I rushing off to? I whispered a tearful I love you at our last visit. Did you hear me? How I prayed that you could stay.

I sadly realize I won’t be visiting you this Summer. Nature doesn’t stop for memories. We always knew there’d come a time. I’m grateful to someone, somewhere for giving me the sound of your laughter, ringing warmly in my ears. I can smile through my tears when I see your picture. Somehow, I’ve gathered a little peace and I know that you’ll stay with me.

It is not Death that has taken you from me, it is Life. Life has a beginning and an end. In between we can create so much that when the ending comes, we can embrace it without fear. Memories are eternal. For this, there is no Death.

It’s Spring. Birdsongs wake me at sunrise.
JENNIFER KIRCHER

Flight

Let me fly away.
Know no beginning,
no end.
My flight...
I'll be a drifter
Why not?
Who's the fool that will trust me
I can't even trust myself.

Yet.
But I'm trying so hard.
Every time I think I'm close
I lose it,
I stumble, I fall
Till I scrape my knees
Scrape my courage
Scrape my pride
And carry it all
Like a chain around my ankles.
And I'm so tired of falling.

In my flight
There will be no falls
Dips, maybe
But as natural as the breeze I ride.
No one will catch me.

Let all of you stay on the ground
Scrape your knees
Wear your chains
Stand on your tiptoes
And you'll just get a glimpse of me
In flight.
SUSAN FOTI

Silent Tears

A twisted world of a rounded square
you cut the corners but still run in circles.
The whisper of cries that
echos through the chambers
only heard by the cry of the beholder.
Trying to do right, it comes out all wrong
you try to fight you see you’re not so strong.
What you want to be is so far beyond your reach,
though the life which you desire
dwells over you day and night.
Some ask why the game is so hard to play,
some cheat to win, some try and lose,
some do what’s wrong and dodge the right
and end up in the rounded square
running in circles with endless fear.
The silent tear rains like thunder
all hear the call, but still some wonder.
MARY ALLEN

Street Smart

Victor was having a productive day. He had sat in the park and watched the children on the swingsets. He had tossed a few crumbs to some greedy pigeons, and a clown had given him a flamingo-shaped balloon. In between all the fun, he’d managed to work $4.25 off passersby. That was a burger and a cup of coffee at Sal’s Diner on 31st. Maybe Grace, his favorite waitress, could swing him some free home fries when Sal wasn’t looking. Victor hadn’t needed the guilt-trip scam today; people had been fairly generous. That was something he saved for emergency situations, usually in the winter when it was so cold his fingers turned blue. He’d had a couple of close calls with the freezing temperatures, but the Salvation Army came along at just the right time and gave him some warm soup, or a blanket. And when times got really tough, he would seek out a shelter.

Shelters were his least favorite places. He used to frequent them in the winter months last year, until he woke up to find another street person rummaging through his things in the middle of the night. He had never gotten mad or shouted, he had only watched. The man took 30 cents out of his pants. Victor let the man keep the money. He never stopped him. After that, though, Victor decided he couldn’t afford to sleep in shelters like that anymore. He was never one for fights, and that was what he would have had to do to protect his things in those places.

Today was an exceptional day. Warm, not sweltering. Comfortable and sunny. It was one of those days when it didn’t matter if you had a home or not, because even if you lived in a palace you’d still want to spend the day outside. It was Friday too. Victor had always found the people in New York full of anticipation on Friday afternoons. They knew the weekend was coming, he figured. In a few hours they could let loose and indulge in the city he loved, without worrying about clocks, phones, or appointments.

It wasn’t always like this, Victor thought as he counted seven blocks left to Sal’s. He used to be controlled by his appointment book. One time he charged his dentist ninety dollars for making him wait forty minutes. Time was money then, and he couldn’t afford to be sitting around a couple of close onlookers, he didn’t do it. Victor never cared for that term—BUM. He’d been called it hundreds of times by angry men in power suits. And women with briefcases. And students, aspiring to be those very men and women. They all raced around the streets of New York as if it were a life-or-death matter that they reached their destinations. Not Victor. He set his own pace—and went where he wanted. His career was indulging in the city he loved, without worrying about clocks, money then, and he couldn’t afford to be sitting around someone else’s office just waiting. He looked down and saw a half-eaten piece of pepperoni pizza clogging a sewer drain. Victor remembered the days when he carried a briefcase, and he sprinted to meetings. Those were the years when he dropped a piece of pepperoni pizza into the gutter and didn’t feel a loss. If that had happened he would’ve just bought another one from the next street vendor.

“Out of my way old man!” a power suit screamed as he sprinted by. Old man. This executive looked like he was on his way to a Shareholders Meeting. It was only mid-afternoon, and the rat race was nowhere near over for him. If he had strolled by, exchanged a friendly hello with Victor, commented on the weather, then he might have realized Victor was not old at all. Not having a shower in two months ages a person. It can turn someone like Victor, at forty-two, into an elderly, crinkled old man. Dirt accentuates lines of age.

Six blocks left. Victor had many of these—wrinkles. He’d earned them. Just like the suit and briefcase people were earning theirs now. They were a byproduct of the territory. His investment company had cost him hours of sleep. In
place of sleep he'd gained wrinkles. He'd been constantly consumed with the business. Where was his next account coming from? How could he earn more Japanese executives' business? Who could he trust to hire as an assistant? And later, after tremendous success, a whole new set of worries arose. Where could he find trendy office space on Fifth Avenue? Who would cater the company Christmas party? When would he have time to drop off his drycleaning? Finally, after all the poor investments he had made caught up with him, the final set of worries were confronted. How can I regain this client's trust? How can I stop rumors from spreading in the business world about my poor judgement on the Time Warner account? How will I meet payroll?

He stood at the streetlight. Five blocks left. Victor felt a sharp pain in his right foot. He looked down and saw the loafer's he'd bought for $1.35 at Nel's Charity Shop standing in broken glass. It was a small pile: light green. Heineken glass, it looked like. Imported from Holland. That used to be his favorite beer. He used to drink it on Friday nights at Showman's. That was the classy business bar near the new offices. He never drank a lot, unless a possible investor was looking to get loaded. Then he poured the drinks as fast he could. Anything to create a bond—a trust—with a prospective client. Prospective clients meant new accounts. Now Victor didn't drink at all. It distorts what he sees—all the action, all the beauty, and all the misery.

Victor thought about his old high society friends. They would think he was crazy—considering the city a beautiful place. They couldn't wait to get out to their houses in the country on days like this. They complained about the traffic and the people and the pollution. But the city was beautiful to Victor. He was awed by the architecture of buildings like St. Patrick's Cathedral. He looked at the leaves changing in Central Park in the fall, and watched the skaters in Rockefeller Center in the winter.

Still, he saw the misery of his fellow homeless people, and he winced. Many of them sat on corners soaked in their own urine, drinking themselves to death. Victor still had his mind though—many others had lost theirs. Perhaps their minds froze in the wintertime, never to be thawed again. He had a homeless friend for awhile. Oliver was the same age as Victor, and they used to chat almost daily. Then, Oliver suddenly wasn't around anymore. The word on the street was he'd been stabbed in the night, while rummaging through a dumpster in an alley. Victor never knew for sure what happened to Oliver, but that story was always in his mind. It kept him scared enough that he avoided dark passageways at all times, even if it meant going to sleep hungry and not hunting for food in the dark alley dumpsters.

With only four blocks left to Sal's, Victor watched the couple ride away. It reminded him of his first date with his ex-wife. He had been so nervous. Now it seemed like it never even happened. Mona was beautiful that night. Victor had wanted to impress her so badly that he spent over $250 on that one date, and that was ten years ago! He wanted Mona to fall madly in love with him, and that nearly happened. Instead, Mona fell in love with his money. She and Victor shared what he thought was a whirlwind romance.

Suddenly a horrendous scent was in the air. Victor smelled manure—horse manure. Surely enough, trotting down the street next to him was an old fashioned carriage pulled by a clydesdale, carrying a driver and two people passionately in love. They sat in the carriage kissing, totally oblivious to their hired horse dumping its feces as it strolled down the street. They had obviously spent a lot of money creating a picture perfect date, and they had never even noticed it was being destroyed.

Now only three blocks from Sal's, Victor watched the couple ride away. It reminded him of his first date with his ex-wife. He had been so nervous. Now it seemed like it never even happened. Mona was beautiful that night. Victor had wanted to impress her so badly that he spent over $250 on that one date, and that was ten years ago! He wanted Mona to fall madly in love with him, and that nearly happened. Instead, Mona fell in love with his money. She and Victor shared what he thought was a whirlwind romance. His business was thriving and they consumed all the best they thought life had to offer: Broadway shows, fancy dinners, exotic trips to Bora Bora, expensive clothing and jewelry. They even threw an occasional Jay-Gatsby-style party in their Westchester home, at Mona's urging, of course.
When the business began to fail, Victor needed to start saving his money instead of wasting it all on the unnecessary lavishness that had become customary to their lifestyle. Mona put up with the skimping for a while. Victor believed their love would see them through the rough times. But when there was no money left, there was nothing left for Mona to love. So, she moved on—to find a more "meaningful relationship." The loneliness Victor felt without Mona was excruciating. He had truly loved her and she had been his inspiration to make the business thrive. He had wanted to give her all the best. Without her, all hopes of resurrecting the company back to its powerhouse potential died.

After Mona left, Victor had no one. His parents had died shortly after he and Mona had married. With no accounts left, and no business partners to lean on, Victor found himself looking to his socialite friends for support. He soon learned the people who had attended his lavish parties were not so different from those that went to Jay Gatsby’s. None of them wanted to associate with a has-been tycoon who couldn’t even afford McDonald’s anymore.

After losing his home, his car, and nearly all his possessions trying to accumulate capital to pour into the failing business, Victor lost nearly everything. Everything, that is, but his knowledge of the business, and his ability to cut a multi-million dollar deal. But those things no longer mattered. This inspiration for his work had been Mona. When she left he didn’t have the drive to keep trying. The exhilaration of his career came from celebrating new contracts with her. She was always so happy when he brought in the big ones—the ones that paid so well. After she left there was no one to buy expensive diamonds for with his bigger paychecks, and no one to send roses to with cards that read “I did it!” He had worked for her—and without Mona there was no reason to keep trying.

Victor was closing in on Sal’s. Only two blocks left—he could taste the burger already. He thought about stopping here on the corner and hitting some more people up for money. That way he could get cheese and tomato on the burger, but he decided not to. Victor figured he’d leave the New Yorkers alone on this brilliant June Friday. He decided he needed a break from the begging. Too much in one day really wore him down. Asking people for money was Victor’s least favorite thing about being on the streets. He loved being a part of all the action, and not having to conform to a busy work schedule, but the part he really hated was having to ask others for money. After having so much himself, begging solidified the fact that he had failed. Failed with Mona, and in his career. This was the kind of reality that stung.

A shiny quarter near a trash bin caught Victor’s eye. He walked over to his home, his car, and pick it up. $4.50. He noticed a newspaper in the bin. He brushed off a wet coffee cup lid, and picked it up. Victor kept up quite well on current events this way. He was more informed reading thrown away newspapers than many average Americans who could afford to take a regular subscription—but never do. The presidential campaign was heating up, and he wanted to hear if Cuomo had changed his mind about running. He shoved the paper under his arm, and decided to take a short cut down a back alley to Sal’s.
The alley was covered in puddles. They were the kind that had purple and green and yellow lines in them. Even though they were covered with grease and oil, Victor liked to gaze at their colors. They looked like rainbows to him. As we were trying to decide what the pot of gold at the end of the string of puddles would be, he heard a voice.

"Goddamn this fucking car! Start, goddammit!" A man at the opening of the alley was half in and half out of his car, trying to start it. He had the hood up. Victor could hear the engine rolling over and over as the man tried to force the car to start. Gasoline fumes began to fill the alley. Both Victor and the man began to cough—there was nowhere for the fumes to escape but into their lungs.

"Can I help?" Victor asked the man with a smile.

The man looked up. His eyes bounced back and forth off the alley’s brick walls, until they found Victor and focused. The man squinted at him, peering through his trendy wire-rimmed glasses. He was wearing a business suit, with the required white shirt and striped tie. All navy. His light brown raincoat was wrinkled from what looked like hours of sitting. Little did he know that as he was sizing up Victor, Victor was also sizing him up.

Victor heard him mumble to himself, something about ‘last thing he needed’ and ‘spare change’.

"I say can I help you there friend?" Victor tried again with a cheery tone.

"Look buddy, I haven’t got any money, O.K.? Now just go along on your way and find somebody else to bother," the man insisted. He kept trying to get the car started. The rolling noise continued. So did the coughing.


"Huh?" the man looked at him puzzled.

"I say I think you flooded it," he tried again.

"Oh. yeah right," the man nodded his head as if to pacify Victor, hoping he’d feel heard and then leave. He kept trying to start the car.

"If you let it sit about fifteen or twenty minutes it should start for you, unless there’s something more serious. Shouldn’t be though. I’m no mechanic, but it doesn’t sound it anyway. And it sure smells flooded," Victor said as he got closer to the man, forcing him to listen.

"TWENTY MINUTES!" the man bellowed. "I haven’t got twenty minutes! I’m already ten minutes late...and this fucking car is about to lose me my job!" the man said as he kicked his tire, leaving a rubber scuff mark on his black wing tips. He came out in front of the car and stood before Victor. He was nearly a foot taller, and he peered down and yelled, "The next thing I know you’re probably gonna try and mug me for my AmEx!"

"I’m not going to mug you. I was on my way to have some lunch. If you’d like to join me you may use the phone in the restaurant," Victor said in a courteous tone.

The man calmed down. His face began to resume its normal color, and he caught his breath. He ran his hands through his receding hairline over and over as he stood there thinking. Then he began to slap his thighs, looking for some spare change.

Victor reached into his pocket and produced the shiny quarter he had just found by the trash bin on the street. He handed it over to the man. "Here," he said sedately. "You can call and see if the account is still viable."

Before the man could decline Victor motioned for him to come the last few feet around the corner to Sal’s. The man followed, looking bewildered at the comment Victor had just made. As they walked through the door into Sal’s, Victor pointed out the phone on the wall to the man and then went and took a seat at the counter.

The man sprinted to the phone and dialed hastily. "Hello there, Victor!" Grace greeted him with a smile. "How do wein’ today? Enjoyin’ the sunshine?"

"Just fine Grace. It’s lovely," Victor replied as he picked up a menu and pretended to read it even though he’d been thinking about the burger all day. He looked over the top of the menu and heard the man on the phone yelling into the receiver.

"I was supposed to be in Tower’s office at 2:45 with my presentation. This whole fucking project has given me nothing but problems."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Marlene is ready to dump me cause I have no time for her and today it was going to be all finished once I handed everything over to Tower and now I’m stuck in some shitty diner in God knows where and I just borrowed a quarter from a bum who hasn’t tried to mug me yet, and if I do manage to get the car started now I’ll still be fired for losing the account because I was late!" he gasped for air.

"What’ll it be today then, Victor?" Grace asked.

"I’ll have a burger and a cup of coffee."

"Anything extra on it?"

"Not today, thanks."

"Looks like you’ve gotten a little sun there—on your face!" she smiled.

"Yes, I just returned from my Bermuda vacation," Victor chuckled.

"Oh boy. Then I oughta be gettin a darn good tip from a world traveler!" she winked.

Grace took the menu from Victor in time for him to see the businessman run out of Sal’s. He whizzed right by Victor without saying a word. He went back out into the sunny, warm afternoon. He probably hadn’t even taken the time to stop and acknowledge the beautiful day. Surely he hadn’t felt the warm sunshine on his face, or looked up at the blue sky. Victor figured he was running off to try and save his job—and his life.

He took the paper out from underneath his arm. There were fireworks scheduled tonight, and a reggae band was doing a concert in Washington Square Park. The lights of Times Square would be on too. All that, plus the street performers. His options were endless.
Together we tumble, we titter, we
Fall -
Into and within one another.
"I hate chemistry" you whisper. . .

Our bodies mold to perfection
under the coolness of an Indian blanket.
"I love you" presses against my lips,
urging to pass.

Jack crawls about the heaps and puts his soft paws
on my cheek,
His tail swatting your nose.
I giggle, and instinctively you pull me into your
safe haven.

I feel we’ve existed for centuries:
like yellowed words of a poem, or
the blackened moss upon a decrepit
headstone.

It’s hard to believe we’re worlds apart
now.
Your sun falls while mine is rising.
Written and spoken words cannot replace
steaming mugs of tea, soft pillows, or
Belinda’s song.

Thousands of miles away, Jack peers from your bedroom window -
dreaming . . .
Megan M. Cavanagh

no name - no address

i saw a dream
standing
on the edge
prepared
to sing
for eternal grace.
a vivid light
a color of depth
one small
step
to close
you
out!
LAURIE WARD

A Man Named Don Larsen

Baseball has always held that special magic for me. From the time I was a little girl, I loved hearing about the heroes of the game and listening to Phil Rizzuto on the radio. My grandfather first introduced me to the game before I could even talk. My mother often tells me of the times when he would change my diapers and talk about Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio.

“She understands,” he would assure everybody around him. “One day she’ll love the game as much as I do.”

I remember crawling up on his lap, which seemed to be a mountain high, and listening to him tell me of specific games, inning by inning. My favorite story was about a man named Don Larsen, who in 1956 pitched a perfect game in Game Five of the World Series.

Poppa had Don Larsen’s baseball card. He kept it in the parlor, on top of the big, wooden radio in a picture frame. The background surrounding the card was the infamous pinstripes. The card looked as crisp and unblemished as the day he bought it.

It was in the parlor that we listened to a man named Phil Rizzuto talk about these new Yankees and say “Holy cow” a lot. I’d get a kick out of that. Everyday someone hit a homerun, I’d sit and wait for him to say it, and then I would burst into giggles.

Every Sunday we’d go to Poppa’s house “for coffee,” as the grown-ups put it. I would run into the parlor as soon as we got there and I would stare at Don Larsen. He seemed bigger than life. I was never allowed to touch the picture frame with the baseball card in it. I just looked at it. Soon Pop would come in and scoop me up into his lap.

“Who do you want to hear about today?”

I’d giggle and smile. “Don.”

He’d roll his eyes. “Again?”

“Tell me about Don, please, Poppa.”

He’d start the story slowly, trying to be more dramatic with each telling of it. I must have heard that story fifty times by the time I was five.

“It was cold in New York. Game Five of the World Championship Series. I was excited just to be there. It was my first World Series. Don Larsen was starting the game for the Yankees against the Dodgers.

I’d stare at the card throughout the entire story. I could almost feel the wind at my back and see my breath in front of me. I smelled the peanuts and popcorn. As each inning passed and the possibility of a perfect game neared, I felt the excitement of all the men and women in the stadium.

I squirmed in his lap, as the story stretched. “Skip to the ninth inning, Poppa.”

“There were two outs in the top of the ninth.” He hushed his voice, building the suspense, even though I knew the outcome. “With one last batter, the crowd was on its feet. No one dared breathe. We sat back with each pitch, breathing a sigh, once the ball pounded in the mitt of the catcher. Dale Mitchell was the last out. He never broke any records, but he’ll forever be an asterisk in any baseball encyclopedia.

“There is nothing to compare to the feeling of watching history take place. It might not have been as important as a peace treaty or the assassination of a president, but I watched history. I never saw any president get shot or any peace treaty get signed — I heard about ‘em, read about ‘em, but there is nothing like being there.”

I never forgot those words. They never changed with each telling of the story, but they grew more empassioned. It was as if he were a young man again, sitting in the cold New York weather, rooting his team on and getting not just a win, but a spectacular show as well.

When I was about eight or nine years old, I went through a phase when I wanted to act like a little girl. I stopped listening to Phil Rizzuto on the radio, and I traded in my Osh Kosh over-alls and baseball hat for frilly dresses and ribbons in my hair.

I look back now and see the love my grandfather had for me. It was a conditional love — not that he meant to hurt me in any way. But Poppa was from the “old country” and was set in his ways. He wanted another grandson, and when I was born, he molded me into the boy he wanted. When I turned into a “little girl,” he didn’t stop loving me, but he stopped paying so much attention to me. Things were never the same between us. I still enjoyed baseball, but there were other things in my life that were important, too. I guess, I was just growing up.

I thought about my Poppa as I made my way through the crowd, past the smell of hot pretzels and stale beer. It was July 4, 1983 — a day when most families were sitting around the grill in the backyard — but I was on my way to my first Major League baseball game with my brother. The Yankees were playing Boston, and Dave Righetti, a tall, skinny kid from California, was starting for the Yankees. He had been the 1981 Rookie of the Year.
I don’t remember who the last batter was or even what the people around me were doing during the ninth inning. I thought about Don Larsen and wondered if he was watching. He had been the last Yankee to pitch a no-hitter, and on this day in 1983, Dave Righetti became the first Yankee in twenty-seven years to pitch a no-hitter. I felt all the excitement my Poppa said he had felt. I had watched history. It was a common bond my Poppa and I had. I felt like his “buddy” again. The distance that had grown between us was now gone, with the final pitch of the game. As the catcher ran and hugged Dave Righetti, I felt that my Poppa and I were on the same level once again.

When my Poppa died in 1980, he left me his 1956 Don Larsen card. To me, it meant that we never really grew apart entirely, just a short separation. The card sits on my dresser next to another card — a 1983 Dave Righetti.
DAWN WHITED

Boyshell

You
Your cracked mouth open
Darkness
swallowed within
Echoed
air whistled
inside.

I did watch you.
To knock you
Down
or hold you
Up
a life would crumble.
I did hate you.

He hit his existential
Crisis
early, they'd said.
Early
I did love you.

Did you find your Peace?

Never, in the
End.
Just a dead friend.
CASEY

Night Breeze

Rustling, shuffling, flapping,
A night breeze blows through.
I hear the whispers of the hills,
The gossip of far forests.
Enthralled, I encourage,
"Go on! Don't stop! Tell me more!"
At my bidding, the air rushes past my ears,
A frenzy of news and leaves.
This evening forum fills my mind,
The voices of the wind inform me.
There is no sharp language in the darkness,
Only murmurs of communication.
... and I’m paying in pain
but it’s the cost of the high
‘till the weight of the secret
and the weight of the lie
makes my heart want to burst
feel the ache as time goes by
getting better and worse
getting better and worse
and there’s a screw that I tighten
as I dream of the kiss ..."

“Splintering Heart”
Marillion

Christ, those eyes. Those big, soft, amazing brown eyes. They just beg to be stared into. And those small yet full lips - they’re so inviting. To watch them mouth my name would be ... ethereal. And the shoulder-length brown hair, pulled back into a ponytail and styled in a way that’s both timeless and contemporary, its timelessness being the reason for its fashionable style. What makes all these features the better is the fact none of them are highlighted or hidden by make-up. Her beauty is natural. In a word, she’s perfect; ironically, that’s the cause of so much of my confusion.

“She” is Baine Elizabeth Murphy, a waitress at the diner frequent. I go to this diner, simply called “Restaurant”, three or four mornings a week on my way to the small college where I teach Recent American History. I also go there for the occasional lunch. I don’t go, though, for the food; I go to see Baine. I’ve been going to see her for about four years now, always making sure that I get a table in her station. On busy mornings, she only has time for a quick hello and to take my order; during slower times, we talk about a number of things, sometimes at great lengths. We discuss movies, books, politics, current events and our major mutual passion, music. We both consider music of all types essential to our lives and can talk for hours on end about it, particularly modern music. I even teach a class about the history of popular music, which Baine may take next semester. She doesn’t know it, but she often helps me plan my lessons for the coming weeks. What she also doesn’t know is how badly or how long I’ve wanted her.

I’ve wanted Baine for as long as I’ve known her; for as long as I’ve realized how perfect she is. I don’t want to say that it was love at first sight since I don’t believe in such things, but there was some... experience the first time we met, something intangible but definitely there. This longing for her manifests itself in so many small ways throughout the days. When there is a note from my student assistant with an unknown number on it, I wonder if it’s Baine’s; when I’m at my desk, buried in work, and an unexpected knock on the door draws my attention, I wonder if it’s Baine, armed with nothing but her infinite beauty and proclamations of affection; and when there’s a letter in my mailbox with an unfamiliar zip code or writing style, I hope that it’s the invitation to Baine’s for dinner and conversation. Sadly, these things never happen and remain a part of my secret wish list where they have resided for so long already.

When the weight of this secret passion gets too suffocating, I screw up the courage to ask her out but always abandon myself at the last moment, saying that she’s too busy at the moment or that I’m running late and will miss a class or that there isn’t a place in the conversation to work in the question. Of course, this is bullshit, and I know it. I know that it’s merely a matter of opening my mouth and forcing the words out. It’s that simple. Or is it? Objectively, it’s only a question of asking her out; personally, there is so much more to consider: what happens if she says no? do we stay friends? can we stay friends? will we want to? What if Baine says yes? will we find ourselves entirely incompatible? or will we find out that we’re not the people that we thought we were? To love her, and be loved by her, would be otherworldly, intoxicating; to have her love crumble at my feet would be devastating, incomprehensibly empty, rendering life a useless burden.

In Baine, I see perfection. The way she’s cynical and skeptical at just the right times; how she’s inquisitive and intelligent in all that she does; in how she finds the humor and laughter in each situation; in how well-read and informed she is; the way she manages to find the word I’m looking for to finish my thoughts; the way she smiles; the way she is. I want to revel in this perfection of hers, let it guide, shape, mold, define my life, I want to run and shout my feelings for Baine. I want Baine. I want the courage to tell her that I want her. I need the courage to tell her. I need Baine.

If only she knew how many nights we’ve spent together, how often we’ve passionately voiced our affection for one another. And if she only knew how many times, in my mind, we’ve had dinner by candlelight, a dinner I made especially for her, and how we danced slowly, scoring points with one another as Bryan Ferry or Joe Jackson serenaded us
As her dress fell to the floor and we made love right there, too eager, too anxious, too passionate to make our way to the bedroom. It only she knew how many times I’ve woken up next to her. If she only knew. If she just knew...

So why don’t I tell her about these desires, about these deep, sincere feelings that I have for her? Because I’m scared. If we get close enough to share intimate dinners and make love on dining room floors, then this image, this perception of her perfection would vanish forever. I would know things – worries, cares, secrets – that would erode my view of the perfection that accompanies her. I would see her flaws; flaws that daily conversations at a restaurant don’t afford one to see. I would know things to do and say that could hurt her in unimaginable ways. I would know all her vulnerabilities and tender spots... knowledge that would be too painful for me to possess. It would force me to admit that she’s fallable and imperfect which is exactly what I don’t want to do. I want to keep her encased in my romantic fantasies and away from the imperfections of everyday life. I want to keep her perfect.

If only I knew how to reconcile my fears with my desires; if only I could make Baine’s flaws a part of her beauty instead of distinct from it. So many times I’ve opened my mouth with words of affection for Baine about to cross the threshold of my lips only to have these goddamn fears of mine steal them away at the last second, making me all the more aware of them. Instead of saying what’s on my mind, my heart, my very fucking essence, I impotently end up asking Baine if she’s seen DeNiro’s new movie or read the new John Irving or heard the new Rush CD, not really giving a damn about her response at the time, only seeking to salvage any shred of respect for myself to build on until the next time that I attempt to profess my feelings to Baine.

Someday I will announce these feelings to Baine. I’ll sit her down, take her soft, cared-for hands into mine and vocalize every thought, feeling, wish and longing that I’ve had for her over the years. And then I’ll kiss her so passionately that every nerve in our bodies will release the well of feelings that have been collected and suppressed day after day after day as we cross the divide between fantasy and reality. I just don’t know when this day will come, when I don’t care about being late for class or the conversation offers me the opportunity to ask Baine out. I don’t know what will cause the conversation to turn to an opening for me to ask the question. I don’t know how the question will be asked. Or when. Or even if it really will be asked at all. I only know why it needs to be asked.

So here I am, trapped by my own insecurities and hurting because of them. Every part of me aches to be joined to Baine; every part of me is also terrified of the things that I’ll learn because of it.

I want to hold her, touch her, kiss her, love her, consume her. But I can’t; I won’t. I want to keep her perfect. And how often in life do we encounter perfection?
JENNIFER KIRCHER

Circle

Alone
Searching
Choosing
Reaching
Strength
Hoping
Frustration
Someone
Someone
Needing
Leaving
Stability
Realizing
Souls
Doubting
One
HEATHER LOBBAN

Lost Youth

Walking on broken sidewalks
Is that a body on the apartment steps?
Did he ever dream?
My dreams are folded in my pocket
For they must wait.
Papa hasn’t been home in...
Mama is always sleeping
Only broken sidewalks as I
stare in the distance.

No school today
The girl next to me is due.
Didn’t do the work anyway!
Almost forgot - School is shutdown
for being unsafe.
Did you ask about that dream?
Still in my pocket.
Can’t think about that now.
Two men arguing at the corner
Better go.
Let’s stick to despair and
leave death behind today.

Home is where...
Mom is still sleeping illegally.
Through the window-
Two men with guns at the corner
Standing on broken sidewalks
The creases in my dreams
must be soft and brown
But they must wait.
Hidden Treasure

They’ve started again. Their yelling gets louder and her mother throws a vase at the wall. It explodes with a shattering crash. Her father has come home from O’Leary’s, reeking of whiskey and stale cigarette smoke, and her mother has spent her time awaiting his return with more than a few gin and tonics. As they begin to scream accusations and threats back and forth, she retreats into the linen closet once again. It’s quiet in the linen closet. It’s double the size of any other closet in their flat, with many blankets and towels to muffle their drunken screams.

“How could you” and “Don’t you dare call him” and worse grow quieter and quieter as she retreats farther and farther back. It’s safe in the back of the closet. Soon, she enters into her own world. The piles of blankets become the columns outside her Southern plantation, while Teddy doubles as Rhett Butler. “Why, I do declare!” she drawls in her best imitation of Scarlett O’Hara, a towel wrapped around her head to emulate Scarlett’s auburn tresses, “As God is my witness, I shall never go hungry again!” This poignant moment is broken only when she hears the telephone being ripped out of the wall.

She then transforms her safe haven into the Old West, with herself as Annie Oakley. Now, Teddy is her faithful sidekick as she rides a makeshift horse made from two musty suitcases. As she rides into town, the people scatter for fear of falling victim to her wrath. She dismounts and says, “High noon. Be there,” to her arch-enemy, Black Jack from Dodge City. As Black Jack is raising his rifle, the Christmas tree in the parlor is being ripped down, and a cacophony of broken glass and broken dreams reverberates through the apartment.

She changes her locale to the South Seas, and becomes stranded on a deserted isle. She makes a shelter from the tropical storms our of garment bags and a vacuum cleaner, which truly could pass for a palm tree in the dim light. As a gale howls outside, she hides in her hut and makes coconut soup for her supper. Their screams are her storm, and the bolt of lightening occurs when her mother crashes to the floor, the recipient of another of her father’s staggering blows.

With that, the flat grows suddenly quiet. As if awakening her from a dream, she can hear the church bells down the street faintly tolling the hour. She knows that, very soon, she will go into the parlor and find her mother passed out on the overstuffed sofa and her father sprawled across the mottled green carpet. She knows that she will then find the faded afghan to cover her mother with, and the crocheted pillow to place under her father’s head. Then, she will pick up the Christmas tree and salvage what she can, and try to put a little order back into the disarray that once was their living room. And tomorrow morning, she will awaken early and brew fresh coffee for her father’s hangover and prepare an ice-pack for her mother’s black eye. She knows she will do all of this tonight, and on the many nights like it that will follow. But for now, she stays in the closet, and soon she becomes Bluebeard, Terror of the Seven Seas, sailing off to find fame and fortune...
MEGAN M. CAVANAGH

Downtown

Do not wait
for what may come
struggle,
pursue,
follow,
and bring about tomorrow.
Do not
lie down-
do not rest
for if you do-
you may not
rise.
Have strength,
have faith.
Use instinct,
be brave.
You’re young,
and
psychotic.
Wishful Thinking

it starts with a smile
but does it ever end that way?

look at those eyes
such a deep enveloping color
is that what you think - it's just the eyes

he pushes his hair from his eyes
his green eyes
his flitting eyes

he talks
not to a thing but to me
a person

i can look deep into those eyes
and see...
What do i see...
i know What it is

yet do i really want to see It
it's just a matter of time before we depart
maybe never to see each other again
left only to wishful thinking

life is like that
but can it ever end with a smile?
It had been hot and dreary in the mountains the previous few days, but on this particular day, the humidity seemed intent on dragging down all which existed. The traveller, drops of sweat falling from the ridge of his brow, gazed skyward, hand shielding his eyes from the flickers of sunlight peeking through the relenting clouds. It had been days since his last meal; he had been sustaining himself with berries and the odd unfortunate jack rabbit which hopped across his path. To look at this man, one would almost certainly be struck with the feeling of non-identity—a sense of misplacement which led one to believe that this man would not fit in anywhere; not in an office building, a prison cell, or a circus trailer. An odd aura of mystique and psychosis surrounded him, like a stone-hearted hit man given to spouting couplets of Chaucer from time to time. He did not know what his destination would be, but as he hiked further up the mountain path, a feeling not unlike a homecoming swept over him. He smiled to himself.

Rachel opened the wooded screen door of the expansive rustic house and trudged down the steps, a collection of Faulkner's short stories clutched in one sweaty hand (she was currently engrossed in Barn Burning), and a dewey glass of iced tea in the other. As she stepped across the lush backyard, the morning mist gathered around the hem of her flower-printed cotton dress as if in worship. Her long chestnut hair hung in limp waves around her thin shoulders—she had not bothered to wash or brush it when she woke up, for Gary wasn't there to see her. She paused, thinking of him. Just the sound of his name made her stop suddenly, letting hate fill her soul. Hate him as she did, it was a passive loathing; an emotion that would remain locked inside of her. Caught between the world outside, which she loved—the sweet melodies of the birds and the smell of honeysuckle on a warm day, and the world inside, a world in which her identity became that of bondswoman, submissive laborer, and most repulsive—object of brutal passion to her husband's commanding presence. Living in such a way, Rachel always felt as though she were drowning in a sea of extremes; not allowed to be anything but what Gary required of her. As her mind clouded over and her vision began to blur with images of her tormentor, she suddenly felt a stabbing pain. Almost as if attracted by the thick smell of abhorrence, a hornet had stung her right foot. Limping painfully over to the stone bench placed before the garden entrance, she collapsed in a heap and sat, weeping blindly. Mechanically, she held the cold glass of iced tea to the swelling mass on her heel, rolling it back and forth over the area. As the sobs waned, she found herself idly contemplating the idea that wherever Gary was concerned, some form of pain was sure to follow, whether in the form of a slap, a rope burn, and yes, even a bee sting. She giggled at this last thought, her hair falling across her pale face like a curtain and, looking up, was startled to see a man standing not twenty feet from where she was sitting.

"Ethereal," he thought to himself as he gazed at the woman. She was very beautiful, and a welcome sight to his sun-strained eyes. Yet there was a deep and penetrating sadness about her, and he felt an inexplicable urge to help ease her pain, whatever pain that might be. She looked up at him suddenly and gasped. He had not meant to scare her.

"I'm sorry—I probably should have spoken up and told you I was here before scaring you half to death," he said.

"Who... are you?" she asked timidly.
“My name is David—I’ve been hiking in these mountains for days, I had no idea a house was here.” He wanted to talk to her more in-depth, to get at the root of her despair, but he didn’t want to frighten her off.

She paused and then said, “I’m Rachel. My... husband and I live here.”

He noticed that she flinched when she said “husband.”

“Where is your husband?”

She didn’t hear him. Her eyes had a glazed look as she stared at the ground at her feet

“Uh... where is your husband?” he asked, his voice louder.

Rachel’s head jerked up. “Oh—he’s away on a business trip. In Chicago. But he should be back this weekend,” she added cautiously.

David noted that she didn’t seem afraid of him specifically, so he decided to test the waters further, and sitting down next to her, said good-naturedly, “Well, do you think you could spare a room and some food for a poor hungry stranger, even though you barely know him and he has no money to pay you with? Although I’m sure my witty companionship will more than make up for my lack of financial status.”

Rachel couldn’t help smiling; his offer was tempting and he seemed nice enough, but she could hardly board a perfect stranger. David saw the indecision on her face and said, “I assure you, I’m totally harmless, unless you call Kerouac a deadly weapon.” He reached into his backpack and pulled a copy of The Dharma Bums out.

“You have Kerouac?” Rachel couldn’t hide her excitement. “I’ve heard so much about him, and I’ve always wanted to read some of his work.”

“Why didn’t you just buy the book?” David asked.

“Well, I... I guess I just never got around to it,” she replied, staring at the ground again.

“I promise, if you can put me up for the night, you may peruse Kerouac to your heart’s content,” David replied, a smile spreading across his face.

Rachel laughed. “Okay, okay. You can stay.” Her look grew serious, as if a cloud had passed over her face. “But you must leave by Sunday. That’s when Gary gets home.” She felt at ease with this stranger. When she looked at him, she was aware of a weird sort of energy pass between them—not sexual, more like a heightened perception, as if he understood all of her thoughts and desires. She trusted him, although she couldn’t understand why, because there was an odd air about him that she couldn’t quite place.

“No problem. By the way, what day is today?” asked David bemusedly.

Rachel grinned. “Today is Wednesday. Now, how about lunch? I was just going to make something for myself, but it will be nice to not have to eat alone again.” She said this as if she ate alone every day of her life. The two rose from the bench and walked into the house as a breeze swept through the yard, rustling the tree branches.

David and Rachel spent the rest of that day and all the next talking about everything from books to politics. They found that they shared a love for Mozart and pizza, and Rachel was fascinated to hear about David’s travels all over Europe. She herself had married young, and had never had the chance to “see the world”. They discussed ideas on current world topics, and discovered that they agreed on almost everything they talked about. In all of their conversation, both were aware of a kind of metaphysical thread binding them together—it was as if they had been friends all their lives. For Rachel, it was wonderful to simply talk to another human being—she had felt isolated from people for so long.

On the second night of his stay, David decided to try and get Rachel to open up about Gary. He felt very close to this woman already, as if they were kindred spirits. He thought of himself as her priest, who could cleanse her of the fear and insecurity she seemed to possess. He had to know what was going on in her psyche, and more important, to make her talk about it.

After dinner, the two sat before the blaze in the fireplace; the evening had become damp and chilly. Holding his mug of cocoa carefully, David
CIPRIAN ALMONTE: Enjoying the Few
turned to Rachel and said, “Do you get along with your husband?” There was no emotion in his voice, and his eyes looked into hers intently, prodding for an answer.

Rachel became suddenly nervous, and stood up quickly. She walked over to the fireplace and pushed absently at the pieces of wood with a poker. “Of course I do.” There was a slight tremor in her voice. “Wh... Why do you ask?”

He could sense now that she was afraid, but he was still filled with an almost brutal desire to break her down completely. He continued to stare at her, his gaze never faltering.

“I know you’re not happy with him. I can sense your pain... I want to help you stop the pain.”

Rachel was truly frightened now, but she tried not to outwardly show it. She felt herself starting to lose control, thinking about her monster of a husband, but still, she struggled to remain calm.

“Oh, c-could we talk about something else?” Rachel pleaded, rising from the hearth and stumbling over an iron cat lazing next to the fireplace.

“I think you need to talk about this. Rachel, believe me, I can help you stop the pain. Together, we can do this. WE CAN STOP YOUR PAIN.”

“Pain...stop the pain...stop the...” Rachel’s head spun with the incessant words. “WE can...stop...pain.” Her mind flipped backward, to the time she had forgotten to scrub the kitchen floor, and Gary had rewarded her with a broken arm. To another incident, when the quilt on the bed had been rumpled from her previous nap, and Gary accused her of inviting other men to their house while he was working. The way he had shouted at her, alternating between insults and blows to her head with a rolling pin, the way she began to believe him when he called her a lazy, stupid bitch who wasn’t worth the food she put on the table. It all came flowing back in one big wave of...

“Pain...we can stop...trust me....”

“Alright!” Rachel screamed. “You want to talk about it? I am sick of being afraid all the time, not being able to do anything that might draw my interest away from him. I have no friends, no hobbies. I have NOTHING! Do you remember that copy of Faulkner I was reading the day you came? I’ve been hiding that for years, waiting for the chance to read it without him seeing. I hate him! You said I have a beautiful house, but it’s not mine; nothing is mine. Everything is this damn house is his. HIS!!” Rachel sobbed with despair. “Including me.” She collapsed as the sobs came harder.

David watched the pathetic figure slumped against the wall, heaving. Now he knew it would be alright. He could help this woman now. He felt sorry for her but made no move toward her. Still standing in place he said, “You know Rachel, there are solutions for this sort of problem.” He laughed, a trace of malice in his voice. “You might call me the vigilante of domestic problems.”

“I hate him.”

“I know, and I understand. It’s good that you realize that. Now you can begin to purify your soul of the poison that has been interfering in your life,” David said quietly, looking at her intently.

“But how?”

“Well, by eliminating the source of the problem, of course!” He laughed again, then became sober. “You see, it’s so simple.”

“Do you mean kill him?” Rachel asked dully.

He was surprised and pleased at her bluntness.

“Yes,” he said simply. There was a pause.

“I’ve thought about it before...but I’m afraid...” Rachel’s voice trailed off.

“I’ll take care of everything. Come here,” David commanded and as if in a trance, Rachel rose and reached out toward his outstretched hands. As his hands grasped hers, Rachel could feel a definite energy pass between them.

“Ahh, yes. I knew it. You’ve always possessed the power to carry out your dream, you just didn’t know how to direct it,” David said.

Rachel wondered vaguely what he meant, and then it didn’t matter, because, gazing into his eyes, she became lost as the irises of his eyes began to swirl and change color. He smiled at her, and she smiled back as a wonderful sense of peace came over her. Everything would be alright now, she thought.
The old grandfather clock struck ten, and Rachel opened her eyes to find herself sitting across from David on her bed. Actually, Gary's bed, but Rachel pushed that thought from her mind. Candles were placed sporadically across the comforter, and they provided the only illumination in the dark room. David, eyes shut tightly, was swaying back and forth, humming a low, monotonous tune. While Rachel wondered what he was doing, she felt the loathing return—a slow burn that grew in intensity, and seemed to fill every inch of her soul. She was aware of Gary's presence, not physically, but mentally. David stopped swaying and began crumbling some dried herbs into a liquid mixture. He handed the mug to Rachel.

"Drink. And while you do, think about everything Gary has done to you over the years—the pain, the degradation, the isolation. Remember everything and concentrate on his very being."

Rachel was too scared and curious not to obey. She drank the strange-smelling potion, and immediately a feeling resembling sensory overload crept over her. It was as if she were in many places at once. She saw many different scenes in her mind, and a few of them were from her own life. Gary's face flashed in front of her, but she did not flinch. She was amazed at what was happening. Aware that David was drinking the same mixture, she faintly heard him say, "Hold on, Rachel. Just let the visions come—don't fight them. And when I tell you, take my hands. Your pain will soon be gone."

Rachel's head spun as the scenes came more urgently. She began to feel sick, as if she were actually in motion. "Have I been drugged?" she wondered silently. She remembered David's words and relaxed. Finally, the scenes running through her mind slowed, and then stopped. A new scene, a constant one, was in her head now. She was looking at Gary! He was in a hotel room, drawing a bath. She looked down upon him as if she were floating high above the room, and she felt powerful. Power over Gary, over the events of her past, and over what the future would hold. Finally, she was in control.

"A clean bastard, isn't he?" David's voice sounded in her head, startling her. She felt linked to his brain, and realized that he wasn't speaking—what she was hearing was him thinking. "Weird," she thought absently.

Gary moved to the bathroom, disrobing. He climbed into the water and slid down among the bubbles, closing his eyes and sighing. On the counter next to the tub was a radio blaring out a depressing country tune. Rachel took special note of the long black cord running from the radio to an outlet in the wall—a lifeline. Still feeling the pain of her past, she let the hate course through her body in violent waves.

"Now," she heard David say calmly. Eyes closed, their hands came together. Instantly, a surge of electricity raced through their grip and a wild wind came from nowhere. Rachel instinctively knew to concentrate on the radio. As if on cue, the radio slid two inches to the end of the counter and fell neatly into the tub. Rachel smiled with pleasure as she saw Gary's eyes pop open while his body began to jerk with fierce spasms. Eyes bulging now, Gary managed to extend his anus to an invisible being and scream, "Rachel!" He was dead before the last echoes of his death-cry had reverberated around the room.

Slowly, the energy between David and Rachel fell away and, shaking, Rachel opened her eyes to see David slowly raising his head from its previous position, lolling to one side. She felt as if she had just awakened from an incredibly bizarre nightmare.

"Did...did that just really happen?"

David smiled reassuringly. "Yes. It did. You're free now. You can do anything you want from now on."

Rachel let his words dissolve through her, thought for a moment, and said, "Let's get a pizza."
JENNIFER KIRCHER

Dizzy

You asked for my thoughts
I collected them
Spun them together
Until they were a song
Which I gave to you

You asked for my energy
And so I danced
To make you smile
To make you laugh
To make you love me

But you never really
Asked for me
Still, I spun and danced
Twirled and sang
Wishing you would, wishing you would
I just twirled, twirled
Dizzy Princess of Nothing
THOMAS J. SEITZINGER JR.

The Blood That Bleeds From My Souls

I walk the razor without any shoes
Discontent rules my life
For it's seldom true

The games people play are such a disgrace
Why do jealous lovers learn to hate
While the clever politicians keep to their fate?

Freedom, An ancient philosophy
Whose purpose
Is easily forgotten

Just solicit the handmaid, Offred

Hypocrisy,
The nasty drug
That slowly corrupts the soul
Metamorphosising it into a disgusting bug

That thinks it's Gregor

Love,
The ultimate test
It's belief tends to lead to a lifetime of loneliness
Though the dedicated troubadour will claim progress
His solitary efforts always end in vain or dire hopelessness

As Charles Smithson will now profess

Death,
Holds no hidden truths
Comes but one time
In age and periodically youth
It's God's only sincere gift to mankind

According to the vampire Lastat
Mr. Haller
Where are you?
I need prudent advice
Or at least a comical view
From your shoes
He wonders why I’m sitting here by myself. Like I have a point to prove, he told me. I told him no, no point, nothing to prove. Sometimes it’s just better to be alone when you choose to be alone.

He’s got the baby today. Back in the bedroom of my parents’ house that is our make-shift apartment. He hates it there. I don’t blame him. I suspect he’s beginning to hate me.

The wind is really cold today. The sun was deceiving, and the cotton sweater I’m wearing offers no protection. The lake seems as angry as me, and it keeps crashing, going back, crashing, going back, like it never learns its lesson. I can feel the coldness of the rock I’m sitting on through my jeans. My hands are bright pink, and I keep them tucked behind my knees, trying to bring some relief.

We used to come down here all the time. I remember the picnic he made for us. It was the beginning of it all, and the August night was so warm. I remember that I was wearing a black tank top, and jeans I thought I looked nice in. I should’ve worn shorts, and little trickles of sweat huddled at the corners of my nose and crept under my hair. He brought a bottle of white wine, but he forgot the glasses and he forgot the corkscrew. So we just shoved the cork down and swigged the wine right out of the bottle. And when we made that toast, we didn’t have to say “to us,” because we knew that’s what we meant.

And then he held the bottle for me to drink from too high, and streams of sticky wine ran around the corners of my mouth, and I wiped the drips off of my chin with the back of my hand.

Once, he told me he’d never really been friends with a girl before. He’d had lots of girlfriends, but they were never really friends. He told me I was the “neatest person” he’d ever met.

I take my hands out and look at them. It hurts to bend my fingers. I like his hands. Short, thick fingers. It used to make me feel so good to hold his hand. Not really a feeling like safety, but more like connection, because I knew he liked it too.

When I had Elizabeth, we couldn’t think of a first name for her. It just seemed so important—we could give someone a name that they’d carry around with them for a lifetime. All we could come up with was a middle name. It’s been six months, and she’s still Elizabeth.

Yesterday, he told me he was going out with his friends. I was busy with Elizabeth, and an hour later, I looked out the bathroom window, and there he was, sitting on the trunk of that rusting Oldsmobile smoking a cigarette. He couldn’t bring himself to leave, but he couldn’t bring himself to stay.

I wanted to rush out and grab him close to me like I used to when he was troubled and tell him that I was still so in love with him, if only he could still love me. Instead, I just curled myself up on that cold tile floor and cried.

We used to go to Younger’s and request the booth farthest away from everything so we could just talk and never be interrupted. We’d talk about all the places we were going to go together, all of the things we were going to learn together. But we never talked about how long we were going to be together.

Once, on our way home from Boston, we got off the Mass. Turn Pike for dinner, and a guy in the parking lot joked, “What, you came all the way from New York to eat at Friendly’s?” When we were walking to the restaurant, he grabbed me close, and said, “Did you ever realize how nice people are to us when we’re together? We must be radiating something!”

I don’t care about the cold anymore. I hope it’ll freeze me, freeze my feelings. Make me numb to it all.
HEATHER LOBBAN

I Think I Know You

I looked from afar, and I
chose to draw conclusions
My mind made up stories and
long tales to match my observations.
Would I ever, could I ever
Know the truth?
Maybe, but the chances are slim
I filled the ears of others
with my beliefs and observations
Never did I stop to think,
Could I be wrong?
I was
I took theirs, and put it with mine
We were wrong.
To know the truth
It came as a shock
Should I hate myself?
I think I do.
To the others,
You may be wrong about me,
So let me tell you the story.
I’ve been livin’ wid dem ‘ere Grierson since I’s wuz a chile. I can’t ‘member my family. I spent my ole days takin’ care a de las’ Grierson, Miss Emily Grierson. She was beautiful, wid her long curly black hair ‘gainst her skinny white body.

Miss Emily an’ her family never done nothin’ to hurt me, deys treat me like a servant, not like no slave. I can’t say I’s love ‘em. They never took no time to understand that I ain’t just a Nigga servant. I’s suspec dat all Southern folks ain’t understand dey Niggas. Them Southerns is so strange, they put themselves in so much trouble for theys cotton, and us Niggas. One thing I’s never understand, is how dey be God fearin’ people and goin’ to Church, whilst ownin’ and buyin’ human beings, dat makes dem strange. I guess dey ain’t feel strange when dey do both.

But Miss Emily Grierson is dif’erent. She don’t go to worship God no more, insted she locks herself up in dat big ole musty dark house. Since her father been dead, she ain’t been socializin’. She’s got nothin’ to do wid the townspeople. De day her father died she wouldn’t a let go de dead body, she kept her father’s dead body smelly and all for three days til the law comes pick it up. After his diein’ she ain’t feel to see sunlight again. Miss Emily keeps e’rythin’ insidea her and that big dark house.

But that didn’t stop de townspeople from snoopin’ around an’ meddlin’ in Miss Emily’s bi’niss. I’s never seen a bunch a people so into one woman like she’s some famous celebre. They shouldn’t care what Miss Emily do.

All dem meddlesome people’s curiosity was watered by the big strong dark Yankee man Homer Barron, Miss Emily curiosity is too watered too by Homer. He would come for her and take her ridin’, and she got real fond a him too. But Homer finally had to leave, due to his work been done in town. The townspeople been want him to go, because they thinks it wrong for a Southern to be fraternizin’ with a Yankee. But Miss Emily didn’t want him go. So when he comes back to town she kills him.

I don’t know which is worse; Miss Emily an’ her need to love an’ keep someone, or de meddlesome townspeople. Miss Emily slept wit Homer Barron ‘til his body wuz stinkin’ and decayin’ so much even the neighbors could smell the stink. It stinks to “high heaven.” But I didn’t complain because it ain’t none a my bi’niss. Somethin’s stinkin’ in the state of the South. I ain’t wish dem Grierson no bad luck, or wish any Southern bad luck, but I can’t helps wonder why do dey allow such evils: slavery; allows demselves to linga in the past, and them and dem children to live in such a decaying society.
The lady in the green house sits on her porch every day at the same time I take my walk through the neighborhood. We never "catch eyes," she's been watching me since I turned onto Argyle Street, as I've been watching her. From the sidewalk I see her hair, once black, and now mostly gray, pulled into a loose bun.

I won't be here six months from now. I have no idea where I'll be, what I'll be doing, or who I'll be with. Perhaps it's better—life is just an endless string of "maybe's." Promises are made all the time, but how can we be so sure of ourselves as to make a guarantee? We're left with an endless string of "broken promises," of things that should have been and could have been and might have been, if someone hadn't changed their mind.

The lady sits with a girl that seems to be nearly a year old, probably her granddaughter. She holds the child with a kind of leisurely patience that grandmothers possess, and I imagine that the parents of the child are fighting their way through work somewhere, such a hurry, hurry, racing to keep up with everyone else, then racing back twice as hard to try and find themselves and the lives they left behind somewhere. And grandma sits every day making sure the baby gets fresh air. Grandma's got time to watch the world a bit.

I'm hurrying, too. Panting my way through life, trying to make this decision or that, wondering how few of them will stick anyhow. And my life will change on May 17th; so odd I can set a day to it. But aren't our lives in a constant change? Doesn't each step lead us to a new possibility? Each time we think the path we're on is straight, or that we've reached a dead-end, we find another fork which leads to more changes. The days keep moving, forcing us to follow suit.

The change around the next corner has a focus: Now it is my turn to Be Someone. Make a name for myself, step into the world. Join the hurry, hurry pace. The footsteps of the world swarm around me, and leave me so little room to breathe.

The lady on the green porch smiled at me once. It was a particularly warm day, and the little girl sat in a Toddler's swing next to her, a pink bow tied to a thin bunch of blond hair.

Grandma is teaching the little girl, showing her: Dear, there's a world around you. So many things, so many people. You don't have to travel to faraway places, or pretend to live like a king, just fresh air every day. Observe a little every day.
Veol-Et-Vie

At the beginning of a stream two leaves fell.
As they float alone they know not of their destination.
Many times they come into light contact,
Developing a spark neither can explain.
One cold summer night, under many stars,
The leaves collide, and for a moment
The spark becomes a fire.

But the currents are strong,
And push them and pull them,
But chance brings these leaves,
Together from time to time.
As the leaves travel the wonderful stream,
Enjoying the beautiful journey,
The currents bring them together,
and push them apart, but one day,
in a quiet, Crystal Bay, they come,
to a common resting place, and together,
understand all that the stream,
has to offer.
M.P. CHRISTOPHER

Helpless Suspension

Hanging from a wire
In the middle of my bathroom mind;
Bare feet bruise with care
Mirrors shatter and cut
Little red prints across my forehead
And you think it’s funny?
You laugh at pain;
S N E E R
at love.

With my toes dangling in the toilet;
Helpless suspension
Of Life.
Memo

To: The Human Race
From: God
Re: Resignation

Effective immediately, I am resigning as your Almighty Father. A successor will be named at a later date. I have given you people a nice place to live, air to breathe, food to eat and cable television and you still cannot get along with one another and solve the problems that you’ve created. I’ve decided that if you’re not going to make the effort to fix things than neither am I. To quote my son, “save yourselves.” Instead, I’m going to work on my tennis game, catch up on some movies and work on my autobiography with an eye toward movie rights. Mail can still be sent to your local house of worship where it will be forwarded to me. See you on the courts.
When laughter becomes as familiar as heartbeats
And glances grow into stares
The Baxter must go away

When eyes seem deeper than darkness
And tears turn twinkling in the night
The Baxter must move on

Before the wind feels old
And the ocean looks new
The Baxter will be gone

After the birds have made their sense
And the stories begin to jump
The Baxter will take it home

There always will be a promise on the front porch swing,
Just like there always will be thunder over top the August bed. The same as there always were birds who escaped the intrepid rain. Because we have always had laughter we must have always had pain.
Our summer mourning will always land with goosebumps, fog, and dew. The summer days will always take off with orange, red, and blue.

I won’t tell you there is a lot to see,
so you won’t look for what you’ve missed
But once you’ve met the Baxter
you’ll know that you’ve been kissed.
Perched Upon a Mossy Rock, the Minstrel Sang His Song to the Sea

There is an ancient man who resided on top of an ancient stone. Both had foreseen and survived that terrible day and the months of night that had followed. And together, they towered over the vast ocean. He used the damp black moss as his pillow and he let starlight be his night lamp as he fed on the ocean mist.

This old man was the keeper of an olden fife given to him by the father of Time on the morning of the rising tide. After that day he played his song to the hazy horizon. Continuously, he repeated and created measures of soothing music which held the attention of the cosmos.

With his melodies he led and reshaped the order of nature. From rubble and dust he grew flowers and grass. In dead waters he placed fish and mammals to live together. He created birds in the skies and deer in the forests. From his mossy throne this old man commanded the earth with his faithful melodies.

After a number of years this creation caused him to grow tired and weak. It was then that he found me, another survivor of the wasted land, and chose me to take his place. And so, I would be taught the tunes of time, and learn to command the water and the sand.

As he taught me to use the flute, I learned much of what he knew, and grew to love him. I can raise a flower from a seed and a hurricane from a gentle breeze. While commanding the turn of the heavens, I made lilacs in the spring and roses in the summer. With the flute I can tear down a mountain and put a meadow in its place. I can make a lion swim and a fish drown. I know how to let some live for centuries and some only a few weeks. I learned that I must bring in the young and turn out the old.

I thought I was the master of the fife. But eventually, he let himself fall very sick. He gave me the flute and told me I must now lead the order of nature. It was only then that I saw that to be the master I must let the master pass to Time where he belonged. I tried to keep him for a little longer but I had to let him go. But before I did, he left me with these final words:

Take stock in the rising tide.
Wait for no shooting stars, shoot them yourself.
Play your flute well and gently govern nature as I have taught you.
Do not play that which endures time.
And finally my son, let what I have taught you about living and dying govern your feelings, and those of the one you make to follow you.

On the night I let him go, I played my fife with such feeling. I sang to the fish and they wept, I sang to the stars and they applauded.
Grey fuzz drowns your thoughts
An orange light glows,
minutes changing to hours.
Across town,
someone watches you.
Late at night,
you hear her call goodnight.
For a minute,
the heart remembers
a feeling
holding someone close.
Struggling, you call goodnight
grey fuzz drowns the words,/her taillights disappear.
Stones placed by people who vanished
traces that still remain
bringing past to present.
The risk too great
Solitude too easy.
Alone in your double bed
you sleep.
As I alone in mine
Dream of you.
Dannyboy

Daniel ran through the backyard as fast as he could, his eyes constantly scanning the terrain for pitfalls and enemy attackers. He spotted movement by the old willow tree at the side of the house and quickly dove behind the woodpile. He slid a little ways on his stomach and then made his way to his feet. He moved carefully, but quickly towards the other end of the woodpile. He had to stay in a crouch, though, because the stacked logs were not high enough to cover him from enemy attackers.

Once he had waddled safely to the end of the pile, Daniel peered across to the willow. He saw nothing. His eyes then slowly surveyed everything in the yard, but he still saw nothing. “What the hell,” he thought, as his heart started to pound. “Where is he?” was his next thought—one that he didn’t get to finish because of an almost undetectable noise that came from behind him. It sounded like a twig being broken by the foot of a lurking bandit, but he wasn’t sure. His heart began to race. With a hard-to-swallow gulp of confidence, he hurred around to confront the noise from behind and saw Brian Kodowski, long time arch-enemy and faithful best friend, squeeze three shots off from his revolver. “Bang! Bang! Bang!” he yelped confidently as he shook his finger at Daniel.

“You’re dead, Dannyboy, I gotcha!”
“Yeah, yeah, I know.”
“Yeah, yeah, my butt! Start counting to ten, cause youuuu’re dead.”
“Wait, Brian, I’ve got an idea.”
Brian looked at Daniel suspiciously, thinking that he was trying to get out of being dead. Daniel noticed the look, ‘cause he had seen it on Brian’s face many times before. He ignored it and kept on talking.
“I’m sick of playing guns with our fingers. Let’s go get our cap guns.”
“I thought your mom took yours away?”
“She did, but I know where she put it.”

Brian paused for a second and then agreed, “Good idea, go get it and meet me back here in five minutes.”

They concluded with their secret handshake and Daniel was off.

Daniel flew into his driveway and was off his bike before it had stopped moving. He bolted into the house, but slowed when he reached the kitchen. He quickly glanced around the room. “Good,” he thought, his mother was nowhere to be found. He still didn’t know where she was, though, and had to be careful because a confrontation right now would be bad, seeing that he hadn’t cleaned his room before he left the house this morning. If he was spotted now, he wouldn’t see daylight for a week. So Daniel took a deep breath and raced to his parents’ bedroom. “Ok,” he thought, “Where did she put it?” He opened up her top dresser drawer. Nothing there but ladies underwear and his sling-shot. Then he checked his father’s dresser. Still nothing. Next, their night stands. Mother’s? “Yeah, right!” He thought, “If I don’t find my damn gun, then maybe I can throw some of these dumb mushy girl books at him.” Father’s? “Bingo!”
He grabbed the shiny gun instantly. He hadn’t had his gun a day when mom, who Daniel thought had skipped childhood, took it away for shooting it off in the house. It wasn’t his fault that the cat went bonkers and peed all over the carpet. He was just practicing for the day when he would finally beat Brian Kodowski at his own game and proclaim himself as too mature to ever play again.

Daniel raced his bike back to Brian’s house. He was determined to get Brian this time. It seemed like he never shot him, and he thought about the many times he had to lie on the cold, soft ground and count to ten before he could get up again. Then he had to listen to Brian gloat and proclaim his victory over “the weak little Dannyboy.” He hated being called Dannyboy. He didn’t mind the Danny part, it was the attachment of that word—boy—that really annoyed him. It seemed so degrading. None of the greats were ever called boy. Superman, Spiderman, Batman, now they were all respected. No one would dare call them mere boys. You just couldn’t respect anyone that was called boy. “I’m going to get him this time,” he said quietly to himself, as he rode his bike through the Kodowski’s ditch and into their front yard.

The moment he got off his bike, Daniel knew the game would begin, and as he hopped off he quickly scanned the area. After seeing no sign of Brian, he ran toward the backyard. He stopped on the side of the house and peered around the corner to the back. Everything seemed quiet and ordinary, except for the Kodowski dog, Fisher. Daniel noticed that the dog, lounging in pet prison, was blatantly staring at the back shed. “Brian must be over there,” he thought, “so if I run back around front to the other side of the house, I can surprise him from behind.” Before the thought was finished, Daniel was already in position and moving swiftly toward the shed.

Just as Daniel had reached the shed, Fisher began barking, and he knew that his cover was blown. His heart thumped uncontrollably as he turned the back corner of the

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shed and saw Brian heading right at him. It seemed that Brian knew Daniel was coming but did not realize how close he was, because when Daniel turned the corner, they almost collided. They both raised their guns immediately. Daniel squeezed the trigger. There was the loudest bang that he had ever heard.

“For crying out loud, Brian, did you have to shoot off your gun right next to my ear?”

“You know Danny, sometimes I forget, are you a boy or a girl? And you’re the one that came barreling around the corner.”

“Ouch! That was really loud, my ears are still ringing.”

“Well, sorry, compadre, I just couldn’t resist the close shot. Plus I thought you had me. Why didn’t that gun fire?”

“I left the stupid safety on.”

“Oh! Ya’ left the stupid safety on. How unfortunate!”

“Shut up, Kodowski.”

“Well, wonderboy, that still doesn’t save ya’. You know what comes next,” Brian yelled as he started to run off to hide.

“Yeah, I know,” Daniel replied in a voice not loud enough for Brian to hear: “1-2-3456-7-8-910.”

Daniel was good at only two things when playing this game. Cheating on the count and peeking to see where Brian was heading off to hide. He did both well today and noticed that Brian went behind the willow.

Daniel clicked the safety to “off” on the gun and crawled over behind a tree close to the willow. He decided that the best way to get Brian was a showdown. He couldn’t resist toughguy macho-like challenges. He stepped out in front of the tree and yelled, “Here I am Bri, come out and get me if you are such a big man!”

Just as Daniel suspected, Brian jumped out from hiding before he could finish his sentence. Daniel fired. The strength of the gun knocked him to the ground. The noise was equally surprising. When he rose, he saw Brian lying on the ground in front of the big willow tree.

“I got him! I got him! I gotcha’ Brian! Now count to ten nice and loud.”

“Brian, didn’t ya’ hear me? I said count to ten.”

“Brian, come on, count to ten, you have to count to ten.”

Daniel ran over to Brian’s limp body and yelled again, “Please Brian, count to ten and get up.” The tears of childhood turned to tears of sad maturity as he shook Brian and pleaded, “Count to ten Brian, please count to ten.”
why?

i don’t know
something in the air?
in your eyes?
in myself?
yourself?
ourselves?

fate hath condemned us to happiness
for but one short evening
reoccurring
on stages ethereal
before the mind’s eye.

“Will we meet again?”

probably not

but

the possibility
pondering pondering pondering
ephemeral or perennial
i don’t know.
CHERI CRIST

Libra

Life has stolen you—
Death has you grasped in its vice;
Squirming, struggled quitting—
Dying.

When shadows shake the ground
Upon a grander scale,
I hear you, feel you.
Arms restrained, my heart looks at you
Quivering in the pall-grey light.

Branches bow silently
Soul and faith entwined
Rising higher, higher still

And lower yet—
A trembling bunch, veils obscuring.

The grandest of scales
Mocking fools unknowing
Unbalanced, swaying
Dropping uneven
Deciding
Life—
Fading.
Who claimed that death is the end of life? You died—but all I saw happen was your spirit fill the world. And your words: Take flight, child. Don’t wait for the end, the beauty is in the flight. You said, Some never know they can. And some are always waiting for the right wind. They will tell you of the security of the ground.

Don’t be fooled by them, you told me. They mean well, but they have no part in the Secret: find your rainbow in each day. Wash your face in the colors. Learn from everything, every face, no matter how humble or proud. Learn from every story, take lesson from every day. And don’t be afraid to love.

And don’t, you told me, get to the end and discover that you knew how to fly all along.

And now your body is gone but you are not, you have only been spread across the universe. I’ve forgotten what your laugh sounded like, though I didn’t mean to. But I can still see your eyes and the gentle way you’d point your hand toward me when you were letting me in on all of the little secrets of the world and you didn’t even realize it. I learned more than I realized through your stories of a lifetime. And now, you fill my senses as I turn my cheek and gather the strength that’s been harbored in my heart. Death doesn’t take you away, it puts you all around me, and so I breathe it in.
I wished on a Sometime Star
And I asked for you
—Not for always—
But just sometimes.
To ask for all
Would be a theft
For you are too large
For me to contain
And how could I be so selfish
As to try

I wished on a Sometime Star
And I asked for you
—Not for all of you—
Just some parts of you
If you'd like to share
Your thoughts, your heart
And your hand
I'd like your hand to hold.

And I wished
On a Sometime Star
I asked for you
—Not for forever—
How could we be so certain
As to make a guarantee?
I asked only for as long
As we feel free to love.
The Garden

The shining stars of the world are flowers,
Glowing bright as far-spinning fires.
Blossoms waving at the sky,
Smiling in the summer sunshine.
Daisies and pansies burning into me,
Seen through closed eyes,
Wonders of earthly astronomy.
Shannon breezed into the house, her arms laden with various packages.

"Mother! I'm home! Mother?" Shannon winced as a brief flash of pain darted through her head. "Damn this headache—today of all days," she thought to herself. Realizing that no one was home, she climbed the stairs to her room and set the packages down on her bed. Her eye was immediately attracted to the gleam of sunlight reflecting off of the silver picture frame that held her beloved Timothy's picture. He was so handsome... he was everything to Shannon, everything she could ever want in a mate. His bright blue eyes sparkled at her from under his dark brown hair. Timothy's earthy good looks were what had initially attracted Shannon to him, but his kindness and generous nature had kept her in love with him. They had been dating through high school and then things had become serious when they decided to attend the same junior college just so they could be near each other. Their parents had tried to make them wait until college was finished to get married, but halfway through their sophomore year, they knew they couldn't wait. Their love was so perfect and true that it seemed like agony everyday they were not together. Now, in the summer before their junior year, they would finally solidify their love, and then continue through college together. Their lives would be perfect. "Just like a fairy tale," Shannon said to Timothy's picture. She couldn't wait until that moment when they would make their vows to "love, honor and cherish each other until death do us part...."

"Such a shame—he had his whole life ahead of him," Mrs. Bennet, the town mayor's wife said to Mrs. Goldstein.

"Yes, and right before the wedding, too," Mrs. Goldstein replied, shaking her head in lament.

The United Pentecostal Church was filled with people dressed in black, milling about in small groups, discussing the latest tragedy to strike Bakersfield. Because the town was so small, almost everyone knew each other, if not personally, then through the town's thriving grapevine.

"Did you know him personally, Widow Perch?" Mrs. Easton asked the elderly but feisty woman.

"Eh?" "I said, did you know him personally?" Mrs. Easton said again, slightly louder.

"Know him? I slapped his bottom when he was born!" the widow Perch replied indignantly.

Conversation in the church ranged from the deceased's first football game in which he was captain, to his favorite dessert. While the mood among the clusters of people was sad, only a small gathering near the casket seemed to be openly crying.

"I don't understand why..." Mrs. Halleck's voice trailed off. Her eyes were red and puffy, and held a look of despair.

Mrs. Solomon shook her head. "There are no answers in situations like this. It all seems so cruel. They were going to spend their lives together... that's what should have happened, not this."

Remembering, Mrs. Halleck said in an unsteady voice, "How is Shannon?"

"She's doing better. The doctor told us she would..."
have to stay a few days until they understand the full extent of her head injuries, but he said it was probably just a concussion.” She saw Mrs. Halleck’s questioning look and added, “No—she doesn’t know. She was still asleep when I left her.”

Mrs. Halleck closed her eyes and shuddered, then turned to accept the sympathies of her friends and fellow townspeople. Mrs. Solomon went over to the pay phone in the church’s lobby and dialed the hospital’s number. After being transferred to her daughter’s room from the switchboard, she let the phone ring for quite a while before replacing the receiver back in its cradle.

“She’s probably still sleeping,” she thought to herself, but her mind wandered through various other possibilities, which she quickly put out of her head.

“Ouch!” Shannon was hurriedly dabbing flesh-colored concealer over the scrape on her right cheek. The bruise on her forehead, she noticed, also needed make-up. She glanced over at the clock on her nightstand

Mrs. Solomon ran over to Mrs. Halleck and told her what had happened. “We’ll try to be back for the ceremony,” she said, and then raced out the door with her husband.

The Solomons drove to the hospital and then to their house, all the while looking for Shannon, who might have been walking along the side of the road. They didn’t even notice when a yellow taxi with their daughter inside drove by in the opposite direction. Reaching their house, Mr. and Mrs. Solomon rushed inside and began calling Shannon’s name to no avail. “I’ll check upstairs,” Mrs. Solomon said breathlessly. She ran up the same stairs her daughter had just come down minutes before. Walking slowly down the hall, she felt a funny, almost giddy feeling come over her.

“Shannon honey? Are you in your room? She pushed at the halfway open door and looked inside. Strewn all over the room were empty boxes that had once contained Shannon’s wedding shoes, veil, and stockings. Her makeup table was a mess, with bottles of liquid foundation overturned, and eyeshadows tossed carelessly aside. As if in a dream, Mrs. Solomon slowly drifted over to the closet door and grasped the door handle. Taking a deep breath, she pulled the door open. The hanger rattled vacantly on the single hook near the top of the door.

“Hello?”

“I think it was a head-on crash.”

“Of course,” he replied.

Running wildly down the hall to the office, Mrs. Solomon tried not to think of why the hospital would call her...here. They wouldn’t bother her unless it was important......

“Hello?”

“I’m looking for her. I called her room and there was no answer.”

“Did you pick up your daughter in the last hour?” the voice on the other end of the telephone asked.
the life of a future groom the night before his wedding. It was awful, simply awful, they all agreed.

"And what about Shannon, the poor dear," Mrs. Sidney asked, clutching her handkerchief to her chest.

"I think she has a fractured skull," Miss King, the third-grade teacher in the Bakersfield Elementary School, answered.

"No she was just shaken up a little. The other car hit them on the driver's side, so Timothy got most of the impact," Mrs. Lang volunteered.

"Yer all wrong—she has to have a brain transplant," the Widow Perch piped up in a crackled voice. The other women looked at each other and shook their heads silently.

"Would everyone please be seated. We are about to begin," Pastor Hillman’s voice boomed solemnly from the pulpit.

There was an increase in the crowd's buzz as seats were taken, and then the room became silent. All eyes were either on Pastor Hillman or the Halleck family.

"We are gathered together today to mourn the untimely passing of Timothy Michael Halleck." Pastor Hillman moved to where the casket stood. "It is always tragic when the life of a youth is so cruelly taken, but it is especially tragic when it happens the day before that individual is to enter into the institution of marriage. We sorrowfully grieve not only for Timothy's family, but for his finance, Shannon Solomon."

The crowd heard the door to the vestibule open. There was a slight murmur as they questioned each other softly... who would show up late to a funeral? Even Pastor Hillman paused, looking over the crowd and waiting for the door leading into the church to open and expose the rather rude individual.

Shannon Marie Solomon opened the door wide and stood smiling and happy at the end of the aisle. The crowd gasped at her appearance. Her face was a swollen mass of cuts and bruises; even those which she had tried to conceal glared painfully. And she was wearing her wedding gown.

The crowd stirred in confusion and sympathy for her. Pastor Hillman let the arm holding the Holy Bible drop limply to his side. Shannon started down the aisle.
DAWN WHITED

Curved Wedge 3

What the hell?
A moron could do it.

Curved
rusting over time
disintegration
turning the ground orange
stain on the pavement

Wedge
stuck there still
I have to look
or look away.

But 3
when I am gone
will I too, leave a stain?

What the hell?
A moron could.
The night we met, it rained. A gentle summer rain as the lights from the yacht club twinkled in the distance. The masts chimed in the wind. We sat on the bow of the boat as you moved closer to me until our lips met. A sweet kiss as the world changed around me.

My footsteps echo on the cold marble of the city court. I watch you on the other side of the room. Our names are called and my heart pounds as we enter the final goodbye. Dry eyed, I state the facts as I watch you die before my eyes. Only an object, not a person. It is too late for second chances.

In the distance, I see you on the pier. Storm clouds blow overhead and the waves dampen the walk. The girl at your side is only a distraction. A friend’s arm guides me to the water’s edge. I watch the waves splash below in an angry storm. As I turn to look back, the glow around you is gone. There is only another body that I pass. I turn and shut the door of my fairy tales.
Its pungent stench rips at the insides of my nostrils as I enter the chamber. Suddenly, it is aware of my presence and falls into a dormant state of stillness, as if to camouflage itself from me. Yet, I know it’s there, and it knows too. It is the essence of evil, and it is anything but stupid.

I stand alone, unarmed, ready to face my ancient adversary. All week I have been preparing for this battle. Several times I had almost conceded to it, given up my journey, and returned home without the knowledge I needed. Just one more obstacle to be passed.

I push the chamber door open further and light spreads across the filthy, mud stained floor. I hear it openly mocking my strength with its guttural laugh. As I step further into the chamber, the smell of rot and fungus grows to the point where I believe it will take away my sanity. Slowly the door to the tomb creeps open and my eyes fall upon the all evil-one for the first time since our last battle.

It has grown immense with internal self-procreation and its body spreads over the entire floor of the chamber. Noxious fumes rise from its grotesque, misshapen form. As it turns to face me, fear hits me like a wave that blasts a rocky coast line, and I nearly turn and run.

A new found courage suddenly fills me, and I stand my ground and face my enemy with the knowledge that I shall stand victorious against my foe, for I know it is my day. Washday. My laundry doesn’t stand a chance.
Oh London! how they mock you:
With deadly thick fogs and multitudes of rain.

What they do not understand is how
your gardens grow a bit fresher,
more alive.

A city which breathes heritage, the reign
of kings, and a land of poets.

When I saw the ancient ruins of a hollowed
out church I breathed in centuries
of time.

I remember the walk up Queens Gate Terrace
with you.
Three a.m. and the silence only penetrated
by passing cabs.

A sky illuminated by shades of blue, pink, and lavender.
At that moment I understood what can be reached
in only skies.
I went home the other day, to the place where I grew up. The houses all looked the same — same colors, probably not the same people. Nothing was the same anymore. As I sat on what used to be MY front porch swing, I saw some boys playing step ball across the street. I wanted to join them. I wanted to explain that if the ball went over the hedges in my front yard, it was only a ground rule double. I wanted to tell them that if they hit the red brick columns on the porch, it was a homerun. They were playing all wrong. I wanted to yell at them, tell them they weren’t playing right.

As I swung back and forth, I was reminded of all the nights in high school that I sat on that swing, either alone or with my best friend, Kevin. I wondered whatever happened to him. Everyone thought for sure we’d get married — the perfect little Irish family and all. I looked up and saw his initials were still carved in the ceiling, something my father never saw, thank God.

That house holds so many memories of a loving family, my family. When my parents told me they were selling it as soon as I graduated from college, I was heart-broken. I tried not to be selfish. I knew in my head that it was just the two of them. But in my heart, I was screaming at them. “Why can’t I show my kids where I grew up? When we say we’re going to Grandma’s house, it won’t mean the same thing to my kids as it did to the other grandkids. What about Christmas?”

Christmas. The first Christmas out of the house was the worst. Sure, my mom still had the same ornaments for the tree — little ceramic angels, one with each family member’s name on it, a few pine cones and lots of red bows. “It’s tasteful and simple,” she’d say. It didn’t seem normal. Who has ever heard of a Christmas tree with pine cones in Florida? Certainly not any of their neighbors. Yea, Christmas was weird that first year. No snow, not that I’m fond of snow. But Christmas without snow is like Christmas in someone else’s home. And that’s the way it was for me that first year.

I wondered what my room looks like now. Once, it was covered in pictures of all my friends and family. I had posters of Mickey Mouse and James Dean and men without shirts. My mom used to tell me that I was the only person who could pull off that kind of combination. My room, my beautiful pink room, with its wall of shelves for all my books and figurines. And my closet, that was actually the size of an average bathroom, with my window seat. I could look into the backyard and into the park behind our house. I watched the boys playing basketball and heard them into the wee hours of the morning during the summer.

I was interrupted by the shouts of the boys playing. The ball landed within the hedges. I got up to retrieve it as they shouted and laughed. “HOMERUN!” I thought about telling them that it was only a ground rule double, but as I threw it back to them, I decided not to.
Keuka Campfire

As daytime creeps to night,
By the dying firelight
A voice sings out upon the air,
Floating, and creating there
An image.
One of leaf-green forests, sun-bright,
People's lives are ruled by might,
Darkness flies around the world,
Nations march with flags unfurled,
Empires rise and exist to die,
Angels soar to heaven high;
Still the storyteller spins on,
Until our ties to the world are gone.
Our Jericho

Our love was like a house
under long-awaited construction.
We formed that place
with sweating, bulging limbs
and the promise of
moving-in day.
Your hammer and my nail
moved in simple harmony.
Two weeks we worked
without stopping for lemonade—
we were parched.
The skeleton formed,
we added bricks
and found
that it could stand.
Our folly lay in the fact
that we thought it was enough.
So we left it alone.
Grudgingly, I came back to the site one day
to try and do the job solo.
As I placed the iron horseshoe
above the oak door-jamb,
I felt the foundation shiver and
looking up, saw your face on an
industrial-strength, turbo-destructive
commercial-size wrecking ball
rushing straight toward me.
And the walls were razed.