



Calliope 1999



Calliope 1999

Armstrong Atlantic State University
Volume XVI

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A note from the editors

The editors of this year's edition of Calliope wish to thank all of those students that submitted their creative work. Based on the quality of the work received, we feel that we have been able to create an edition that is representative of Armstrong's student body, one that showcases its wealth of creativity and diversity. In addition to representing our fellow students, we are honored to have had the chance to play a hand in the creation of the last edition of Calliope of the twentieth century. We only hope that it is enjoyed enough to solidify the existence of Calliope in the years to come.

We wish to thank Dr. Chris Baker, who looked out for us without constantly looking in on us. While we were aware that he was always nearby if we needed help, he trusted us and let us do our own thing. We appreciate that. Next, we wish to thank Elaine Hakala, without whom this magazine may have been no more than a twinkle in our eyes. Her uncanny computer skills and her calm exterior are what got us through in the end, and for that we cannot thank her enough. We would also like to thank our friends and families for not abandoning or committing us. Along with them, we would like to thank our teachers, who have also been understanding of the responsibility that we undertook. We thank you all for bearing with us. We hope you agree that it was all well worth the effort. Enjoy.

on the cover: This year's cover is a hand-colored black and white photograph by Kellie Easterling entitled *Camille*, which is also the recipient of this year's award for outstanding artwork.

Poetry

<i>Palm Sunday</i> by Marcus Smith	12
<i>Old Paint</i> by Heidi Butler	22
<i>The hero</i> by David Seckinger	25
<i>The Four Year War</i> by Catherine Hope Greene	31
<i>What the Thunder Didn't Say</i> by Melissa S. Hill	32
<i>Thoughts in the AASU Men's Room</i> by John D. Trainor	34
<i>At the Gateway</i> by Denise Shaw	37
<i>Thinky Pinky Lipstick</i> by Dana Skiljan	39
<i>Voltage</i> by Melissa S. Hill	45
<i>Downpour</i> by Hal Thomas	55
<i>Perpetual Ebb</i> by Patrick LaPollo, II (recipient of Lillian Spenser Award)	63
<i>When I Look Upon This Blank</i> by John D. Trainor	64
<i>Sleep Walkers</i> by Renae Tanner	67
<i>Instinct</i> by Elizabeth Pferschy	69
<i>Echo</i> by Hal Thomas	71
<i>Nest</i> by Renae Tanner	72
<i>Dreams</i> by Marcus Smith	75
<i>Conversation</i> by Hal Thomas	83
<i>The Tenement Landlord</i> by Michele Fox	84
<i>I Am Through Apologizing</i> by John D. Trainor	97
<i>Snake River</i> by Melissa S. Hill	108
<i>Oranges</i> by Heidi Butler	110
<i>A Secret Crush</i> by Marcus Smith	116

Short Fiction

<i>The Red Shoes</i> by Elaine Hakala	14
<i>Learned Helplessness</i> by Fred Peterson	26
<i>Dramatic Monologue</i> by Stacy Sims (recipient of Lillian Spenser Award)	40
<i>The Failure</i> by Dan Van Brunt	48
<i>Kyla's Shirt</i> by Heidi Butler	56
<i>Dressing on the Side</i> by Elaine Hakala	58

<i>Worthy of Love</i> by David Seckinger	89
<i>Night of the Living Dead</i> by Fred Peterson	99
<i>December 14th</i> by Elaine Hakala	102
<i>The Hamster's Name Doesn't Matter</i> by Stacy Sims	113
<i>Pyrotechnics</i> by Seth Riley	118

Art

<i>Black Sand</i> by Clair Buckner	11
<i>untitled #1</i> by Kellie Easterling	21
<i>untitled #2</i> by Charlie Parker	24
<i>untitled #3</i> by Reneé Lyon	29
<i>untitled #4</i> by Tiana J. Page	30
<i>Bell Tower 2</i> by Sabrina Arango	33
<i>The Hostel in the Forest</i> by Alicia Lively	35
<i>Rhett and Scarlet</i> by Mike Rios	36
<i>untitled #5</i> by Daphne B. Wooten	38
<i>Unforgotten Childhood</i> by Patrick LaPollo, II	41
<i>untitled #6</i> by Reneé Lyon	42
<i>untitled #7</i> by Reneé Lyon	43
<i>Cleansed</i> by Cara L. Wade	44
<i>untitled #8</i> by Angie Hernden	47
<i>untitled #9</i> by Charlie Parker	54
<i>untitled #10</i> by Tiana J. Page	57
<i>Cub Propeller 1</i> by Melissa Tharpe-Tiesi	62
<i>Sinclair #2</i> by Cara L. Wade	66
<i>Loneliness</i> by Lisa Morekis	68
<i>untitled #11</i> by Mike Rios	70
<i>Hole in the Wall</i> by Lauren Ashley	74
<i>Hidden River</i> by Cindy Nielubowicz	82
<i>untitled #12</i> by R. Nicole Hilliard	85
<i>Stairs</i> by Bonnie Kizer	86
<i>1899</i> by Niki Weber	87
<i>untitled #13</i> by Charlie Parker	88
<i>Bogey and Bacall</i> by Mike Rios	95
<i>Bead Man</i> by Cara L. Wade	96
<i>Rock Crevice</i> by Chris Harper	98
<i>Flower Power</i> by Dori Gann	101
<i>The Quiet Shack</i> by Nicole Wierauch	107
<i>untitled #14</i> by Tiana J. Page	112
<i>untitled #15</i> by Kathy Hutcherson	117
<i>untitled #16</i> by Kelly Lamb	120



Black Sand
Clair Buckner
silver gelatin print

Palm Sunday

Marcus Smith

The worm trees, laid down on snake
skin shed crowded streets, reach up in death to grasp
my soul and drown me longingly in the place.
Clamoring cowards, hiding in augural shadow, sleeping in
perfidious light,
linger like the phantoms that wash their backs
with quiver and sword, and call him to this dance.
This place of disquieted death, now buried in the sand dunes,
rolls on like discarded date seeds.

Palm oil, date oil, hand oil, now crushed against
the foreheads of the dying men, ran sane, hearing their breaks,
their whispers still caught in their shallowing yoked throats,
riles old men in death to rise and wash away in that river
insanely their names
calling their lord to sky and sea and chain,
breaking flesh against shackles
as grind stone rinds their bone under tanks.

And take this now, you who see in this pert night
the wrought day and the chiseled dawn, See you this now
in the blood cup, blood reaches and compounds the rabid dogs of sunken
men;
flesh spurns and wrinkles in the hungry mouth.
This the heart can cure, this the soul persuades.

Go

To those beneath the ancient behemoth of Christian Martyrdom
crying acid tears of mirth, go;
To those bent down in reverence to dead kings, kings who choke on the
smoke from burning bush, go;
To sick gods coughing on the smoke of their sacked cities, cities leaning on
their everlasting arms, go;
To bearded stone high men undulating in your priest-pelvis the
seed of coming nations in their belting voices, go;

To those who now see faintly that image growing and wavering
ever so gently beneath the tiny surface of the wild sea, go.
Pull not with galvanized screams the growing girth of two on sea and land.
Tell them quake and tremble in your breaks
for the day comes slowly.

The Red Shoes ... A Twisted Fairytale

Elaine Hakala

Once upon a time there was a young girl who lived in a beat up singlewide down by the lumberyard with her mother, six brothers, four sisters, and two of her mother's deadbeat brothers who did nothing but watch wrestling, drink beer, scratch themselves, and belch all day instead of looking for work. They were all so poor that they didn't even mind the condemned sign on the trailer door when they moved in ... it looked like a palace to them after the roach-ridden one bedroom apartment they had shared before that. Sure, there were holes in the floor big enough that they had to keep all their food, even the drygoods, in the old, wheezing Fridgidare to keep the raccoons out of it when they snuck in at night ... but it was home.

Despite the fact that they were poor, their mother always hustled them off to the Antioch Apostolic Revival Church every Sunday to hear the Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell preach hellfire, brimstone and redemption through "JeeeEEEEeezzzz-uussss (hallelujah ... amen!!)" This one particular Sunday, the girl, whose name was Sunshine (named after the little baker on the saltine cracker box with the fat belly and the flat head ... because that's who her brother Morton said she looked like when she was born), was wearing her brother Pillsbury's hand-me-down black sneakers, four sizes too large with holes in them big enough to show the newspaper she'd stuck down in the toes so she could wear them without them flapping on her heels.

Right in the middle of *How Great Thou Art*, Sunshine noticed that Miss Jordan in the next pew was staring at her old tennis shoes ... and just shaking her head. It made the girl's face turn red to realize just how poor she really was. And it got worse after the last notes of the hymn were finished and they filed out of the church, because old Miss Jordan called Sunshine over to her car as soon as the girl managed to get her hand away from the Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell at the door of the old church ... luckily without him insisting that he give her a kiss on the cheek, too (hallelujah ... amen!!).

"Yes, ma'am?" Sunshine asked as she reached the big, old Buick, remembering that her mother had told her that just because they were poor ... it didn't give them license to be rude as well.

"Child, is that the only pair of shoes you have?" the old woman asked, and when Sunshine nodded sadly, Miss Jordan reached into the back seat of her car and pulled out a pair of bright red tennis shoes ... Keds ... a finer pair than Sunshine had ever seen before in her entire life, despite the

old woman told her, pushing them into her hands. "I think they'll fit you better. I only wear them to garden in, and you look like you could use them a lot more than I can."

With a happy smile on her face, Sunshine thanked Miss Jordan and skipped back to join her family for the long walk home, the red shoes clasped to her chest that pounded with excitement.

Three days later, Sunshine's mother was hit by a speeding bread truck, and pronounced dead on arrival at the charity clinic at the hospital. Three days after that, Sunshine and her new red Keds, along with all her brothers and sisters, walked behind the plywood coffin carrying her mother out to the little cemetery behind the Antioch Apostolic Revival Church after the Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell gave a loud and lamenting eulogy over the body (hallelujah ... amen!!). Sunshine noticed several of the old women in the congregation giving her feet evil looks during the funeral. She knew that red Keds weren't appropriate for church, but she didn't care. All she cared about was that her mother was gone.

After the service, the people from Family and Children Services were waiting with a big van, and they loaded Sunshine and all her brothers and sisters into it, then took them to the Crestview Orphan's Home out on Highway 52. Sunshine hated it immediately, so she decided that she was going to find herself a foster family quick ... even if she had to kiss every well-meaning butt that walked into the home looking for a child to care for.

It didn't take her long. A week later she was sent home with Mrs. Blanchard, a woman who must have been two hundred years old if she was a day, who promptly made Sunshine strip when they got to her house and put on some scratchy new clothes that had been bought for her. They were dowdy and swallowed her like a crockersack, and the shoes she was given to wear with them were flat-black and square-toed, just like something an old woman would wear.

Sunshine watched sadly as her almost new red shoes were thrown in the trash with the rest of her clothes.

A couple of years passed, and Sunshine grew into a curvy teenager with a body that no amount of old lady clothes could hide. She and Mrs. Blanchard had learned to get along pretty good ... except when it came to what Sunshine should wear. Because the old woman was so strict, as soon as Sunshine got out of the house in the morning on her way to school, she would unbutton the buttons on her plain, white blouse to show off her

cleavage and roll up the waistband of her dark tweed skirt till her long legs caught every boy's attention. It got easier as she got older, because she got better at adjusting the frumpy clothes into something more appealing, and because Mrs. Blanchard was getting so blind (bless her heart) that she didn't notice as often anymore.

But no matter how hard she tried, Sunshine was always the "poor" girl at school ... and everyone knew it ... especially Amber Webster. Amber's dad owned the lumberyard near where Sunshine used to live, and he bought Amber anything she wanted. Sunshine tried her best to not be jealous of Amber (because that's what the Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell preached, and because that's just what the little bitch wanted), but sometimes she caught herself staring with envy at the little, cute skirts and the fluffy angora sweaters Amber strutted around school wearing.

But nothing compared to the red shoes Amber came walking in wearing one day. Sunshine's heart almost broke when she saw them. Five-inch heels. Gold buckles. Red patent leather ... the good stuff, not the cheap vinyl imitation leather that everyone else wore (Sunshine knew this little bit of trivia because she heard Amber explain the difference to Susy Smith ... and to Melissa Granger ... and to Judy Trooper ... and that was just in homeroom). They were so bright that they brought back memories of her own dearly loved red Keds, and that memory brought a small tear to her eye.

Time came for Sunshine to get her first communion at the Antioch Apostolic Revival Church. Mrs. Blanchard had started taking Sunshine there as soon as she moved in with her, trying to keep things as normal as possible for the little lost, lamb (that's what Mrs. Blanchard called Sunshine ... after she'd had a few glasses of elderberry wine to "keep her blood thin"). Sunshine had managed somehow to get through all of her communion classes without the Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell managing to trap her in a corner for a "JeeeEEEEeezzzz-uussss loves you hug (hallelujah ... amen!!)" like he tried to give all the teenaged girls in the classes. She was as excited about her first communion as she was to be through with him as a teacher.

To celebrate the event, Mrs. Blanchard and Sunshine rode the bus to the mall to buy her a new dress and shoes. Sunshine could hardly contain herself in the stores, fingering so many pretty things, but she could have spit nails when Mrs. Blanchard picked out a boring old navy blue dress for her ... high-necked white lace collar ... and PLEATS that made her look like a whale!! The girl was fuming when they finally got to the shoestore, but the display in the window stopped her cold. Five-inch heels.

Gold buckles. Red patent leather ... the good stuff, not the cheap vinyl imitation leather that everyone else wore ... with a big tag on them that said "1/2 off."

Sunshine's head was swimming as Mrs. Blanchard ordered the salesman to bring out a pair of the old lady shoes she'd picked out. "And the ones in the window?" Sunshine added hopefully. Mrs. Blanchard was busy looking at the displays, and when the salesclerk returned with two boxes, Sunshine almost shoved him down grabbing the box that contained the red shoes.

She put them on her feet ... and they were like magic. They made her feel like she was a fairy princess, or something very close to that, and she did a few dance steps in the three-way mirror just to see how they'd look.

She had to have them. She just HAD to have them.

So she formed a plan. She tried on the old looking black shoes, showed them to Mrs. Blanchard who was still standing on the other side of the store, and then went back to the salesman and said "she wants me to have the red ones." She knew it was a lie, but she just couldn't help it. And since the box was closed when Mrs. Blanchard came to the cash register to pay for them, she never saw that a switch had been made. "How much?" the old woman asked.

"That will be \$21.97," the clerk replied.

"I thought they were more," Mrs. Blanchard remarked, making Sunshine's blood freeze in her veins.

"No, Ma'am," the man returned, taking the money Mrs. Blanchard counted out of her change purse before returning it to its safe haven inside her bra. "They're on sale."

Sunshine had to try hard to keep from dancing as they left the store and headed to the bus, the red shoes tucked safely under her arm.

The day of her first communion dawned gray and rainy, and it wasn't hard to hide those bright red shoes from Mrs. Blanchard, who started off the day with some elderberry wine ... just in case. But as Sunshine entered the church, marching in the procession behind the advent banners, she could feel the entire congregation staring at her feet. And things got worse when she made it to the altar rail. The Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell, who had started his opening welcome, stopped in mid-sentence and just pointed at those red shoes. "Those are dancing shoes, young lady," his voice suddenly boomed across the church. "Not communion shoes (hallelujah ... amen!!)."

Sunshine couldn't help herself. She was so very tired of the way

the preacher behaved that she just didn't care anymore. Grinning at the Reverend, whose face was growing more critical every second, she took a few dance steps ... just to show him that he was right.

"I won't have you at my altar wearing those jezebel shoes!!" he screeched, pointing at the door at the far end of the aisle. "Out of this house of God, you immoral hussy (hallelujah ... amen!!). I thought you had learned better ... but I see that the taint of your family will always be on you."

Sunshine's face went as red as the shoes, her anger at him flaring instantly. How dare he speak that way to her about her scattered and dearly departed kinfolk? She turned around with a sharp snap and stomped back toward the door. Mrs. Blanchard was white-faced and trembling when she stood to follow her, but Sunshine had not had her say quite yet. "That's right, Reverend Mitchell," she bellowed as she reached the doorway and spun back around to face him. "They're dancing shoes ... so I can just dance my ass out of here."

She proceeded to do just that, but when she got to the bottom of the stairs, her feet kept right on dancing when she wanted to stop. Mrs. Blanchard was struggling to get down the stairs behind her, but Sunshine couldn't help her. All she could do was dance. It started to scare her pretty bad. Mrs. Blanchard yelled at her to stop as she finally made it down the stairs, but she just couldn't.

Luckily a man came walking by at that exact moment, and Mrs. Blanchard begged him to help her. They wrestled Sunshine down on the bus bench out in front of the Antioch Apostolic Revival Church and finally managed to get the shoes off of her feet, despite the fact that she kicked them both several times in the process. But when they finally got the shoes off, her feet were finally still.

Mrs. Blanchard was so shaken that she could barely climb up the steps of the bus when it finally came. Sunshine followed her, head down, barefooted, and sick in her heart.

Mrs. Blanchard went straight to bed when they got home, a glass of elderberry wine to calm her frazzled nerves, but not before throwing the red shoes in the garbage can in the kitchen.

Sunshine sat gloomily on the front porch of the house. It just wasn't fair that her wonderful shoes had turned out to be so evil.

But the more she thought about it, the more she wondered if maybe, just maybe, it had not been the shoes themselves, but rather Sunshine herself, just being evil like The Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell said (hallelujah ... amen!!). After all, she had conned Mrs. Blanchard into

buying the shoes for her.

But Mrs. Blanchard had spent good money on those shoes, Sunshine reasoned. It was a shame to see them thrown out. So she crept back in the house, rescued the shoes from the trash and hid them in her closet.

They haunted her. It got so bad after a few days that she started sleeping with them under her pillow, just so she could run her fingers across the red patent leather ... the good stuff, not the cheap vinyl imitation leather that everyone else wore. Before too long, she had convinced herself that it WAS her that was evil ... and not the shoes. And of course if she was evil ... the best thing for her to do was accept it and learn to live with it. And what better way to learn to live with it ... than to embrace it ... and just wear the damned shoes anytime she wanted to.

So she snuck them into her bookbag that next Friday morning, and headed off to school. As soon as she got there, she sat down on the bench out front and stripped off her old black shoes. When she pulled the red ones out of her bag, the sunlight glinted off the gold buckles, off the shiny red leather, and she knew instantly that she was doing the right thing. Smiling to herself, she dusted off her feet and slipped them into the red shoes.

Floating on air, Sunshine stood and started walking into the school.

She found Amber standing at the head of the stairs. "Nice shoes," Amber said, giving her a smile that could almost be called warm. Sunshine was so taken back that she blushed all over herself, and then took a couple of dance steps to show them off.

And couldn't stop.

The other kids standing around were ignoring her to start with, but as Sunshine continued to dance, they started noticing ... and laughing at her. She tried to stop, but her feet just kept right on dancing, and the more she danced, the more they laughed, and the redder her face got. She finally managed to dance back down the steps and then down the sidewalk to the street, the sound of their laughter ringing in her ears as she started trying to dance away.

It was awful. Her feet just wouldn't stop no matter how hard she tried. People on the street just looked at her funny as she danced by, tears rolling down her face. Her path took her by the Antioch Apostolic Revival Church, and The Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell was out front digging in the rose bushes. Sunshine shouted to him, begging him to help her, but as he rose and stretched his back, looking at her as she danced up to him, his face turned up into a smirk. "Harlot. Jezebel." he retorted. "I knew that

So she danced on, her feet taking her where they wanted to take her, her breath howling in and out of her chest from the exertion. She danced as the sun crested noon, then started that long, slow crawl toward the horizon. She danced past houses and shops and finally out past the railroad tracks at the edge of town as darkness started to cover the world. In the gloom ahead, she saw the old trailer she used to live in with her family, and remembered how happy she was there even if they were poor. Beyond it lay the lumberyard, looming in the distance.

Giving it everything she had, she started dancing toward it.

The security guard at the gate wasn't much older than she was, and when he saw her dancing up the dusty road leading to the mill, he got his flashlight and met her half way. "What are you doing?" he asked suspiciously.

"I can't stop ... I can't stop dancing," she managed to tell him, her voice thick with exhaustion and sobs. "Help me ... get ... these ... shoes ... off ... my ... feet."

He tried everything he could think of. He finally got her flipped on her back on the road, managed to get ahold of the shoes despite her frantic dance steps, but try as he might, he couldn't get the shoes to slip off of her feet. It was like they had grown attached to her skin. "There might be another way," he finally said, stepping back out of her range and wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Do it ... JUST DO IT!!" Sunshine shrieked. "I can't stand it any more."

Today, Sunshine dances on the little wooden legs that James, the security guard who still takes care of her to this day, carved for her as he spent long nights watching the lumberyard. They have a little cottage out near his job, with a cute little garden, two dogs, and three kids who adore them.

And the town still talks about how The Reverend Brother Billy Mitchell ran out of town and never came back (hallelujah ... amen!!), a pair of severed legs chasing him and kicking him in his sanctimonious ass the whole way.

Legs with red shoes on the feet.

Five-inch heels.

Gold buckles.

Red patent leather ... the good stuff, not the cheap vinyl imitation leather that everyone else wore.



untitled
Kellie Easterling
manipulated photograph

Old Paint

Heidi Butler

Colored paint,
Terracotta,
peels like skin off the window.
The men had come today,
with trucks and big,
gloved hands, to carry away my life.
They packed it up neatly
in their dirty yellow van,
and left me standing
emotionless on the front porch
staring at this old paint.
I'd painted it such a long time ago,
by myself,
all the trim on this tan house,
with its two rooms,
set back from the road,
solemnly waiting to sink into the ground.
I sit and rock,
not in a chair though;
they took that,
but on my hips,
with my knees tucked to my chin.
The edges of my skirt
that had been clean this morning
was soiled with moving around,
back and forth
through the rooms
collecting things.
As I rocked I could feel
my woolen socks
that had sagged around my ankles

start to sweat.
I shivered a little bit.
The sun was sinking,
and the shadows were slanting,
announcing unto my weary eyes
and into my weary head of late afternoon.
The red pickup drove in about then,
its shiny coat such a contrast
to the dusty road and the sinking house.
My son,
the eldest one
that lived a few counties over got out,
“Come on Mom, let’s go home.”
I could have said I *was* home.
I could have uttered a million other
protesting phrases,
but I didn’t.
For some reason I was relieved to hear this command,
I was tired of the house and the yard
I’d spent my life in,
and for the first and the last time
I let him take me home to Gainesville.



untitled
Charlie Parker
silver gelatin print

The hero

David Seckinger

The hero enters, shining like the truth,
and evil trembles like an aged hand.
This familiar scene (fresh as desert sand)
is never wasted while tv feeds youth
some sugar poured on a new cutting tooth
and preaches, "Don't be scared to take a stand
because the hero gets the marching band
and Mary's sweet hand or kisses from Ruth."
So heroes march on, with movies for brains,
but villains see clearly from inside the womb.
So Able's unable to faze out Cain
and horror falls harshly on virtue's bloom.
But stories don't die. The lie still remains
because the truth is not heard from a tomb.

"I'm serious," Tim says, and continues, jabbing his spoon at Angela for emphasis. "When a guy says, 'I'd do her,' what he's really saying is, 'I would *admit* to doing her.' Big distinction there. Guys will do just about anything. Robert, back me up here."

"It's true," I nod seriously. "However, it can also mean, 'I would *brag* about doing her.'"

"Good point. It depends on the tone. Like this: 'I'd do her,'" Tim shrugs, glancing down into his coffee. "Now contrast that with—" a look of terrified awe creeps over his face, and he throws his head back, turning his face upward into the soft, dim glow of the coffee shop's lamp light. He reaches out, left hand still gripping the spoon, and reverently whispers, "—I would *do* her."

"Preferably set off by 'dude,' I add, and mimic Tim's pose and voice. "*Dude*. I would *do* her."

"That's it! That's it!," Tim laughs, and pounds the table.

"'Dooooo.' That's perfect."

Angela covers her face with her hands and looks utterly disgusted. "See, you think this is funny, but it's not. This is why I don't date."

"We just want you to know what it's like out there," I say, touching her arm in mock concern. "We just want you to be prepared."

"I know what it's like. That's why I don't date."

"Now you shouldn't isolate—shit. Don't look," I say quietly as Tim and Angela swivel around to face the door. "Jimmy alert." I grab a couple sugar packets, rip them open, dump them into my coffee. "Keep your eyes down. Tim—damn it. . ." No good. Tim's turned around completely, sitting bolt upright in the booth, looking straight at Jimmy and his latest loser friends. He loves this sort of thing, loves to watch me squirm, and suddenly I wish I hadn't come home from school this weekend.

"Why are you so nice to that idiot?," Angela stage-whispers. "He'll never leave you alone. He's going to sit down and talk forever. Great."

"I'm not nice," I protest, but I know what she means. She means I act indifferent toward Jimmy, and Jimmy doesn't take indifference for an answer.

I can't stand Jimmy. No one can, at least not in my circle of friends. He's one of those low self-esteem, self-fulfilling prophecy types. You know: hates himself, wants to be liked so he can feel good about himself, tries so hard he totally humiliates himself, feels like shit, hates himself.

Rinse and repeat. His only friends are people even worse off than he is. Problem is, he thinks we're buddies. I think he sees me as his connection to the elite: people like Tim and Angela, people with huge egos. Witty people, smart people, confident people. Popular people.

Back in high school, there was this guy, Scott Sharp. Popular guy. It was lunch time, and as usual Jimmy had invited himself to sit down at our table and be ignored. Scott, a 4.0 junior already receiving offers from some pretty prestigious schools, announced he was throwing a party the following weekend. Parents out of town, you know. He started making a guest list and wondered aloud who he should invite, writing down names as he thought of them.

"Don't forget me," Jimmy said, and grinned nervously.

"Yeah. Right," Scott dismissed, and turned to one of his friends. "Seriously, who else?"

I admired that bluntness, that ability Scott had to say exactly what he felt. I mentioned something to him later that day, and he said, "Why gloss over the facts? Why bother with social graces around people you don't care about? That's your problem, Robert. You're too nice. The only reason Jimmy sits at our table is because you throw him a bone every now and then. Don't do it. Let him know he's annoying you."

The thing that struck me most about that incident, though, the thing I remember most clearly, is that Jimmy just sat there. He didn't get up and walk away, didn't say or do a single thing to retaliate, to defend himself. He turned a little red and sat quietly, pretending to read, for the rest of the period.

This semester I'm taking an introductory psychology class, and I think I understand what's wrong with Jimmy.

There was this experiment performed on dogs. They were put in cages and shocked through the wire floors. They jumped at first, they whined, tried to break out. After a while, though, they gave up. They just sat there, taking it. Here's the part that really got to me, though: after the dogs got used to the shocks, *even after the scientists gave them a way out*, they didn't leave. They didn't even try. Learned helplessness, it's called. So even though Jimmy may think he's trying, he's not. He's still sitting in that cage.

So I'm sitting here stirring sugar into my coffee and Tim's trick has worked. I can feel Jimmy standing next to the table and I don't look up until he speaks.

"Hey, Robert. How's it going?"

I can feel Tim and Angela looking at me, demanding something, and I can feel my heart pounding in my chest. Anger wells up: anger at Tim for basically inviting Jimmy over, anger at Angela for pressuring me to do

something, anger at myself for my fear of hurting Jimmy's feelings, but mostly anger at Jimmy for pestering me, for being stupid, for not taking the hint, for not having a single clue that I hate him. I clear my throat. I look up.

"Hello."

"So what's going on? How's school? Man, I haven't seen you in months. What—"

"I'm busy, Jimmy. I'm talking to my friends. I don't want to be bothered." I can hear my voice shaking, and I wonder if the others can hear it too.

"Okay. Take it easy." But he keeps standing there, and after what feels like a full minute, he finally says, "Well, I guess I should go—"

"Okay bye." I stare blankly up at him, daring him to say anything else. Angela laughs.

Jimmy turns red, and for a second I think he's actually going to start crying right there. He doesn't. He turns and almost runs out the door, leaving his friends looking first at each other, then accusingly at me.

A few moments of silence, and I'm looking at my coffee again, feeling my cheeks burning, feeling sick.

A low whistle from Tim. "Well, somebody grew some balls! I didn't think you had it in you."

I try to smile, but can only grimace. "Yeah," I mumble. "I took a class." I sit there and can't think of anything else to say.



untitled

Renéé Lyon
silver gelatin print



untitled
Tiana J. Page
silver gelatin print

The Four Year War

(for P. on 38th Street)

Catherine Hope Greene

In downtown Savannah
the air weighs heavily—
a rapist's body,
the woman beneath.
Out there, outside,
the night people walk,
openly defiant,
in the streets.

I watch, I listen,
and now it's midnight again already

and I think 'we've been separated,
forced to fight alone.'
I call you on 38th Street,
hear your music in the background,
hear in your voice the intention to sleep.

I know that, involuntarily,
we won't survive this war
between what we need to do,
what we want to do,
between mind and heart.

And if my voice cracks,
it is because I cannot breathe—
my chest beneath this unyielding weight
of the air around me, the sounds around me.
And how are you going to keep me alive
if you are not here?

So I must come to you,
lay my body onto yours,
defy death to be the winner
as I draw my breath from your lips.

What the Thunder didn't Say

(for Fraser)

Melissa S. Hill

Your smile often catches me unaware,
naked and dripping, stepping down
from your ceremonial grounds,
safe from misspelled festivals and nights alone,
safe from the honey inside Satan's altar,
You often make known your unforgiving nature,
cold as hands dipped under winter;
always hiding in those words that play outside the meaning,
with those smoky spinning serpentine hisses,
designed to tell of days to come,
serving to remind of the last time you said goodbye.
Always your eyes are melting ice,
crystal blue inside my snow globe,
and I know you think to turn me upside down,
to shake me till I'm dry. Don't say a word.
Don't speak, sometimes.
One thing you have not learned about me:
I can be as cold as your hands, your heart, your soul,
and even fading I think I may have come to know
the passing of summer: all the planes have left,
and the clouds draw pictures beneath my silence,
but puff away, and begin to erase,
soft as the final kiss you laid
against the crook of my arm,
when all of my pulse and most of my life
were still enough to deliver you to the thunder.



Bell Tower
Sabrina Arango
silver gelatin print

*Thoughts in the Armstrong Atlantic State
University, 2nd Floor, Men's Bathroom Stall
of Gamble Hall*

John D. Trainor

Graffiti—the voice of the minority
speaks passionate expression.
The house of knowledge heavily layered
with an enamel face,
covering secret thoughts
of gagged voices:
but continue to generate
through defiance.

Country girls fuck best.
Kill all niggers.
Don't worry, when all is said and done
ALL THE FAGGOTS WILL DIE OF A.I.D.S.

...and all the enlightened before
who these voices learn their lessons
are forgotten to memories of martyrs
whose message was never heard.



The Hostel in the Forest

Alicia Lively

silver gelatin print



Rhett & Scarlet

Mike Rios
pen & ink

At The Gateway

Denise Shaw

As i stand and admire the forcible edifice
i notice cracks arising from the foundation
No . . . not yet

i can't face the dissolution
i need to admire it a little longer
i need to contain its memory

Languor intrudes
unwearied
to consume it away

immersed in sorrow
i stand aside
i'm powerless

i fight every fiber of my being to fix it
make it whole again
It can not be

i fall down and embrace the remaining foundation
i try to hold on . . . i can not
i must let it go

I have my own edifice to tend to.



untitled

Daphne B. Wooten
silver gelatin print

Thinky Pinky Lipstick

Dana Skiljan

Lipstick on the coffee cup
Can you relate?
He was not calling
As much lately
No! It's not my shade
It's much brighter than mine.
My catty-self thinks tacky color
Would he be caught dead
With a woman wearing....
Thinky pinky
What can I do?
Can I ask...
Who's been drinking from my cup?
No. It's not mine.
He can't be had
He's not available
He's only my waiter
In this restaurant
For tonight
Tomorrow I'll be gone.

Dramatic Monologue

Stacy Sims

I didn't know what white trash meant until Jeff Bradley told me that those people smelled funny and their shoes always looked like they came from the Big K. I laughed, even though my mama bought my shoes at the same store. The whole store smells like that hair place on Kentucky Avenue where my mama goes to get her permanent. She says that permanent makes her look beautiful, even though her hair stinks up our house something awful. It smells like greasy fried chicken. Permanents and the Big K do. I like fried chicken. Mama says that I eat the tar out of it.

I got a note sent home with me today from Mr. Russell. I think it says that I'm in trouble because I... I can't read his writing. It looks like the scribble that my cousin Betsy does in her coloring books. My writing has gotten better ever since me and mama practiced. She writes the dotted lines on the pages of my D'Nealian tablet, and I fill them in. Mama says that the D'Nealian books are a waste of time. She learned to write on regular paper. Now, what's the harm in that? She had to save money for my school supplies because, since I turned seven, I have to have what everybody else has. I felt bad because, two weeks before school started, mama and me were in the new grocery store, which doesn't just sell groceries. It sells cassette tapes and balloons too. I saw an Incredible Hulk lunch box on aisle seven and I begged mama to get it for me. It was the last one and my mama put her purple eyeshadow back and bought it for me. On the first day of school, I forgot the thermos on the lunchroom table and someone who didn't know it was mine threw it away, I think. I know that we're poor. Mama told me so I wouldn't expect so much, and I try not to. Last Sunday, we were in the Big K buying me new underpants cause my old ones have holes in them. Mama said that she felt awkward buying underwear on the Lord's Day, and a couple of times we had to hide from the good Christians. We stay at home and watch the midget preacher on channel seven. Mama gives me a special treat on Sundays cause I'm facing another long, hard week and I deserve it. My treat is always the same. A piece of Bazooka bubblegum. I don't really like the gum. I just chew it a little and then swallow it. I like the Bazooka Joe comics inside the wrapper. I have to be careful cause a couple of times I got too excited and ripped the comic on accident. I have a whole collection in a shoebox under my bed. One day, when the box is filled to the top, I'm going to sell them and turn a profit to give to Mama, so she can have as much purple eyeshadow and permanents as she wants.



Unforgotten Childhood
Patrick LaPollo
mixed media



untitled
Reneé Lyon
polaroid transfer



untitled
René Lyon
polaroid transfer



Cleansed

Cara L. Wade

Van Dyke brown ortho print

Voltage

(electricity + eccentricity = elexentricity)

Melissa Hill

For electric lights and electricity,
live wires and looping fans,
bent between the beds we made
and this bed I lay in,
till we go creeping across the spider's parlor—
the shadow of a lover's hand. . .
How many circuits must I build to make me bleed?

Nineteen years I've been dividing,
bolt by bolt to build the machine;
left inside poison ivy and honeysuckle vines,
poison is just another lover to kill and drink,
and tastes like angels going down.
I'm burning it now— so how many amps?

Pain is the light that lances my eyes,
a tiny eclipse of the soul
in electric blues that can build no world,
or move me up or down;
You know I'm scared of the darkness
and I'm swimming in my lies—
so I have to wrap myself in some sort of light.
I know he said to have.
I think I heard to hold.

But to forget him— how many volts?
I decided today to wake in grace
with a knife in my back and one in my veins.
I bleed sparks in showers of crimson and gold,
burned black to the fingers where the scars never show—
And if I could flash silver and let the light consume my scars—
How many arcs?

How many years till my eyes fly open,
connectors react and wake the machine?
And will she know the things I know,
and will she see the things I've seen?
I have nothing pure left to give her,
but I've cut myself for a year or more—
She'll take my soul, defined in voltage,
and of course my heart, dead electric arc—
She'll take my eyes as amps, deadliest of all,
though they never lit the way for me;
And through all these wires, she will program my death,
take over my circuits and go looping all through me,
to take apart my metal existence,
flipping the switch on her eccentricity.



untitled
Angie Hernden
silver gelatin print

The Failure

Dan Van Brunt

Deputy Peter Flemming arrived at work at the Faraway County Sheriff's Office at five minutes to eight, and was surprised to be greeted by Deputy Josephine Browning instead of Will, the little old man who served as dispatcher.

"Sheriff just called in, told me not to take off on my beat yet, but to sit tight until he gets here. Wants you to do the same." This was Joey Browning's way of saying good morning.

"Good morning to you too, Joey," Flemming replied, as he stepped into the little office. Faraway County was the smallest and third least populated county in Arkansas, and fittingly had a small and unpopulated sheriff's department. Besides Browning and himself, there were only three other officers, including Sheriff Edward C. Calhoun. The tiny facility they used looked more like a bail bondsman's office than one a county sheriff would use. The main room was lit by the brilliant early-morning sunshine coming through barred windows.

Flemming thought the place was more of a nighttime room—it didn't feel right in the daylight. The sun revealed the dingy yellow shag carpet and the old wormwood paneling, which somehow looked better at night—as if the furnishings knew their cheapness. Three battered desks took up half the floor on the opposite end from two cells. Each cell was about twenty by twenty, just big enough for a small cot, a sink and a toilet. Privacy for prisoners was not a pressing concern.

Once they'd had a woman they brought in to sleep off a bad drunk, and she had complained loudly, not wanting to relieve herself with two lawmen in the same room. She kept yelling about her right to privacy until she just pissed herself and went to sleep. By the time her husband came to bail her out, she was stinking up the whole place.

The only other rooms were a small bathroom and a storage room that adjoined the main office by way of a dimly lit hall that had one of those step-downs in it. Deputy Flemming forgot about that step sometimes when he had to go to the john—he nearly broke his fucking collarbone one time.

"Where's Will?" Flemming asked, as he looked around for the creaky dispatcher who usually was chattering away all the time—the office seemed empty and silent without him.

"Boss said he called in sick," Browning replied, as she rocked back and forth in her chair. "That's newsworthy, too, since Will ain't been sick one day that I can remember. That tough old bastard'll probably outlive us

all.” Browning said all this without taking her eyes off the papers she had in hand. She was a small, athletic young woman whom Flemming found attractive, but Pete Flemming thought she’d be a lot more attractive if she’d lay off the chewing tobacco. Her can of Copenhagen snuff lay on the desk, next to the ever-present Mountain Dew can she used as a spittoon. She was dipping now, and it made her lisp a little.

Flemming heaved his bulky frame into another chair behind a desk and looked out the window at the green countryside, and reflected on the past few months.

“How’d I wind up here?” he thought. He’d been a bouncer in a strip club for years, but decided to get out of the big city and find a job he could take a little pride in. He’d grown tired of his job, and having grown up in a small town in Oklahoma, decided to get away from the bustle and the violence that had been his life and get back to the country. The only problem was that in a small town, you had to take whatever job you could get; Faraway wasn’t exactly the land of opportunity.

So he took the only job he could find. It was offered to him by the sheriff himself one day as Flemming was walking down Main Street in his only suit and tie as he applied and interviewed at practically every place in town. He took the job, thinking that maybe it would be more fulfilling than bouncing. So far, however, he thought that being a cop wasn’t much different from being a bouncer, except that he kicked people into instead of out of his place of employment. He’d only been in town for four months, and only been a deputy for three. He thought he’d give the job six months before he decided to stay or not; yeah, six months, then time to re-evaluate his situation.

He ran his hand through his shock of black hair, smelled coffee, and decided on a cup. Whatever habits Joey Browning had, the bitch sure could make a pot of coffee, he thought. He filled a Styrofoam cup, returned to his seat, and wondered if Browning had a spittoon on her nightstand, for that after-sex dip of snuff. The thought made him shudder a little, but it turned him on, too, as he pondered on what kissing her would taste like.

The sound of the sheriff’s cruiser crunching the gravel out front woke Flemming from his thoughts. He rose to greet the sheriff, as did Browning, who carefully placed her precious forms on the side of her desk. The door was thrown open and the sheriff strode in, leading a handcuffed man with lank hair and a two-day beard. The guy smelled like he needed a bath, too. Flemming scowled—he smelled like a fish market’s back room at the end of a long, hot day.

“Get in here, boy. That’s it. Hey, Joey gimme a hand with this son of a bitch. He ain’t too keen on this whole thing.” Browning went over to help the sheriff muscle the reluctant man inside and over to a chair in front

of the booking desk in the corner.

"Found this guy out by the Darnell's lake, sleeping next to the dock. Ken Darnell wants him charged with trespassing. He was fishin' in their lake, and they claim some stuff is missing of theirs, too. Whew, he smells like people must have before soap was invented. Damn punk, sit down." The man refused, looking like he hadn't even heard. "I said sit down." Calhoun gave the man a rough shove, and he stumbled over the chair and cringed into it. He then just sat there, looking down into his lap, his long hair falling into his face.

"Damn drifters, think they run the show. Around here I run the show, you hear me?" Calhoun was angry, red-faced, and pointing his finger at the man, inches from his nose. Calhoun was not a big man, but he had that kind of presence, Flemming thought, a sort of intense quality that commanded your attention. That is, if you weren't a stoned out loser like this guy, anyway. Flemming thought that if this dude didn't start answering the sheriff soon, that things could get ugly. He knew what Calhoun was capable of, and had even helped out in "straightening out" a couple of prisoners, but the thought of beating this guy suddenly gave Flemming a queasy feeling. There was something different about this one.

The drifter was wearing a sport coat with leather patches on the elbows, like he'd been out at a poetry reading and decided to hitchhike across Arkansas on a sudden impulse, stopping only to poach fish out of private lakes. The whole time that the Sheriff and Browning were taking his fingerprints and trying to get his name, he just sat there, dazed. Flemming wondered what he was on. Finally, they got the information they needed from his driver's license.

"Parker, Philip G. Hey, buddy, that you?" Calhoun was looking back and forth from the picture on the card to the man's face. "Guess it could be, if you'd had a shave and a haircut recently." Flemming thought the man did need a shave, and his hair was too long; it wouldn't help him around here. Calhoun especially hated guys with long hair. Flemming had his own doubts about this Parker guy; that feeling of uneasiness still lingered. This guy had on really nice shoes, even though they were now covered in mud and slime. What transient has loafers like that? Flemming began to actively wonder just what the sheriff was up to when Calhoun called over to him:

"Pete, put this piece of shit in the first cell, while I start processing his paperwork. Joey, go out to my car and get his stuff—there's two bags in the trunk, and we need to go through them and catalog the stuff so we can tell if any of the Darnell's stuff they claim to be missing is in there."

"You got it, boss." Flemming said. He got up and collared Parker and roughly pulled him up, half carrying him to the cell. He threw him in

and slammed the door shut just as Browning walked out the door. He turned to find the sheriff standing at his elbow.

"Come over here, Pete. I've got a job for you." Calhoun grabbed Flemming's arm, and walked him away from the cell.

"I'm gonna leave you two here alone with this clown in a minute, and I want you to try and get this guy softened up a little while I'm gone. The Darnells made some other accusations besides trespassing and poaching. They claim that he broke in to their house, took some stuff, and..."

Calhoun trailed off, wiped his hand across his mouth, then continued: "Pete, they claim that he raped their daughter."

"Holy shit, that little girl? She can't be much more than 9 or 10 years old for Chrissakes," Flemming said.

"Yeah, LuAnnes' 10 this fall. Look, I have to go to the hospital over in Hot Springs to see what the docs find, and to take some more statements from the Darnells. I didn't want to mention any of this in front of Joey, you know? Frankly, I've known Ken and Janine Darnell my whole life, and God help this shithead if he really did force himself on that little girl. I know what you can do, and I'm sure that I can count on you to do what is necessary to get this guy to see how important it is that we communicate." Flemming knew what this meant. Calhoun wanted him to beat the shit out of this Parker fella until the man broke down and confessed to raping the Darnell girl.

"OK, boss I know what to do," Flemming said, as he wondered if he really did or not anymore. He realized that in a few minutes, he'd probably need to open that cell door and beat a confession out of a man whose only crime might be drifting into this town with a sissy haircut. Browning came back in with Parker's bags—one was an Army duffel—and threw them on the floor next to the hallway. Calhoun announced:

"Joey, I'm going back to the Darnells to get the whole report since we're short-handed today with Will out sick. Wait 'till I get back to open them bags, but while I'm gone, you can do the write-up on this creep. You're a better typist than I am anyway." Browning didn't look the least bit concerned at this turn of events. She cared more for her paperwork than she did for people, he sometimes thought. Calhoun promised to be back around noon and left, his big Ford slinging gravel as he whipped out of the lot. Browning went over to the booking desk, grabbed up Parker's forms, and headed to her own desk. She glanced over at Flemming, and he felt a strange sense of foreboding when he heard her say,

"Looks like we've both got our work cut out for us this morning, huh Pete?" Her wide smile showed too many of her teeth, stained from her chew. She parked it at her desk, turned her little radio up louder, and dismissed Flemming and the room at large. Flemming turned to see what

the prisoner made out of all this, but he only sat there exactly as before, and if he had any clue as to what was going on, he did not show it. Some new country singer started in on a lousy rendition of an old Hank Williams song on Browning's radio as Flemming removed his gun belt, and threw it over the back of his chair. He went over to the cell door, and opened it with a key from his large ring, and then he went inside, swinging the door shut behind him. He tossed his key ring over towards his desk, and missed. The keys made a hollow clang when they landed instead in a little gray wastebasket, and Flemming sighed.

When they were through, he would call Browning to let him out. This way, if he were overpowered, the prisoner at least would remain confined. Flemming seriously doubted that this dude could overpower anybody, but procedure was procedure. He almost laughed at himself then, but it caught in his throat. Procedure? Where in the police manual did it list procedures for beating on a suspected child rapist?

Flemming tried to turn his mind to the task at hand.

"Hello, anybody in there?" he asked. The man still acted like there was no one in the cell with him. Flemming started to anger—he looked hard at Parker, and grabbed his head to make the man look into his eyes. The man's gaze was totally vacant. He was definitely on something.

"Hello," he shouted directly into the man's face. "If you can hear me, give me a sign. Hell, if you can't hear me, give me a sign." Flemming was stalling, and he knew it. He knew what was expected to do, but then, all of a sudden, he felt with total certainty that he could not go through with it. The thought flashed in his mind like lightning—this was a frame job. Flemming had no doubts in his mind that Calhoun or someone had found this guy travelling through town and had slipped him something, and now they were using him as a scapegoat. Who was responsible? Flemming knew that Calhoun was part of it, but beyond that, he didn't know. He just wanted to get out of this cell with this obviously drugged man, just get away altogether. He'd had his suspicions before about how on the level this department was, but he saw it as if for the first time in that cell that day, and he was frightened.

He turned towards Browning, to get her attention, and saw that he already had it. She was standing right outside the cell, with her arms folded. He hadn't even heard her cross the room, but there she was, looking like a schoolteacher regarding a slow, stupid child.

"Let me out of here, I can't go through with this," he said.

"Sheriff was right, you are weak after all. He saw the signs, you know. He had a feeling that this is what would happen sooner or later. That's what today's little test was designed to do—make you face your weakness. Flemming confusedly reached out to Browning, clawing at the air.

"Come on, I said I'm not gonna do it, now let me out!" he felt panic rise, but beat it down for the moment. He saw and felt Browning's smile as she backed away, carefully keeping out of his reach.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, not until you do your job. You are not to leave that cell until that man confesses to child molestation, or is rendered unconscious, or whatever." At that last, she smiled that yellow toothy grin, and Flemming felt he might throw up. How did she know? Calhoun said he didn't want her to know. How many times had this little scenario happened in the past? Was the sheriff some serial rapist who pinned his sex crimes on unwitting travelers? Flemming thought that unlikely, but maybe the man had tendencies and couldn't hide them forever. But, Browning sure seemed to know a lot, too.

He wished that he was a thousand miles away, or that he'd called in sick, or that he had his keys—anything to keep from having to think about what it was that he was being asked to do, which was obviously to help put this guy Parker away on some trumped-up charge.

"Joey, is there something you know about this that you aren't telling me?" Flemming decided to try and talk his way out. What other choice did he have?

"What do you think, city boy? That weirdos only live in the big towns? Everybody's got needs—sometimes the sheriff's get him into trouble. Too bad for you that you figured it out though. You were supposed to be a big dumb ox, but you went and got too smart for your own good." With this, Browning walked over towards Flemming's chair, where his gunbelt was.

"Looks like you forgot to take off your gun belt before you went in the cell with that pedophile," she said, smilingly. Flemming realized in horror what she meant to do.

"Don't do it, Joey!"

"Rookie mistake, nothing I could do but kill him after he already shot you," Browning went on. You'll be remembered as the dumbest cop this county's ever had, and we've been through about ten in the past five years. They keep dying, or running off, or turning up missing." She laughed her nasty laugh, and pulled Flemming's .357 out of its holster.

"This is where we part company, sweetheart..."

Flemming shut his eyes, didn't listen for the sound of the shot. It was incredibly loud when it went off—it sounded to him like the world was ending.



untitled
Charlie Parker
silver gelatin print

Downpour

Hal Thomas

You entered my life suddenly
And unexpectedly
Like a summer afternoon thundershower

Ever since,
I have been caught
In the torrential downpour
of you.

It has been some time
since I have been forced to swim;
Now I'm drowning in the floods
Of thoughts of you.

Every minute I spend with you
is another drop from
the raincloud . . .

So let it rain.

Nyla's Shirt

Heidi Butler

Her shirt reminded me of the blue and white china teacups my grandmother gave me when I was small and didn't realize their little value. I broke one soon after, no one yelled, and I still didn't realize their little value. I've misplaced them now, somewhere in my attic, I think, or maybe . . . well I couldn't really tell you where, I guess. I like her shirt though. It's towering blue buildings, with angular roofs and broken up trellises., crowded behind white clouds and yellow blossoms. It fits so nice on her too. I'm sure I couldn't wear it, even if I were skinnier. It's the way she holds her shoulders, the way she arches her back, and maybe the way the silky fabric rests just above her hips that makes it seem as if no one in the world could wear it except her, as if it were made for her frame, and hers alone. It's not that it especially flatters her, or makes her look like some gorgeous supermodel. In fact, I don't see how a supermodel could wear it. Maybe it's her: her personality, her strange poses and the way her short, dirty blonde hair lays on the collar in a soft mess of imperfect color. I think I could imagine a man's mind, the way he looks at a woman, the way he notices her smile, her curves. I can love a face, the way the eyes set on an object with laughter or seriousness, the way the eyebrows arch or the fingers twitch nervously on jeans. I think women are beautiful, all women, true women,. You can tell from the outside just how lovely they are inside, the way their hearts beat steadily, the way their lips part full and pink when they don't even realize they're staring into space.

Then come the sick ones, the empty ones, the ones that step hollow shoes on voiceless streets. They have no beauty, no spark, no softness. Their eyes are knives, their tongues vipers, their heads mush.



untitled
Tiana J. Page
silver gelatin print

Dressing on the Side

Elaine Hakala

The dried whatever it was would not come off the fork, no matter how hard she scraped against it with one manicured nail.

"You'll love the country steak," he prompted, looking over the greasy menu at her and grinning. "They'll put extra gravy on it if you want, and Della makes some damned good milk gravy."

Her white silk blouse felt like it was sticking to her. The diner was like a blast furnace, heat rolling across the smoky room from the grill on the other side of the counter. It sent up clouds of steam every time the weasely looking man with tattoos on his arms flipped over whatever it was he was cooking.

The smell of grease mixing with her Chanel #5 was nauseating.

"Why didn't we just go to that little Italian place like I asked you to?" she asked, glaring at him as she returned the menu to the cheesy chrome rack behind the grimy salt and pepper shakers. Snagging one of the cheap paper napkins out of the canister, she wiped her hands off disgustedly. "I'd have even settled for MacDonald's, Frederick. At least they're cleaner."

"Don't be that way, Elizabeth" he murmured in that sexy drawl that made her melt, reaching across the filmy formica table to take her hand, absently spinning the big diamond engagement ring around on her second finger as he chided her. "You know that Della is an old friend of the family."

"I know that I'll have to take this outfit to the cleaners first thing in the morning," she returned peevishly, withdrawing her hand from his and folding it in her lap with the other one, just so she didn't have to touch anything. "I'll probably take it off in the garage when we get home and put it in a plastic bag so I don't have to smell it in the car in the morning. I KNOW I don't want it smelling up my house."

His face crinkled up in exasperation, but his rebuttal was cut short by the appearance of a grossly obese woman ... sporting a huge, dingy lace contraption pinned to her pink polyester uniform by a plastic name tag that read "Della."

"FREDDY!!" the woman squealed when she recognized the man at the table, and he rose to wrap her in his arms and squeeze her tight despite her bulk.

Elizabeth just let them chat, inching a bit further away from the crease at the far end of the shiny red vinyl bench seat she was sitting on ... unwilling to find out what that brownish-black crud stuck in the crack was without a hazardous materials team standing by. All she knew was that it was not getting anywhere near her \$300 rose colored linen skirt.

"Well, I want the country fried steak, Della. And a sweet tea," Frederick said, his arm draped around the woman's ample waist as he returned to his seat and smiled up at her. "Elizabeth?" he asked.

"Salad, low-fat dressing on the side," she requested, trying to keep her upper lip from curling as she spoke. Sometimes it was just hard to be nice for him. For a lawyer, he had some awful friends. "Just bring me water to drink," she added.

"We don't got no low-fat dressing, sugar. How about some nice Thousand Island?" Della asked with a sunny, gap-toothed smile, pulling the stub of a pencil from behind her ear and bringing with it a little snow-shower of yellowed dandruff as she began scribbling on a tattered order pad.

It was all Elizabeth could do to keep from standing up and running out to the Lexus immediately. "That's fine," she murmured, fighting back the nausea. "Just please make sure that they put it on the side. People in restaurants are such idiots."

As the fat woman turned to leave, Elizabeth remembered another pressing issue. "And please bring me some clean silverware."

"That was rude," Frederick announced quietly as Della walked away, disapproval thick in his dark gray eyes.

"I said PLEASE," she snapped in return. "I was TRYING to be nice."

"Your tone of voice said otherwise, Elizabeth. And you don't just call people idiots to their face."

"I didn't call her an idiot. I was making a generalization."

"You said it about people who work in restaurants ... like her. You really don't think before you say things to some people, Elizabeth," he scolded, "especially when you consider them lower than your little circle of plastic friends."

"Let's talk about something else," she interjected quickly, feeling her stress level going up, and rubbing her forehead to keep it from wrinkling. She felt so lightheaded already. All she needed was to pass out and hit the floor in this place.

Imagining what kind of filth was down there was all that was keeping her upright.

"No, we're going to have this discussion," he replied, then paused

as Della returned to the table with their drinks.

Elizabeth took one look at the glass placed in front of her and nearly lost it. "Look at this," she hissed as the obese woman turned and lumbered away from the table, holding up the glass with two fingers and showing Frederick the smudge on it. "Did you bring me here so I could catch the bubonic plague? Anthrax? What?"

"And that's the other thing," he returned, leaning back in the booth and fixing his gaze on her. "You are so obsessive/compulsive. Off the deep end. There's a tiny little speck on that glass ... and you act like it's coated in raw sewage. You've got a real problem, Elizabeth. It rules your life."

"You're just being ridiculous. How can you say that wanting things to be clean is a problem, Frederick? Don't you like it when things are clean?"

"Sure I do. But I don't have panic attacks when they're not."

"Well ... I'm just fastidious," she replied defensively. "My mother was always fastidious."

"Right into an early grave."

"That's not fair, Frederick. My mother was very fragile."

"Your mother worried herself to death ... over nothing ... just like you're doing. I love you, Elizabeth. I don't want to see you do that to yourself. And quite frankly ... I'm sick of listening to it. You were fun when we first met, but now all you do is complain."

She sat in stunned silence as Della returned to their table, bearing a huge plate of greasy food for Frederick, and a wilted salad for her. How dare he speak to her that way? The old woman turned to leave, looking anxiously at the hard expression on Frederick's face, but Elizabeth wasn't about to let her get away right yet. "Where is my clean silverware?" she snapped, picking through the lettuce leaves on her plate with the tips of her fingers and tossing the unsavory looking ones to the side. "Or don't you have any in this dump?"

"That's it, Elizabeth," Frederick sighed. "I'm not going to stick around and watch you insult people who don't meet your standards for the rest of my life. I've got better things to do." He stood and wrapped his arm around the large woman's shoulder for a second, pressing a \$50 bill in her hand. "I apologize for my companion, Della. I won't bring her here anymore."

Without another word, he turned and started toward the door.

"I'm sorry, Frederick," Elizabeth whined, scrambling for something to say to make it right.

When he didn't stop, she got desperate. How could he do this? She couldn't let it end this way. They had already begun to plan their

wedding. What would people say?

“Look, Frederick. I’m eating it,” she shouted, not caring who heard her. Picking up a piece of lettuce and biting on it, she fought back the urge to gag. “I’m eating it.”

He never stopped, simply pushed open the glass door at the end of the line of booths and disappeared out into the night, leaving her watching the gravy congeal on his abandoned plate, and wondering what she was going to do next.



Cub propeller 1
Melissa Tharpe-Tiesi
silver gelatin print

Perpetual Ebb

Patrick LaPollo II

When I drink wine I want to pick fair flowers,
When I pick fair flowers my feet begin to dance,
When I dance I spin in circles,
Spinning circles makes me prance.

Prancing makes me grin,
Grinning makes me laugh,
Laughing makes me sin,
Sinning keeps me busy.

When I'm busy sinning I feel sadness,
And when I'm feeling sad the woe is mine,
This possession makes me thirsty,
And when I'm thirsty I drink wine.

When I look upon this blank

John D. Trainor

When I look upon this blank
and I think of the words
to write of what I see in you,
in reflecting mirrors—
I hesitate
to pollute
the page that stares at me
blankly, innocent, pure
like your autumn eyes that fall like leaves from the heavens,
when I slip into the clothes
that I shrugged off years ago, in past decades,
generations, or lifetimes,
when I was younger...

when we boys would play
baseball,
with hard wooden bats and well-greased gloves,
hunting for wide open space
to experience freedom....
Where girls were not allowed
into complicated games
of offense and defense,
aggression brewing
in pots of naïve testosterone
that were our bodies,
becoming everything
and anything
that our mothers
Nursed in us
since birth
with game after game,
keeping score,
that was once for fun,
but now a necessity
for manhood....

I saw my enemies
lined in opposite colors,
prepared with strategy
for my demise,

but across the field,
in the dug-out of visitor,
rooting for your brother,
friend, or boyfriend,
I caught the flash
that was your eyes

...and fell into a blank page,
where words were never to be written
to describe a world

that was you.



Sinclair #2
Cara L. Wade
silver gelatin print

Sleep Walkers

Renae Tanner

Back away from me—you foggy fools
Wake up to the coffee you don't taste
And press on through your pillow lives
With fading smiles and worn out bodies
Pushing further into nothingness
Wondering why—all the while
Or
Perhaps you never wondered—
Never searching for the answer to anything
Except monotony's smile—and the next good feeling
No matter who it sacrifices
As long as
It's one more level up
As you rest asleep all your lives
Never penetrating the surface of your core
Just okay with being empty
Just okay with the zombie life
Of work and sleep and brain wash
Clearing your head
Because all day you've been talking trash
About people you don't truly know anyway
Wrong style—wrong way
When you don't even know your own way

Wake up for once
And rest—in the darkness of your being
Look at the shadows you invoke
And question everything
From reality to the one you're trapped in
And when you wake
Perhaps the whole world will feel lighter
Lifted by the flight of your burden—

And you can begin again—on your own path
As a thinking being
Instead of a robot being—
Led to death—



Loneliness
Lisa Morekis
silver gelatin print

Instinct

Elizabeth Pferschy

Sleep under the crook of my arm,
breathe water with the rest of us.

Gently remember who you are.
The water on the window
Feels so cold, but the rabbit
has warm flesh

Come begging, And I will
Suckle you
And cover you with
My hair

-warm,
Warm inside
Close to beating waters
And a tightened grip.



untitled
Mike Rios
pen & ink

Echo

Hal Thomas

Footsteps resound in the empty halls
paved with cheap linoleum
And against cinder block walls
adorned with industrial galvanized sea green paint.

Opaque plastic window panes
blot out the sun's bright rays,
And wads of paper, dust-bunnies, and a
rapidly decaying banana peel enhance the
Abandonment.

Phantom voices shatter the silence,
whispering remembrances
of the myriad of things
passed here,
Reverberating from wall to ceiling
to floor to wall and back again.

Nest

Renaë Tanner

Strange!?
Nothing is near me—
No crazy fixation
Of him—or her—
No revelation
Splashing me in the face—
No questioning eyes for
Me to contemplate my being upon—
No anger need be released—
And no love conjured
To its receiver—
I must perform
No unique duty of being—
Only being who I am—
No one waiting for my reply
About every manipulated thought
They have &
Neither do I seek out
A companion to bounce
My skirt or mind upon—
I am sitting here
Realizing—
No energy exists—
For or against anyone
To or from anyone—
All is suited well
And well away from me
All is—
I am feeling nothing—
A beloved feeling
I have always strived
To stray from—
But it is so wise and
Easily planted
In the shell debris

Of my within—and
Each shell is
Strategically placed
In this within—
I am content
Holding nothing
But my head up—
I only question—why
It took me so
Long to get here—



Hole in the Wall

Lauren Ashley
silver gelatin print

Dreams

Marcus Smith

Sinking through the cracking sunrise vault
Captured images drain through the dayspring
Like dead lives rising, brought forth and killed,
Calmed down and drunk in my thin veined seas,
And though the death be long and forsaken,
The life mourns till the lion-eye opens dead
And image converges with object
And all is lost in creation. And all is lost in creation.

Deep redolenting mourning sleep, the sleep
Like babies milk Rotten, sleep, which numbs
Like butterflies wings, me still in the indolent creeping
Of my motionless soul. These dreams though lost
And shaken away like brown cackles in the summer solstice
sun
Dream down to the cloudless sky of green grown.

And that one lost that now comes, now comes
Like the cockleshells once whole and broken,
Once saint and confessional, once dead to the dead place
Now live for the living and lives like the twirling songs
An octave above thunder, in the hinterlands of the dreaming,
In the hinterlands of the song.

The Avalanche Recovery

Dan Van Brunt

My name is Todd Jacob Spencer. I'm twenty-two years old, but I'll probably never see my twenty-third birthday. In fact, I give myself less than a couple days, as cold as it is. I wish I had put that pack up here in the cab instead of in the bed of the truck, because there was enough food in there to last awhile. I've got some food—a couple of candy bars that I found in the glove box, and all the snow a body could ever want for water. I'm starting to think that the cold will definitely get me first, although it really doesn't matter, because I could never have enough food to last me until spring, which is when I'll probably be found.

You see, I was caught in an avalanche a few hours ago while driving down service road 19, which leads from Big Craggy Mt. to Winthrop, Washington, and nobody knows that I'm up here. That sucker really caught me unawares—one minute I'm driving along, next minute—it was like the hand of some giant just picked me up and I was swept away, rolling down the side of the mountain.

I haven't gone into shock, I don't think, which is pretty amazing because my arm doesn't work—I think my shoulder is dislocated. It hurts like somebody jamming a steel rod into the bone of my arm when I move it, so I won't be digging out of here. It's amazing I wasn't hurt worse. I guess seatbelts do save lives, or in this case, extend them. Anyway, I came to rest after what seemed like ages of tossing and rolling, and so here I am, buried alive. I'm sitting upright in the truck, which must be upright as well in relation to the ground, because when I dropped my glove out of my shaking hand, it fell on the floorboard.

I've been told that avalanches don't often occur this time of year around here, so who'd have thought that I'd be the lucky recipient of one? An avalanche in November—what a joke. Well, I'm going to get it together enough to tell my story, so that I won't die from fright, anyway. Whoever finds me will, I hope, forward this story of mine to my loved ones, my uncle first of all, but I'm mostly writing for myself. They say that writing can be cathartic in times when you are under a lot of stress. Well, I'm not under a lot of stress, but I am under a lot of snow—and I guess that's close enough. My mind feels stretched to the breaking point of reality, and it's as if I can actually see the credits rolling on my life.

This laptop of mine was along for the ride, since I carry it everywhere. I don't know how it wasn't damaged, and I don't know how long it will work before the cold gets to it, but it seems fine now. I'll save this to disc when I'm done, and keep it in my jacket so it'll be found—kind of like a voice from the grave. Well, here goes; background first.

I'm not originally from this area; in fact I'm only visiting. My uncle, Hatch Spencer—my father's older brother—runs the store down in Winthrop, and every year while I was growing up my folks sent me up to work in the store with my uncle. I hadn't been back up here since the summer before I graduated high school, about five years ago. Once I joined the Army, I was on my own and didn't have time for this place or my uncle anymore. And, even though I didn't want to admit it for awhile, I missed

coming up here, I missed the store, the town, and the mountains—especially, though, and I missed Glenn and Emily. Well, I'll come back to them eventually. Anyway, I went into the Army, against my parents' wishes, of course. They had my life planned from the get-go. Like I said, they had me coming up here every summer, usually for about two months of my break, then it was back to the boarding school outside of Atlanta that I went to my whole childhood. My folks sent me up here to "diversify" me, they said, but I really think it was because they didn't know what to do with me when school was out. I saw them at Christmas for a couple of weeks, and a couple of weeks in the summer when I was around the house before and after my trips up here, but other than that, we had little contact.

But, they had their ideas about where I was supposed to be headed in life. I had excellent grades—Hell, I had nothing better to do—in a boarding school they pretty much absolve you of your spare time, you know. And my folks made me apply to all the right schools. My father was new money; he had made it big with IBM as a creative consultant, and he has a huge office in the IBM building down in Atlanta. His family is from Seattle, and my grandparents still live there. Only his brother, my uncle Hatch, is crazy enough to live out in the mountains. Sometimes I think though, that my uncle is a bigger success in life than my father is—even though he has not made any money to speak of. At least he's happy here.

Anyway, my mom is another story altogether. She is old money, honey, and don't you forget it. I think that the only reason she married my father was because the Beaumont family fortune was almost gone, but she would rather marry into new money than get stuck selling the house, or worse, getting a job. She is from Savannah, and around there she is like a baroness, a lady of title. People kiss her ass at parties, and all that stuff. It really made me kind of sick, but I wouldn't mind being at one of those cotillions or whatever right now. Hell, I'd gladly swap places with one of those old phonies right now if I could.

Well, enough about my parents. Even though I got accepted at several fine schools, including MIT (Math is my specialty) I decided to throw them all a curve and enlist in the Army instead. My scores were right off the charts; I could have gotten any job I wanted. I chose to work on tanks. Finally, here was a job that interested me. I even drove a huge tracked vehicle, especially designed to tow tanks. Have you ever seen those big wreckers that tow semis? Those things are Tonka trucks by comparison. It was a fun job, and I made a lot of friends who didn't care if I knew so-and-so, or where I went to school. In the end, I got out because I wanted to explore a little. I needed to find out what I was going to do with my life. I mean, the Army was fun, but not a career for me. And there was this place. Always I thought about Winthrop and my uncles' store, where I had most of my good memories. I needed to come back up here, because this is the only place that I have felt at home in my entire life.

My uncle's store is in a building in the middle of town, on the only corner that has a red light. It's a two-story brick affair, and it is one of the most important in town. Winthrop is so small that the general store is more than just a store, it's a town meeting place. My uncle is one of the most important people because of this, and since he loves the town, he loves his position. The store has a cluster of tables up front, near the windows that overlook Olympia Street. The old-timers hang out there all day, playing

checkers and dominoes, gossiping about the goings-on in town, the weather, and anything else they can think of. Uncle Hatch has a satellite, and a big TV that he switches back and forth from the Weather Channel to CNN all day. In Winthrop, if you want the news, be it local or national, you go to uncle Hatch's store.

The store itself sprawls across the entire lower floor, and it's got just about everything. Most of the store is given over to groceries, but he also has a small but well-stocked auto parts counter, some basic hardware and plumbing supplies, and several shelves of movies for rent. In the winters, which come on quick and hard and linger for months, this store is a lifeline to the outside world for the nine hundred or so residents of Winthrop.

Uncle Hatch lives upstairs, in a cozy series of rooms that he has, over time, made into quite a nice place. There is a great room, which takes up half the space, with the fireplace in the corner, a huge kitchen, and three bedrooms, one of which is mine. My uncle is a life-long bachelor, but he has a great many friends who are always coming to visit, so his house is always full of life. In the summers of my childhood, I can remember there always being somebody either staying there with us, or calling on us for a while.

Uncle Hatch was in Vietnam, and several of his Army buddies came to stay over the years, more when I was small than now. I can remember being packed off to bed early on the nights that they would come. I've never seen my uncle drink, and I think that's because I stayed in bed when he sent me there on those particular nights.

Well, it's time to come back around to Glenn and Emily now; after I give a little background on them, I'll be able to tell the story of how I wound up driving up to Big Craggy on this particular Wednesday in November. Glenn and Emily Watson were an elderly couple who worked for my uncle. My uncle runs the place, does the books, helps customers, and all that stuff. Glenn, a big, husky man in his sixties, did a lot of the physical stuff like unloading and stocking shelves. He worked about twelve hours a day in that store—always did. No matter how many times my uncle told him to take some time off, or tried to hire some young kids to help with all the work, Glenn would never waver. He knew everything about the inventory, and also had an uncanny ability to remember shipment dates and what box came on what truck.

But his defining characteristic was his skill as a woodsman—having lived his whole life in the mountains of Washington he was steeped in mountain lore. Many times when I was a boy he took me out into the woods, where he showed me his world. It was probably the best time of my life, the excursions into the deep forests around the National Park up near the Canadian border. We'd spend whole weekends camping, fishing, and hiking all through the Cascades during the summers of my youth.

Emily is Glenn's wife, and the love of his life. They have never spent more than a couple days apart, only when Glenn went into the mountains would they be separated. Miss Emily also works for my uncle, cleaning the store and his apartments, cooking for him, giving the place a womanly touch. She is also in her sixties now, and she, until recently at least, kept the place in order. She is slow, not full-blown mentally retarded, but definitely not of normal intelligence. She cannot drive—in fact she is

usually terrified of cars unless Glenn's with her. That kind of sums her up, in fact. If Glenn's nearby, she functions well, if a little erratically sometimes. If he's not around, or she hasn't heard his voice for awhile, she'll get jumpy, crying out until he answers her. She wasn't quite so bad about this when I was growing up, but unfortunately she's gotten quite a bit worse while I was away in the Army. This year when I arrived, I couldn't believe the change the years had made.

She's quite a bit more nervous than she used to be, and I guess that's why Glenn had not gone out into the woods for one of his two or three-day camping trips for awhile. I bet she started to get a little whiney whenever he started to get out his lantern, or brought his sleeping bag out to air on the balcony rail. I've been here visiting for a couple weeks, and was getting ready to take my leave, before the snows really started, making it harder to get out of town. Then, last Friday, Glenn asked me if I wouldn't mind helping my uncle watch Emily for him, because he was dying to get up into the woods before winter set in.

"She thinks the world of you, Todd," he said to me. "She'll be alright with you and your uncle around to keep an eye on her. I ain't been out there for almost two years, and I really need some time up there in the big quiet, if you know what I mean."

I did know exactly what he meant, and I thought then, and now, that he was one of the most long-suffering and patient men I've ever met. If anybody deserved some time away from his demanding job and beloved high-maintenance wife, it was Glenn Watson. So I said sure, I'd do it, and my only regret is that I wasn't invited along, even though I knew why I wasn't.

Well, Glenn didn't take long to get ready, he always camped light, only taking whatever he could carry on his back—which was a lot, by the way—and once he made his plans to go on his two-day excursion he was ready by the following morning. Saturday morning. When he threw his pack into the back of his old Jeep CJ-5 and took off out of Winthrop, headed up to county road 19, (where I met my avalanche today), it was the last time anybody but me saw him alive.

The weather turned ugly on Sunday night, and we all started to worry about old Glenn. He was an extremely competent woodsman, true, but he was also way past his prime, and hadn't been up in the mountains for awhile. Anyway, that night was bad. The wind was really whipping and the snow came on at about seven-thirty in what was our first big snow this season. As my uncle and I took turns holding and comforting Emily, we also kept in touch with a couple of the game wardens that Glenn has known all his life. Those guys, Smythe and Tibbet are their names, should get some kind of commendation. They picked up on our fears immediately and turned out a full search based entirely on our concerns. Well, they looked from the next morning, that's this past Monday, until this morning, Wednesday, and they have called in helicopters and observation planes from as far away as Seattle and Boise. Like I said, Uncle Hatch and I are grateful to those two park rangers for all their help, but in the end, Glenn didn't need all those folks' help after all.

Well, I'd better hurry and wrap this story up, because I just fainted or something for a minute there, actually I have no idea for how long I was under. It's so dark and cold in here. My computer screen is lighting up

most of the cab of this old truck—most of it. There's one corner over on the passenger floorboard that is still pretty dark, but not dark enough for me, not by a long shot.

You see, by this morning, Uncle Hatch and I realized that those guys with all their equipment and know-how weren't having any luck, and they'd be forced to give up by the end of the week, when the weather is supposed to get a lot worse. The last snowstorm, the one that caught Glenn, only ended last night, so they haven't really been able to search very thoroughly yet. Anyway, I talked Uncle Hatch into letting me use his truck to head up here and see if I could find Glenn on my own. I know where he likes to go, and I had a hunch, it turns out a correct one—about where Glenn would hole up in case a big storm hit.

The old cabin was favorite spot of mine when I was small, and I can remember Glenn saying that it would be a good place to get to in case we ever got separated. Well, when I told those rangers that, they just said that somebody had already been over there to check. It really isn't a hard place to get to from my now-favorite road, county #19. It's only a short two miles from the road up where it goes through the pass to the north of Big Craggy. So I headed out this morning, and it took me the better part of the day to get up there, the snow was so thick. Twice I got stopped by state troopers, telling me that my help wasn't needed in the search and all that, but I just went around 'em and their roadblocks, which never block all the logging roads anyway, and kept heading up here.

I got to the cabin at about three this afternoon (I just remembered that although my watch was broken during the avalanche, my computer has a clock in it—I just checked it—it's still Wednesday, but not for much longer.) Anyway, at first, I thought that my time had been wasted, because there was no sign of Glenn anywhere. If he had been there, the recent snow wiped clean any trace of his passing. The deputy who had checked the cabin had thoughtfully put a note on the door to let Glenn know, should he happen past it, to let us in on where he was, since everyone was looking for him and all.

Well, I was pretty discouraged and was about to leave when a strange thing happened. I had a feeling right then that I wasn't alone. I felt more than I heard Glenn call for help, down at the bottom of the well.

The old cabin had a (thankfully) shallow well sunk in it's back yard. In the mountains, with natural fresh water everywhere, it's pretty rare to see such wells. In essence they are just small scooped out areas, usually no more than fifteen feet deep, and about four feet across. Dug to that depth up here, a well can give you an inexhaustible supply of fresh water, without your having to walk to the nearest stream or spring. Anyway, there is a well there, and Glenn had fallen in it on his way to the safety of the cabin. Of course he knew right where it was, but it was covered by the snow and he was tired and disoriented enough that he stepped right into it. He was almost all the way at the bottom, about twelve feet down. He'd gotten wedged in tight by his heavy pack and was too weak to get himself out. In the end, I almost couldn't get him out either. It took me all my strength to get him unstuck, and the better part of an hour to pull him up, using some ropes the rangers left in the cabin, which they kept stocked as an emergency ranger station.

Once I got him out, I looked him over, not liking what I saw in the

slightest. He was alive, but not in good shape. He had frostbite on his face, and one hand from which he had lost the glove was so frostbitten I winced just looking at it. He would lose those fingers, probably. But, he'd eaten plenty of snow and ice, and even had wiggled some jerky out of his pocket and so was still semi-coherent, anyway. I checked the cabin for a short wave set, but no luck there. We'd have to walk out. I didn't want to leave him; he was in and out of consciousness and I was worried that once he drifted off, he might be lost forever. We stumbled all the way to the truck, me half-carrying him, with his pack on my back. He was an amazingly resilient man, that's for sure. I still can't believe that he made it. So it was that we came to the truck, and I threw his pack into the back, and swung him into the passenger's seat. I ran around to the driver's side, got in, and fired it up, kicking the heater on as soon as I could. We still had a little drive in front of us, so I reached for my seatbelt out of habit, then thought about Glenn. Should I put his on him as well? I looked over at him. He was sort of awake, making a weird noise in his throat, like a moan. The pain of his injuries was most likely going to keep him awake now, especially once that heater came on strong. I hesitated another minute, then let it go, buckling myself in before flooring it and roaring down the track towards the road.

I guess that whoever it is that is reading this knows that Glenn is with me here in the truck, he has been all the time. I saved him, only to lead him to another death. That avalanche caught us not twenty minutes after I decided not to buckle him in. He's laying down on the passenger floorboards, face turned upwards in a horrible deathmask, eyes wide, frozen tongue lolling. I wish I could move my damn shoulder enough to just reach down and turn his head.

Well, that's my story. I'm getting really cold now, so maybe it won't be long. I thought about adding little personal notes to my folks and everybody here, but I think maybe I'll just let this baby ride the way she is.



Hidden River
Cindy Nielubowicz
silver gelatin print

Conversation:

Hal Thomas

Soul's communion
Lost spoken art
Information exchange
Doorway to the heart,

Mind's eye conversion
Lips' words attempt
To picture-perfect paint
But at best, circumvent.

The Tenement Landlord

Michele Fox

Sometimes I feel like this house,
 Old and scarred from years of abuse and neglect.
The doormat . . . used, worn out,
 walked all over.
The window . . . transparent,
 always looked right through.
Th lights . . . flickering, dim,
 have lost their shine.
The door . . . rusted shut,
 from tears that fell like rain.
The attic . . . dusty, cobwebs,
 holds lost memories of another time.
A fresh coat of paint can disguise the house on the outside,
 but the soul is still black and blue.



untitled

R. Nicole Hilliard
silver gelatin print, sepia tone



Stairs

Bonnie Kizer
silver gelatin print



1899

Niki Weber
color photograph



untitled
Charlie Parker
hand-colored photograph

Worthy of Love

David Seckinger

I suppose you already know that Paul wrote about love in the Bible (and what he said about it was true) and Plato wrote about love in Symposium (and what he said was also true). Now it's my turn. But I'll warn you before I begin, try to keep an open mind. If you cannot or will not, you might be offended, but your reaction makes little difference to me. To be honest, I didn't write this for you. Great literature tells us that Petrarch loved Laura; Dante, Beatrice; and Shakespeare, the dark lady. I loved Amanda as truly as any of these, and anyone who disputes this probably knows more about books than love.

The whole affair happened years ago. At the time, I worked as a security guard, night watchman, for Phil Sidney's Chevrolet. It was a great job for a kid fresh out of high school. I worked five nights a week. The car lot would be closed and the salesmen gone by the time I got there, so I worked alone, if you want to call it work. Basically, my job consisted of staying awake while normal people slept. Located beside the dealership was Kresthill's, a fast food restaurant. The place never closed, which was great for me. I was already a regular there when Amanda started. I remember the first thing she ever said to me.

"Can I help you?"

I didn't see it then, but I do now. You have to understand; there are no coincidences in life. Granted, sometimes things happen and we were never meant to know the reasons why, but if we just paid closer attention to the insignificant events, they might give us that glimpse of insight we all desire. It didn't take long for Amanda and me to start talking, but just talk. It's funny; there's something inside a person that wants to make a familiar face a friendly one. And Amanda always wore the nicest smile. She was neon in the darkness, hard to resist. Instead of a neon smile, I wore a SecureForce uniform, no gun included. After a while, Amanda asked about my job:

"So you work at the car lot?"

"Yeah."

"So what do you do over there?"

"I guard the cars."

"So has anybody ever tried to steal one of those cars?"

"No."

"So then tell me, what do you do over there?"

"You really want to know?"

"If I didn't want to know, I wouldn't ask."

“Well, I can’t tell you in here because it’s top secret, but if you come over, I’ll show you.”

“That’s okay. I’m not that curious.”

Curious? I suppose you already know the cliché about the cat. I knew a little about dead cats and dead clichés, but still couldn’t help myself. I tried to be sensible and consider the facts. Amanda had one obvious obstacle, a wedding ring. Amanda wore the gold band but told us she wasn’t happy. “I’m getting out of it soon,” she said regularly, but more to herself than any of us. There were other problems. Amanda was a grown woman, and I was eighteen, skinny framed with a boyish air that even a uniform couldn’t hide. Finally, like Shakespeare and his dark lady, our complexions didn’t match. Amanda was black, but don’t expect me to describe her skin as chocolate, sable, coal, or coffee. I’ll let poets turn women into “beautiful objects.” And I know that race shouldn’t matter in affairs of the heart, but it honestly does, because even affairs of the heart are subject to the outside world. However, in spite of all our obstacles, love managed to discover the two of us.

Amanda and I drew closer. We spent many a lonely night together, wasting each other’s time, earning pocket change. We always kept company from 3 to 4 am. That’s the suicide hour, in case you don’t know. A person’s best defense is to sleep through that hour because that’s when your hidden fears come to visit and whisper in your ear. If you can’t sleep, you’d better make a friend. Take it from one who knows. Too many lonely nights struggling through the suicide hour can wear anybody down. If my nights weren’t bad enough, I soon found my days were haunted, too. My sleep became troubled. Erotic visions roamed through my mind, disturbing my sleep, and dreams caged me in their labyrinthine ways. . .

I am a child walking through the woods. Young pines cast long shadows under the heavy sun. Hazy orange fills the void, broken by descending, yellow beams shooting through the treetops. Naked women slowly race from tree to tree, coyishly giggling in cloistering echos. And I am a child again, but more than a child. Light guides me, and the presence of angelic companions, graceful, ethereal, satisfies my desire without inflicting love’s sad satiety. The unworn path ends at a clearing, where an old gypsy woman stokes a campfire. As I approach, she looks up and declares, “In the fire, this is yours.” And in the eye of the blaze, between flame and ash, the face of the devil watches over me, waiting. . .

I told Amanda about my dreams. “Sounds like witches to me,” she said.

“What do you mean, it sounds like witches?”

“If a person is secretly in love with you, then a witch will come and ride you in your dreams.”

Amanda smiled at me.

“What are you telling me? You mean a witch, a real witch, is riding me like a broom?”

“No Honey, not like a broom. Like a man. A witch will get you hard or a woman wet, and the witch will ride you. That’s why you’re having bad dreams. The witch makes you have those dreams to keep you in a deep sleep. The longer you sleep, the longer it rides.”

“You mean a real witch is having sex with me while I’m sleeping?”

“Yes,” she said, “you’re susceptible. Do this the next time you wake up from one of those dreams: look to the foot of your bed. When you wake up, a witch jumps to the foot of your bed to hide. It waits to see if you go back to sleep. But you must look the moment you wake up because witches are very fast.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I do too. I know all about love, and I got the scars to prove it.”

“Oh yeah? Can I see?”

“Honey, you don’t want to. Believe me.”

And I did believe her. You could argue that she was wrong, that witches don’t exist. Most everybody would agree with you, but before we go any further, I want to clarify one thing. People tend to confuse facts with the truth, but often the two are not the same. Most people believe that truth is merely an accumulation of facts; however, this isn’t altogether true. Sometimes the facts get in the way of the truth, and sometimes it’s easier to see the truth by lying. You might think I’m wrong, but take for example, Aesop’s Fables, which have nothing to do with facts but a good deal to do with the truth. It was the same with Amanda. Maybe her facts were questionable, but she believed what she said. She wasn’t lying, and I could put my faith in that. Personally, I’ll trust honesty before evidence.

My job grew more boring, and I grew braver, spending more time at Kresthill’s and less time protecting the flock (that’s what we called the cars). Amanda was more fun to watch, anyway. She eventually told me her story: she grew up in rural Georgia on a small farm with a big family. A handsome stranger wooed and married her, and she left the farm, but he quickly changed, becoming abusive, until one day he dragged her up a flight of stairs by her arm, so she left him. Soon after that she met her current husband, a man who had a good job and a nice home, who didn’t drink, and who desperately loved her. Amanda said he was scrawny and ugly, but that was okay with her; she wouldn’t have to worry about other women too much. She also told me about their great sex. Apparently, he had a big dick, really big, and she really liked it. Amanda claimed that dick was God’s way of compensating for those pitiful looks. Amanda said they

had a good marriage, but she didn't love him.

Amanda told me her birthday was coming, so I bought her a teddy bear with black button eyes and soft fur. The night before her birthday, I asked her where she lived. She didn't even bat an eye: "1551 East 64th Street. Why do you want to know?"

"Maybe I want to visit you sometime."

"My husband wouldn't like that."

After work, I drove to Amanda's house. Nobody answered the knock on the door, so I left the bear on her steps and went home. That night, Amanda told me about finding the gift. She called it "cute." She played with it all morning and took it to bed with her.

"Are you the one who brought the bear?" she asked.

"Yeah, do you really like it?"

"Yes Honey, I like it. I thought it was you."

"You thought it was me?"

"Yes, I thought it was you that left the bear."

"Oh."

It was me for the next two weeks. It took every bit of my willpower to stay at work. If I wanted to see Amanda, I had to go to Kresthill's. She wouldn't set foot in the car lot, but every moment with her was worth the risk. One night Amanda said after work she was going home to have a drink and asked me to join her. She instructed me not to show until a quarter past seven. I gently knocked upon her door at 7:23. Seconds later a dead bolt lock clicked, and I could hear the tumblers fall into place. Amanda let me in and gave me a beer. We talked a little, just like so many nights at Kresthill's but not really. We were alone now. I was nursing my beer when Amanda rabbited across the room, saying she wanted to watch a movie. She put a tape in the vcr, turned on the tv. The screen flickered. Our bloodshot eyes fixated on the set. Background music kept the beat. Amanda touched the back of my neck. "Relax," she said, "I hope this doesn't bother you."

It didn't. A man's mouth sweeping over soft skin, a pink tongue, a thin trail, hands working inside a shirt, fingers fumbling with a bra, screen flickering in a hot embrace, voices pleading, background music keeping the beat, clenched fists struggling with a shoe, a foot removing pants, a flickering screen keeping the beat, a woman's mouth sweeping over soft skin. By the time she had me naked, I was just getting her pants unzipped. Amanda stood up and undressed herself. I fell to my knees and grabbed her. "No," she said, "not like that." Amanda pushed me on the couch and crawled on top of me like I owed her money and she wanted it back. She pinned me down and closed her eyes; she wouldn't be denied. Every thrust fell harder, more deliberate. Amanda wrapped her arms around my head. She had a

better grip that way. Her face was buried in my shoulder. Her hot breath. Her sweaty body. She gasped for air, gasped for air, gasped for air, air, air, air, air. Then she stopped. Her chest was heavy, and her belly quivered. She raised up and looked me in the eye.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you okay? Why didn't you come?"

I just looked at her. I didn't know what to say.

"Roll over," she said.

We rolled over and tried, but it wasn't any good. There was no rhythm, just frustrated pounding. I started getting mad. I had something to prove. Amanda told me to get up. She said I was trying too hard. She told me to get dressed. I asked for a second chance.

"Maybe later. Now go home."

I really didn't want to go, but she insisted, so I went home. Believe it or not, the drive home that morning was nice. It really didn't matter about not finishing. On the inside I was satisfied. The world looked pretty damn good, and I felt like a man. That night, Amanda acted sweet and smiled but played it cool like nothing had happened, so I did too. But she had changed, stopped talking about her husband, seemed kind of vacant, lost a little of her shine. Amanda left her husband about a month later and Kresthill's too. I walked in one night and asked where she was. The woman behind the counter said Amanda left her husband and wasn't coming back to Kresthill's. I almost asked how to reach her, but I stopped. A voice in my head said, "Let it go."

Amanda must have wanted a clean break, a complete change. And I could understand that. Even I changed a little, an unexpected miracle, turning to books (instead of another waitress) to keep me company during the lonely nights and suicide hours. At the time, no woman could have replaced Amanda, anyway. But I acquired a book called *Franny and Zooey*, which not only occupied my time but comforted me, too. I don't know if I really understood the story entirely, but it sure understood me. It told me, "Honey, don't worry yourself too much about what happened, because sometimes- not always, but sometimes- love looks like an unholy thing."

And that's how it ended. You could argue that this isn't much of a love story. You might call it a pathetic example of show and tell. Of course, you're entitled to your opinion, but don't judge too harshly. Amanda and I were real, and I haven't tried to turn our love story into a fairy tale. Everybody knows that now-a-days Jack and Jill last from three to five years before selling the castle and calling it quits. That's how fairy tales end, with a U-haul trailer and friends taking sides. But go ahead and judge if you

want. You'd probably be justified, maybe. Maybe it wasn't real love. Maybe it was just the best we could do at the time. I'm not making excuses. I know the Ten Commandments and the difference between right and wrong. But in spite of our fall, love somehow managed to discover us. "What love?" you ask. "Where was the love?" That's the amazing thing about love. Sometimes it looks like hate or pride or even lust. If you don't believe me, look it up. Great minds have written all about love, and most of them understood it. You see, love is usually easy to define because it takes many forms, and because it takes many forms, love is often hard to recognize. That's one lesson literature teaches. But I suppose there are some things you can't learn from a book. Some things you just have to figure out for yourself.



Bogie & Bacall
Mike Rios
pen & ink



Bead Man
Cara L. Wade
silver gelatin print

i am through apologizing

John D. Trainor

i am through apologizing
for words
that i line in rows
of imagination and random points
of my subconscious
trying to form meaning to my existence
i don't know why
that old man poet
rambled about termites
eating, digesting
nothing,
for nothing's sake,
poetry for poets
and preaching to the choir,
the unholy degradation in the face
of your god
that you piss your talent
for incoherence and jargon
for deep thinkers.
are you alive?
did you see her smile?
or the way you grimaced
when i asked the question?



Rock Crevice
Chris Harper
silver gelatin print

Night of the Living Dead

Fred Peterson

Doug was surrounded. He didn't have to turn around to see the killers behind him. He could feel them: the old polyester couples hovering around the public garden like senile sharks in a kiddie pool, all puffed, pouchy faces, and dingy gray hair and short bluish perms, and fat hanging off the arms (white arms with bruised, purple veins and clumsy, shaky hands), and wheezing in the heat, and stale sweat, and garishly-colored synthetic shirts and slacks hissing ceaselessly, insidiously, under the July sun. It's Night of the Living Dead, he thought. They haven't smelled me yet. But they will. Any minute now they'll eat my brains, I'll gain a hundred pounds and seventy years, my clothes will become Montgomery Ward circa 1975 and I'll start circling the park, grunting and coughing at the flowers. I'll be one of them.

From his bench in the shade, Doug could see the parking lot filling. More gigantic American cars spewing out more of the shuffling geriatric mob. Reinforcements. Oh, God.

Chickens, Doug decided. Not sharks but chickens. Evil chickens. He pictured them huddled together in some rural, shit-covered coop, the pale, pimpled skin showing under their thinning feathers, clucking a low, toxic cluck, preening contentedly and waiting for Sunday. Today. And Doug couldn't leave. Couldn't go home, anyway. Not until the acid wore off. He sat on the bench, his t-shirt stuck to his back, and felt the sweat roll down his face.

The trip had started out smoothly enough. He and Ed, his best friend and drug buddy, had dropped around noon and sat around Ed's place listening to music until it went 3-D and it was time to head to the park and goof on all the weirdness there.

Just as they were heading out the door, though, Mrs. Bowens, Ed's landlord, showed up to talk about Ed's leaking toilet. They managed to be polite, smiled at the right places, but Mrs. Bowens ("Call me Janice") liked to talk, and Doug could feel her sucking the energy out of the room, out of him and Ed, while she went on about some problem with the tenant across the hall. The lights dimmed. She was a vampire. She was lulling them.

The real trouble started when Doug let it slip that he was going to be looking for his own place soon and Mrs. Bowens, after asking his price

range, insisted on showing him a basement apartment right then and there. There was no way out now. Ed waited while Doug mutely followed her down the stairs, tuning out her shrill jabber about the low cost of utilities, expecting her to turn and attack.

She swung open the door, they stepped in, and it was all he could do to keep from running away. The first thing to hit him was the smell, the stench of cat piss, years of it soaked into the brown shag carpet. He was surprised his shoes didn't squish. The room itself was tiny, just big enough to fit a bed or a couch and a dresser. The kitchen consisted of a small oven/stove combo and a sink next to it on the wall facing them. No counter. Through the open bathroom door he saw a faded blue shower curtain dotted with mold. The ceiling was low and dirty, with a single fixture in the center. One of the bulbs was out. Doug was almost grateful. Overwhelming sorrow and dread flooded through him. Was this what his life was coming to? Would he end up here or worse? This isn't an apartment, he thought. This is a deathbed. This is suicide. This is where you don't even bother leaving a note because no one cares. This is a fistful of pills and a revolver.

He quickly mumbled a thanks, bolted up the steps to the front door, and headed for the park. Sorry, Ed, he thought. I'll explain later. So he sat in the shade, hiding from the blinding black sunlight, hiding from the circling dead, riding it out. He was not a quitter. He was not a quitter.



Flower Power
Dori Gann
silver gelatin print

Elaine Hakala

Life has been so busy for me recently; the date crept up on me before I realized it. When I glanced at the calendar today, I realized that it's been a year since my grandmother died.

She was my dad's mother, and the last grandparent I had. Her name was Evie Louise ... born in 1903, the youngest of nine children. Her family was never really rich, but they did the best with what they had. They lived on a 200 acre farm in the north Georgia hills, held together by past generations of her family since before the Civil War. Her husband, my grandfather, bought it from them during the Depression when times got hard, just to keep it in the family.

From one sunny afternoon in my childhood, I remember the huge, old clapboard house she was born in. One floor. Sprawling. Pointed and rusty tin roof. No electricity. The bathroom outside in a little house with a half moon on the door. The kitchen in a shed out back, too ... in case of fire from the old wood stove. I don't think the entire house ever had a lick of paint on it. It was completely empty the day I saw it. No one had lived in it for years since my grandparents moved to town. The sound of my quiet footsteps echoed against the walls as I crept through the rooms while the grownups were all outside. Scratched plank floors held together with pegs. Sooted stone fireplaces. I could almost see my grandmother and her brothers and sisters playing there when they were kids. I remember bits and pieces of my one and only visit there, shortly before that old house was torn down, but the thing I remember most about it was that it was big despite the fact that there was almost nothing left of it.

Of course, everything's big when you're six or seven.

My grandmother was also very big to me at that age, and we always had fun together. I remember holding her hand and looking up at her in her white uniform. She looked like a nurse to me, but she was really the lunchroom manager at an elementary school. I've got a school picture of her from 1954, dressed that way. Every time I look at it, it reminds me of the smell of cinnamon rolls and spaghetti, the sound of big pots and pans banging together, and of female laughter as she and all her helpers put together sustenance for starving minds and bodies in that steaming kitchen. She certainly knew her way around a stove, and she taught me more about cooking than anyone else in my life.

She also tried to teach me how to play the old pump organ in her living room, the one her father bought for her when she was seven for fifty

dollars, second-hand. A small fortune at the time. It was even older than she was, and she was already ancient in my eyes. It was sound, but scratched and well used. Several of the chord stops were stuck open, and most of the cloth covering the inside of the open scrollwork was gone. It was, and still is beautiful, but I was never any good at playing it. I just liked to climb up on the stool and pump the pedals so I could hear the moan it made. It made great haunted house noises for me, but my grandmother could make it sing. I remember her legs pumping and her fingers flying over the keys. Her favorite songs were hymns, especially "In the Wildwood," but there was one she called "Moonshine," a rollicking, bawdy tune much more fitting a saloon than a church choir.

I always wondered where she learned that one, but I never asked her.

I also never asked her why she and my grandfather separated when I was two. They never divorced. She just moved three blocks down the street into another house they owned and never spoke to him again. I remember my mother having to try and remember which one she had invited to the last family get-together as another one rolled around ... because the two of them refused to be in the same house together.

They were both hard-headed.

That's probably where I got it from.

Because of my own hard-headedness, I drifted away from my grandmother during my teen years, just like I did from the rest of my family. I knew everything. They knew nothing. I thought I had all the answers ... only because I hadn't heard all the questions yet. And when I came back as a young woman, I discovered that my grandmother had changed. By then I could look down on the head of the woman who towered over me when I was a child. I'd grown taller, but she had begun to shrink as well. Arthritis had begun to wear her down after she retired. Her posture was stooped, and getting worse every year. Her gait slowed, and then she needed the assistance of a walker.

But her mind was still good. Every day for her meant morning coffee with the crossword puzzle in the paper, something she was very good at, then spending the day in her rocking chair, crocheting and watching soap operas. A little lunch at noon. A little supper at six. Friday and Saturday nights she'd play cards with friends. On Sunday, she'd watch church services on TV.

She loved her life. Those small things made her content.

We spent lots of time talking then, whenever I could get the chance, my daughter playing at our feet. I'd let her supervise me making her a German chocolate cake while we talked about life, and she'd listen to my

southern rock radio station with me, tapping her foot in time. It was funny watching her take a closer look at the expanse of nicely tanned male body stretched out for all the world to see, and she gasped when she realized what “that thing” was.

“I thought it was a towel rolled up in his lap,” she chuckled, her face red.

I thought we were all going to fall off our chairs laughing right along with her.

By that time she was so crippled she was only about four feet, ten inches tall ... when she could stand up, that is. She’d already moved in with my parents because she couldn’t take care of herself anymore. Her eyesight had started to fail too, so TV became the sound she could barely hear, and the picture that was only a blur. Her answers on the crossword puzzles were frequently wrong because she couldn’t read that well. And her hands became so crippled that the basket of yarn and crochet needles sat untouched beside her chair for years before my mother finally put it in the attic. Most of her old card partners took their turn meeting that undeniable fate we all have in our futures.

But despite everything else she lost, my grandmother kept her sense of humor, and my family and I saw it as our duty to corrupt her even more in her old age. After all, she had few of the pleasures left of the ones she’d enjoyed before.

She needed a replacement.

So we taught her to be a smartass. A good one. I think she always had it in her, but her southern Baptist upbringing just kept it at bay for the first eighty odd years of her life. But with my parents, her four grandchildren, assorted grandchildren-in-law, and six great-grandchildren constantly popping in and out ... after she lived alone for over 30 years ... she learned ... and learned well.

I’ll never forget one morning I was having breakfast there. A lazy Saturday. Hunched in her wheelchair, she couldn’t have been more than four feet tall, wheels and all. Little wisps of cotton white hair on her head, her deeply lined face like aged and crumpled parchment with two dark eyes peering out of it, bird-like despite being almost blind. My parents were joking around with each other, teasing like they always do. My dad told my mother that he didn’t know how he had stayed married to an “old bag” like her all those years.

Without batting an eye, my grandmother chimed in, “And I don’t know how she’s stayed married to an old prick like you all these years either.”

I laughed so hard they had to pound on my back to get the biscuit I was eating unjamed from my throat. I’d never heard my grandmother say

something like that in my entire life.

My mother laughed and said that she was cutting off my grandmother's HBO ... because she was picking up bad habits at age 85. My grandmother laughed about it for years herself, and my father brought it up frequently, playfully lamenting over how his own mother abused him so badly ... just to make her laugh some more.

When she was 86, my folks helped her buy a little motorized cart to drive around in the yard. She loved to chase the great-grandkids with it. We used to call her "Joey Chitwood" ... after the stunt car driver. She would ask my dad to build her a ramp so she could practice jumping. He would ask her if she was sure that she wouldn't rather have a loop-de-loop track.

They'd chuckle about it for hours.

She was quick with the wit during those years, but her health was declining rapidly. The time came when my parents had to get a full-time nurse to stay with her during the day so they could work. It was hard on her adjusting to it, because she never gave up her dream of going back to live in her own house.

Like I said. Hard-headed.

It got to the point that her only excursions outside were to visit the doctors, but even then her sense of humor wasn't slowing down. One day as the nurse was taking her to an appointment, a man in a beat up old truck cut them off on the interstate. Incensed, my grandmother instructed the nurse to pull up beside him at the traffic light at the end of the ramp.

Imagine the picture he saw. All you could see was the top four inches of her head over the edge of the car door. You could barely see her eyes.

She had gotten so small.

But she raised one crippled, arthritic hand up in the car window when she caught the man's attention ... then raised the other ... and used it to pull down three of her bent and gnarled fingers ... leaving the middle one exposed ... just so he would know her opinion of his driving.

The nurse said the man laughed so hard he cried. She and my grandmother laughed about it all the way home.

Granny was 90 at the time.

At age 92, after nearly fifteen years of being wheelchair bound and basically bedridden, her mind began to fail as her body continued to shrivel back toward an almost fetal state. It was the hardest thing I've ever had to stand helplessly by and just watch. She began seeing things that weren't there ... men standing at the head of her bed, right where she couldn't quite get a good look at them ... people setting bonfires in the back yard. Sometimes she was lucid, but more and more her longwinded conversations

were mostly taking place in the 1920s, or the 30s ... with relatives long dead.

Sometimes she knew what she was talking about, like when she talked about being so claustrophobic that she was afraid to die ... because she didn't want them to shut the coffin lid on her. It was a conversation I remember us having many, many times ... even when I was just a kid. She never could explain how she came to be that way, but she never wanted her clothing tight around her, especially around her neck. My dad would always tell her that at that point she would be dead ... so she wouldn't know when they shut the lid on her.

She always insisted that she would.

Huddled around coffee at the kitchen table in my parent's house, listening to her ramble incoherently in her room for the last year of her life, we used to say that claustrophobia was the only thing keeping her alive ... because nothing else was.

Other than being hard-headed.

She was 94 years and two months old when she died, and despite her fears, we buried her in a pink, gold and pearl casket. She looked more beautiful than I remember seeing her in years ... lying there in the little sweater that matched her coffin.

A little sweater ... because she was so tiny in the end that I could have picked her up and cradled her in my arms. Barely a hundred pounds of ancient flesh and bones. There was almost nothing left of the woman who baked cinnamon rolls and made me laugh ... except inside of the people she'd touched in her life.

She'd given her everything to stay with us as long as she could. Part of her will always be with me. And I don't worry about her claustrophobia. She was too hard-headed to still be around when they put her earthly remains in that coffin. She's probably sitting someplace doing a crossword puzzle right now.

Seven down, Granny.

Seventeen letters.

The clue is ... someone who loves you very much.

Your granddaughter.



The Quiet Shack
Nicole Weirauch
silver gelatin print

Snake River

(for Miguel)

Melissa Hill

He said, come away with me, and dance the Snake River.

He had dark eyes and Spanish hands, and he lit up her darkness

Like an Angel of Fury, hate-red and insistent. She pulsed

In time with him, and gave herself to his madness, through

The canyons of Hell and what we might call the badlands of
the soul,

Down the winding river, to watch from the banks, never
trusting

A step to move further than the licking water, little cats gone
crazy

In her blood. And he knew the way her eyes turned inward,

And he felt the way her thoughts were always flying away
from him.

He knew the cold aches of jealousy, knew he could flow like
the river,

Catlike reflexes winding all through her hair and dragging her
down

To him: He could possess her, could set her on fire, burn her
down

With wind, drink her alive again, force her errant thoughts back
to him;

And she began to burn inside his intense sphere, a creature of
fire

Gilded and stoned, cast in marble and fixed for his own. He
could not know

The way his bruises left her scarred, his hands left her alone,
and she turned

Away from him, and she danced the Snake River, leaving
behind all the glories

Of the Hell inside Idaho, while his Spanish hands sang through
his dark

Hair, remembering the way her red hair looked on black sheets,
or floating

In the water. He could not hold a candle flame without burning
his fingers,

And she could not love an Angel without giving herself
entirely after—

Oranges
Heidi Butler

Damaged fruits
rolled off the old truck and hit the road,
scattering in different directions.
One slipped under the sagging,
wooden
fence,
three plopped in the ditch,
and four stayed in the road.
The car behind the pickup smashed
one of the rotten oranges,
splattering its membranes over the pavement.
The driver laughed to his companion
as the juice leaked out in three directions.
A passing cow reached its head
under the fence
and almost seemed to sniff the moldy navel orange
caught between the beaten,
unpainted
planks.
Its huge mouth opened on the orange ball,
and gobbled it up,
peel included,
letting it roll around in its mouth
for a while
before realizing the penicillin coating
and spitting it out.
Half mangled,
it glistened in the hot June sun.
It fell on a soft mound of dirt,
already mowed of its green stalks
by the cows in the field.
It was their favorite place to munch;

right by the fence,
while they watched the cars pass
like beetles skittering down the highway.
I kicked one of the oranges
that had landed in the ditch
and continued walking.



untitled

Tiana J. Page
silver gelatin print

The Hamster's Name Doesn't Matter

Stacy Sims

Emily was ten years old when her father caught some rare virus and was put below the ground in Our Holy Father Cemetery out on Basset Road. The younger people said that it came from drinking the water and some traveled ten miles to the next town to buy some fancy water that was bottled somewhere down in Florida. The older people of Midville stuck to their regular refreshment from their dingy kitchen basements. All the young people who were drinking that bottled water ended up sick. In fact, Dr. Stapleton bought himself a nearly new pickup with all the money that he earned from the ailing town.

After Mr. Pugh passed away, his little Emily was sent to live with her uncle. Emily didn't know Uncle Danny very well. She had been to his general store lots of times to buy pixie sticks and lemonheads. He never charged her, but he was never very friendly either. Uncle Danny was a hideous man, with a face full of pocks and an eyebrow that stretched the entire length of his forehead. He was also missing several teeth from right in front and he had a phlegmy, hacking cough. Emily was frightened by him.

Uncle Danny lived on a little dirt road that didn't have a name. The winding path to the gray colored house was lined with cats.

"I get out here and use em' for target practice every now and again. They ain't scared of me. Sure, they run, but they always come back."

Emily eyed Uncle Danny and the rest of her surroundings nervously. She was relieved when the engine of the truck collapsed into silence.

Uncle Danny led her inside the tiny house and to her new bedroom. The room was small and dark and reeked of cigarette smoke. There were a couple of flies buzzing about the room and Uncle Danny furiously swatted them away. They landed on the closet door and Emily's uncle crept toward them and quickly demolished the noisy insects, leaving a trail of something down the door. Uncle Danny turned and walked out of the room.

Emily kept to herself for the first couple of days. She attended school every day and at night, she engaged herself with her studies. It wasn't until about a week after her arrival that her uncle found her a job. It was Wednesday afternoon when her Uncle Danny met her on the dusty porch with his good news.

He was holding a K-Mart bag in his grimy left hand.

"Here, take this," he said as he handed her the plastic bag.

Inside was a red plastic weaving loom and a bag of one thousand

multi-colored nylon loops.

"Thanks, Uncle Danny. This is great," Emily said with a hint of confusion.

"Girl, I thought it was about time for you to earn your keep. Them potholders are all the rage about town. Peggy at the K-Mart told me so," Uncle Danny said.

Uncle Danny told Emily that she was to weave potholders for the general store. That night, Emily sat on the cement blocks thrown carelessly around the overgrown yard and prayed desperately that someone would come to her aid. She didn't have the faintest idea how to weave a potholder. Emily sat in the yard most of the night, remembering the words of her horrible uncle.

"Girl, this ain't just a present. Them things are gonna make me some money. Give me ten by tomorrow morning. Don't come in this house until you finish. See here. This here is your workshop," Uncle Danny said as he looked around the yard.

Emily alternated between laughing and crying. Was this really her life? It was just like the Channel 5 news with Kathie Lee and her sweatshops. Emily missed her father. A rustling noise jerked Emily back into the present. She could see something moving ahead on the dirt path.

"Damn cats," she muttered aloud.

"I'm not a cat," a prepubescent voice came from a distance.

Emily quickly rose and hurried toward the porch. On the way, she tripped over a tire and fell flat in the dust. She got up slowly, dusting off her old Wranglers and spitting the dirt out of her mouth. A boy about the same age as she hurried quickly down the path to assist her.

"Are you new here," the boy questioned.

"Yes," Emily answered, "and hopefully I won't be here for too much longer. This place is awful."

The boy glanced at her for a moment and said, "Look, I'll help you out. I heard about the potholder situation. I lost my cap gun somewhere back there and I've been looking for it all night. I didn't mean to listen."

"You know how to make potholders," Emily said with a smirk.

The boy looked a little embarrassed but said, "Sure. My sister got one of them things for her birthday. I'll help you on one condition."

"What do you want?" Emily asked nervously.

"I want a large package of Fruit Stripe gum. My mama won't let me have it on account of all the sugar," the boy answered.

Emily quickly agreed to the boy's proposal. He made her ten potholders that night, just as her uncle ordered. There were red ones and green ones and they sold like tobacco in the small store. Everyone loved them.

The next night, her uncle requested twenty. Emily sat out in the

yard with all of her supplies surrounding her. She waited on the boy and sure enough, he came. This time he wanted a roll of caps for his black plastic gun and Emily agreed to have the caps ready for him the following night. The boy sank into the dirt and didn't move until he had completed all twenty potholders.

Emily's uncle sold all of the potholders in the store the next day. Uncle Danny was so impressed with sales that he asked Emily to make fifty that night. Of course, Emily agreed.

That night, Emily waited until almost ten o'clock and the boy didn't come. She began to get anxious and feared that he wasn't coming. If he didn't show up, Uncle Danny would know the truth. A few minutes later, the boy came struggling down the path. He was unsure of what he wanted in return for his work tonight.

"What's that?" he asked as he saw a flash of gold in the pocket of Emily's jeans.

"You can't have this," she replied without hesitation, "This was my father's watch."

"Well, I want it," the boy said, "and if you don't want to get into trouble with that mean uncle, you'll promise it to me."

Emily was still reluctant, so the boy said, "I'll tell you what. If you can guess my hamster's name in three tries, then I'll let you keep the watch."

"It's a deal," Emily said.

The boy worked all night on the potholders and was able to produce fifty just before dawn. He waited impatiently for Emily to guess the names, but she simply smiled.

"I don't have to guess anything, you freak. I'll just tell everyone in town that a ten year old boy was making potholders for me. I know your folks would be so proud," Emily said with a laugh.

The boy was so angry that he kicked one of the cement blocks in the yard and danced around the yard in pain. Emily didn't care. The boy taught her how to make the stupid little potholders without even knowing it.

Emily's potholder business continued to be a success and she became one of Midville's most affluent. The boy's luck wasn't as good. He spent weeks recovering from a broken foot and has been forever doomed to walk with a limp. But that says nothing about the boy's broken pride. Emily's entire story was published in Midville's newspaper and the poor boy learned never to give freely, without always expecting something in return. The boy's hamster, Olivia, lived to a ripe old age and was moderately famous due to exploits of his master.

A Secret Crush

Marcus Smith

You stayed there once by the gate post
and startled me with your half-smile.
In the sky and the earth, there was only
you, the heat and the sound of your
smiling teeth clicking, beginning to
say hello.

Good Day to you also, I whisper then walk
away.



untitled

Kathy Hutcherson
silver gelatin print

Pyrotechnics

Seth Riley

When I was a kid, me and the kids from down the street used to steal matches from our parents and hide in the bushes. We'd light paper or pine straw or whatever we could find. Mrs. Blitch from across the street used to catch us and call all of our mothers, but we didn't care. My mom knew that I was better outside, because she said there was less to burn out there.

Fire is the closest that we ever come to getting to be God. Say you got a comic book, right? Some trash like an Archie. There's energy in there, but it's in a cage that sucks. Touch a flame to it and, the next thing you know, it's free. You just let that much power back into the universe. Maybe it'll become creative energy. Burn a hundred or so of them Archies and you give somebody the energy for something like the Green Lantern. Every great idea has to materialize from some energy, right?

Now I'm not saying that you should only burn the bad things. Some things are quite good; and that's exactly why you should burn them. Think of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Brilliant energy. Genius. The world has gotten to enjoy that energy visually for centuries. It's only fair to give it back. Who knows what that kind of energy might do next time? Cast it back into the cosmos and maybe you've got the solution to global warming, or somebody all of a sudden finds an inexpensive alternative to fuel. Who knows?

When I was in the eighth grade, there was a fire a few blocks from our house. Some old man fell asleep in his recliner while he was smoking a cigarette. You may think that there's nothing left of him but the hole in that chair, but you're wrong. You see, that man's somewhere out there still, more alive now than he was for the years that he probably spent in that chair. That fire saved him from just fading out like so many people do, you know?

After the fire was extinguished, they repaired the house; but they left that chair on the lawn for weeks, just sitting next to the construction dump, like that old man was there to oversee the repairs. Some people thought it was scary. It made me feel alive.

I only burned a shed; that's why I'm here. Nobody was hurt. It was just a sacrifice. Nobody ever went in there anyway. Eventually, all potential energy needs to be kineticized, if that's a word. Damon, from down the hall, he did something much worse. He burned his mother. We weren't friends then, so he didn't know my theory about fire. Now we agree that he was acting on it without even knowing. She was a miserable woman, used

to hit the kids and say that they were a curse. She needed the change.

A few weeks ago, Damon and me, we stole a lighter off of one of the nurses. I liked to touch the flame to my skin, let it excite my senses. Wake me up. Energize me, if you will. Damon suggested that this entire place could use a change of energy; he said that it has a very negative aura, and that he would like to change that. His plan didn't work though; they were able to put the curtains out before the roof or wall caught. What's that thing they say about the best laid plans?

That nurse was lucky, cause she got to smoke. I can't anymore because the doctor saw my scars. Smoking doesn't change energy; it's just like communion. I know if I don't talk about fire that things will work out. When they give me the dot tests, I say that the ink blots look like spring flowers, or puppies, or some crap like that. They buy it. Leave it to a doctor to assume that, just because you don't talk about something, it's not on your mind. So if you see the burning bush or the fiery hands of God, tell 'em you see rabbits or clowns. They just log it down and you're on the road to recovery.



untitled
Kelly Lamb
silver gelatin print

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