

Arden

Volume IV, Issue 1
Spring 2003



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-Arden staff

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From a Line in Richard Wilbur's Prose
Nick Norwood

Things *are*. The cow is there. Meanwhile,
The moon pours down its vaporous milk, and below her,
The night's furtive waves form a ribbon of foam.
Well, of course you have seen to her pasture,
But one fence is a cliff and it overlooks the sea,
And one is a road and it leads to the north,
And, as everyone can see, her barn is just a stand of trees
Where a winding darkness swirls in the rafters.
And who could have guessed, you will say,
That even the blades of grass could not be trusted,
That they would choose this moment to whisper in her ear.
Now she whips her tail and sends ripples of portent
Riding off through the night. And you are in your farmhouse,
And you are sleeping, when they enter the attic.
You think they are ghosts and begin to shiver in your bed.
And then, turning to your wife and hoping for the best,
You slide one leg next to hers, place one hand on her hair.
"Please, darling," you say. "Let's be warm. Let's
Waft ourselves away to the Valley of Moo..."

O perhaps she will have you, O perhaps she will not.
But whatever the case, when it is over, you will feel alone,
And it will still be dark. And then that plaintive lowing:
A rich contralto flowing, like sorghum, over the fields,
Calling you, as it might to anyone, to come, carefully
Warming your hands, and kneel there beside her.

I Eat Meat
Anne Xuereb

My honors-enrichment yoga “professor” delighted us all last Thursday evening when she announced that we had a “project.” Each of us had an area to research, write a paper on, and present. My immediate reaction was that my esteemed yoga instructor must have stood on her head a little too long that day. But, in the spirit of enrichment, and knowing there was no way out of it, I embarked on my spiritual journey of enlightenment into the realms of the yogic diet and the three gunas.

Before I delve into the secrets of the yogic diet – as tempting as they are – I must first share the guna philosophy. Gunas are the “qualities” of energy and everything is assigned a guna based on its characteristics. Sattva symbolizes purity, Rajas stands for passion and activity, and Tamas represents darkness and inertia. Everything has all three, but only one is dominant. The dominant characteristic is how the object is described – sattavic, rajasic, or tamasic. The enlightened metaphor used to explain the predominance of one guna over another states that sattavic fruit is perfectly ripe, while rajasic fruit is a little overripe, and the tamasic fruit is rotten; of course, this metaphor applies to people as well. Mental and physical problems

arise when a person is too rajasic or tamasic and thus out of harmony with the world. One way to correct the problem is by eating a specific type of food – again, either sattavic, rajasic, or tamasic. This isn't so difficult. It's actually a lot like the ancient medical belief concerning a person's "humors." Sickness was caused by an imbalance of the four humors: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. According to the disease and the nature of the imbalance, diets – among other things – were prescribed as a cure. This also led to such astute medical practices like bloodletting to restore the "balance," which unfortunately survived a tad longer than it should have. This was actually how our first President – and at least one Poe character – died.

Well, it's the same for the gunas! The Sattavic diet is "pure" and organic according to the yogis, thus leading to perfect health. All foods are natural and come from the earth. No meat by-products – among other things – are allowed. Not too harsh a prescription for perfect health, I'd say. But they say the Rajasic diet – which is one to avoid – contains anything "too hot, spicy, bitter, sweet, sour, or salty," which suspiciously sounds like a rather hefty chunk of my diet. Tea, coffee, and chocolate are also banned. Now this is where a line – a big, fat line if need be – must be drawn, because it's starting to get a little too ruthless. No chocolate? No coffee? Supposedly, all this unbelievably good stuff "destroys the mind-body equilibrium, feeding the body at the expense of the mind." Maybe it's just me, but a good dose of caffeine *helps* my mind function on a daily basis; in fact, I shudder to think of my Latin class without it. And chocolate has long been touted for doing wonders to lift the spirits of the weary, mine especially. But according to the yogis, too much raja apparently "over-stimulates the body" and "excites the passions." If that's the

case I'll continue to eat chocolate – every day, if necessary – and slip my future husband some, too.

But the worst offender is the Tamasic food group, of which meat, wine, alcohol, onions, vinegar and garlic are members. The Italians and French seem to be doing fine despite the meat, wine, alcohol, onions, vinegar and garlic, but what do centuries of incredibly good food prove? Rome, Italy is home to one of the three ancient cuisines, according to the Frugal Gourmet. They must know what they're doing after two thousand years of practice. What a surprise to discover it's so unhealthy!

The yogis also believe that overeating is a Tamasic sin. After much consideration, this could actually be true as I reflect upon many Thanksgivings past when I thought someone would have to forcibly roll me from the dining room table in order to budge an inch. Nevertheless, I always managed to recover enough from Thanksgiving to overindulge all over again at Christmas, and feel all the while that it was my duty – no, my moral obligation – as a good Catholic and a patriotic American to do so. So, at this point in my research, I'm a little quizzical about yogic thought, but since it jives with ancient medical practices – that were abandoned centuries ago – it can't be all that bad can it?

It only goes downhill from here, folks. Rapidly. Granted, I have respect for anyone who follows what he truly believes, and if he's a vegan who doesn't wear leather, that's perfectly kosher by me. But this isn't founded on ethics, although there is a pinch tossed in here and a dash thrown in there. This is pure craziness. It's nuts. And on top of that, there's no way for anyone to really survive on the sustenance they suggest. I know there's no way **I** could survive this

lifestyle – and don't forget that survival is **key** to existence in general. I should have taken careful consideration of the fact that after only one month of yoga classes, I now know that I'm not meant to be a human pretzel and that any diet conducive to becoming a human pretzel should probably be avoided at all costs as well. Not that a person on a yogic diet could even eat a pretzel anyway – too much salt. Not only is salt toxic, but it causes cancer, cataracts, and kidney stones according to the yogis, and should be avoided religiously, in addition to all processed food, which causes nerve impairment and retards mental growth in children. Somehow, my brain seemed to survive a youth of Pop-tarts – which are not just processed, but contain sugar! Which, of course, causes all behavioral problems in children, more physical and mental retardation, brain imbalances and “psychiatric disorders, depression, phobias, fears, paranoia, compulsive behavior, and epilepsy.” Oh, and ulcers, acne, arthritis, and yet more kidney problems. It must be a wonder to these yogis that we're all not raving lunatics with attention-deficit disorder waiting for organ transplants or on the verge of death.

Ah, but I digress. Apparently even worse than sugar is milk. The yogis say it doesn't do a body good. Somehow in the crackpot science applied, which refutes a good half-century of actual medicine, drinking milk causes osteoporosis and rotten teeth. If that's not enough to persuade me not to drink milk, bronchitis, tonsillitis, ear infections, asthma, amoebiasis, and various discharges – none of which I suffer from – will all disappear! But wait! There's more! Now I'm supposed to “imagine” that I'm a dairy cow after reading about how horrible it must be to suffer the indignity of forced milking and being attached to a cold, brutal machine. “What kind of sentiment would you have

toward man?" they ask. After suggesting that the cows are "cursing man" for taking their milk, the brilliant yogic conclusion is that "we are suffering from the collective curse of the cows of the world!" Ah ha! The Bovine Conspiracy Theory!

This is only the tip of the iceberg, folks. Meat, of course, is the supreme evil. After the expected green answers ("It's cruel!") and the economic answers ("We could solve world hunger and end water shortages by forgoing meat and growing more grain!") the yogis delved into uncharted territory. I never knew, for instance, that meat, too, causes psychiatric disorders, although at this point I should have guessed. The theory here is intriguing: the stressed out animals produce toxic stress hormones, which we then eat, producing further toxicity, thus causing "unnecessary panic, stress, and fears," resulting once again in more psychiatric disorders. Whew. Then we have the sloth/violence/lifespan argument, taken from studying "nature." According to yogic thought, lions – who are carnivores – eat only meat and work only to eat, the rest of the day they spend sleeping. Let's not forget that they are violent, which is, of course, caused by eating meat. Elephants and horses, on the other hand are "peaceful vegetarians," with solid work habits and strength. I, too, can have a solid work ethic and strength by abstaining from meat like the regal elephant and the mighty horse. The yogis even offer the term "added horsepower" as an incentive to eat, well, like a horse. I might then be able to finish all my schoolwork on time, with freshness and clarity – and power, by giving up meat and grazing. Literally. No wonder I nap daily. It's the meat.

But their best – and most creative – reason for giving up meat I have intentionally saved for last: it rots us from the inside out. Since

we as humans are not equipped to, ahem, rid ourselves of food quickly enough to please the yogis, they believe that if we eat meat we have “decaying corpses within us.” This is, of course, why we all have colon cancer. Again, considering I’ve never had colon cancer and since I have consumed meat for, oh, twenty years or so, I certainly question the correlation. So, in conclusion, my asthma, ulcers, arthritis, psychiatric disorders, eczema, high blood pressure, worms (of all varieties) and cancer – again, all of which I don’t presently have and have never suffered from – will disappear immediately once I give up meat. But if the health concerns are not enough to sway me against meat consumption, the “moral and spiritual” consequences of killing something in order to eat should be the final consideration, the yogis say. Since people ate meat in the Bible without God striking them down and even offered animals – and humans – for sacrifice, I think I’ll live without fear of eternal damnation; though I’m sure that suffering from the “collective curse of the cows of the world” is more than enough punishment in the scheme of things.

So what’s actually left? If I were to pretend to remove the meat, cheese, milk, pasta, bread, sugar, spices, and anything else that might be in the least offensive, rotten, toxic, or cause psychiatric disorders or colon cancer, what else could I eat? Fruit and nuts. And liberal doses of restorative, cleansing lemon water. After suggesting that I could “survive without malnutrition” on fruit and nuts alone, it is recommended that they must be eaten in a certain way and at certain times in order to avoid creating “toxicity” in the fruit and nuts. At this point, I’d have to be nuts to try it. I wonder if this fruit/nut toxicity causes cancer, too. Suggested fare on the yogic diet includes homemade curds, lentils, beans, and “any variety of sprouts” – in addi-

tion to the fruit, nuts, vegetables, and rejuvelac. Out of curiosity, I had to find out what “rejuvelac” exactly is. On the “www.sproutpeople.com” website (and I stress that this is not a joke), recipes for homemade rejuvelac can be found. It’s a “fizzy” grain... beverage. Mix rye and water and let it “sprout” (which sounds suspiciously like mold to me, or even worse, sourdough starter) and then drink the resulting “beverage.” Other choice tidbits from their website recommend recipes for sprout cereal – just add milk and honey! – and sprout omelettes. “There are few people who actually enjoy the flavor of Grass Juice,” they say, and I’ll take their word without question on that one. “But we all drink it because we know how perfect it is - because we FEEL IT as soon as we drink it!” Yes, I’m sure they FEEL IT. I would, too. Rising back up in a hurry.

Disregarding the fact that I love steak, pork, milk, and lobster, oh, and I shouldn’t omit the chocolate, tea, wine, garlic and onions, spices, or “hot, spicy, bitter, sweet, sour, and salty” – the latter which, in fact, sounds a lot like really good Chinese food, which, of course, I love – the diet doesn’t sound enticing enough to even debate trying it. The absolutely revolting concept of rejuvelac alone should send a clear enough message to anyone with an ounce of common sense: attempt at your own risk, or as proof of your own psychiatric illness. Hell, just thinking about rye water sprouting gives me the willies, but actually drinking the “fizzy grain beverage” is another story entirely. If rejuvelac isn’t enough to scare someone, sprout cereal should be enough to sway those even *tempted* to starve on this diet. I could be alone in my sentiments. Highly unlikely, but still possible nevertheless.

However, in the spirit of yogic enlightenment, and again, because

I have to, if – and that's a big if – I did debate it, the fact that I don't suffer from arthritis, acne, eczema, worms, asthma, various discharges, ulcers, high blood pressure, epilepsy, phobias (well, spiders, but that's completely normal), bronchitis, tonsillitis, ear infections, amoebiasis, cancer – of the colon or otherwise, cataracts, kidney stones, mental or physical retardation, or last, but certainly not least, any severe psychiatric disorders, leads me to believe that the incredible health benefits of the yogic diet might not do much for me in the long run, or, for that matter, the short run; however, since it might alleviate “unnecessary panic, stress, and fears,” in addition to compulsive behavior and brain imbalances, I might want to consider the diet seriously, although I feel that merely graduating would produce the same results, without nearly as much angst, anguish, or anorexia. Although I have no doubt that after subsisting on fruit, nuts, and rejuvelac alone I would be bony enough to twist myself into appropriate human-pretzel shapes with surprising ease, I've decided that “surviving without malnutrition” isn't really all it's cracked up to be – nuts or not.

The Bus Stop
Daryl F. Seldon

It was pretty cold out so he stood there head half sunken in the blanket of his heavy coat waiting for the bus to arrive, meditating on what little warmth radiated from his wiry little frame, and circulated under his coat. The heavy coat, which his big brother, after an argument, had insisted he take despite the fact that there was not another between the two of them was not enough against the mild cold which to him felt many times colder. The morning sky was overcast, cut by electric white and gray, the fibers of the gray clouds slowly, hypnotically being pulled apart in little pieces then floating alone in the bright white sea of light. He looked to his right at the sidewalk, sparkling with the electric light, as it lengthened in a straight line every so often cut by the square Hanley Housing Project parking lots, then off in the distance disappearing over a hill that lead to the plant where they slaughtered the hogs and the shack houses.

It was on this path day after day, after losing himself in some meditation, or taking his eyes off the path for just a second, John

would appear as if from nowhere, slowly trudging forward. He didn't really know whether John had descended the project stairways to access the sidewalk or whether he had ascended the steep hill from the shack houses where the poor white folks stayed. He had often wanted a way to categorize the silent and resolute white boy who shared the bus stop with him but he always felt it a blasphemy to the name of his single school friend. He had heard kids at school use the term white trash and had been drilled at home with tales of the trickery and evil of "white crackas", but he never could put John in either of those categories. He wasn't all high talking and self-worshipping like the kids at the gifted school they attended and he wasn't all hateful, deformed, and beaten-up-looking like the white trash boys over the hill. His clothes were inexpensive but neat, usually a checkered button shirt and creased khakis. His blonde hair parted down the middle and jutted out over his forehead creating a little cove where the face was often hidden in shadow by tilting the head downward slightly. His brown eyes were set in deep hollows and disappeared in the downward gaze. His skin was very pale and delicate, through it one could see the blue veins branch off down the length of his arms to the bony fists where they swelled. His features seemed all set in such a way as to be easily hidden and accessible only by his permission. Sometimes, briefly, so much of the face was revealed to Kevin that he was momentarily frightened by how much of it was unfamiliar. But soon it would retreat to its comfortable secrecy.

Kevin and John had been made pals quite randomly; the result of an IQ test given to fifth graders a year earlier that prescribed that their educational needs could be better met at the Hanley

Academy for Gifted Students. Neither of them had really been asked whether they would prefer the gifted academy, full of students who looked, spoke, and acted as if they were on a family sitcom, over the regular elementary school which was right across the street from the bus stop. It was decided for them. For the rest of their fifth grade year after the IQ test, and even before he had met John, he would find that among the teachers and parents, his name would be fused with John's, Kevin and John, as though it were one name. Kevin and John would be reading poems at the next assembly program. Kevin and John would be sent to the math competition. Kevin and John could do some tutoring during the after school program. They had been volunteered for everything. They were Bishop Elementary's weapon against the rich schools. At every academic competition, just when it looked like the poor school would walk away with nothing, the first and second place victories would go to Kevin and John. Kevin would glow with nervous excitement, but there would be no alteration at all in John. John rarely smiled and hardly ever talked except when absolutely necessary. Their relationship often consisted of Kevin trying to guess what John was thinking. Or sometimes, John would make a decision without warning, like protesting something at the assembly program by just getting up and walking out, and Kevin would follow. Kevin would then have to figure out on his own what they were protesting. He sometimes stole long glances at John's eyes and wondered if John ever knew what was going on, but he had to, Kevin thought, in order to do everything so perfectly.

Kevin stood watching the sidewalk, he sort of hoped John wouldn't come today. He didn't feel this way often. Usually only

when he was embarrassed of something like making anything other than a 100 on a paper or having done something foolish trying to get the acceptance of the other boys. On those days, John would just be there, shaming him in a strange way, by saying nothing, and acting as he always acted. Kevin stood shaking, measuring time by the quantity of pain he felt from the cold. Every cough, every shiver, every snuffle decreased the likelihood that John would ever arrive. Just when he decided that he had suffered enough for the bus to have long ago come to pick up its lone passenger from the south side of the city, John's nonchalant figure appeared on the glowing sidewalk, progressing slowly toward the bus stop. There was something different about him. His walk was unsteady and his shoes shone brightly.

Kevin disappeared under the big coat. He wanted to just be warm and forget everything. The miserable weather, John, and the day ahead. He tried to think of Newton's laws, electricity, Poe, and taxonomy but these could not hold his attention. He tried thinking of his guiltiest pleasure, a boisterous little white girl from the academy he had a crush on, but not even she could hold his attention. The events of yesterday began playing in his head. His mind returned to the bright orange and green of the playground. From where he had stood near the school entrance returning from the water fountain, he heard the excited commotion and saw the migrating circle of spectators scanning the orange sand, in the center of it, between the legs and the breaks in the circle, he saw a black boy and a white boy moving swiftly kicking up a cloud of dust as the circle bounced off the boundaries of the grass, the monkey bars, the slides, and the swings. The shrieks of the crowd rose and fell erratically. Fights and their

tendency to be unable to confine themselves to their original participants frightened Kevin and he had no desire to get a closer look until he heard someone say the name "John!" It was one of the rare times that the name was used alone without his attached to it. He ran over to see what was happening. In the center of the circle stood John. He paused staring directly at Kevin, his fists tightly clenched and his chest pumping viciously, greedily sucking in and expelling the warm dusty air, his shirt torn almost completely off, dangling off his waist, red blood smudging his arms. On the ground below him, the little black boy was knocked out, blood pooling in the sand around his mouth. A group of boys were bringing water to clean him up and quickly get rid to the evidence that there had been a fight.

The sight immediately terrified Kevin. But he also knew that John wasn't the type to fight anyone over just anything. John, he thought, was in fact so immune to wanting the approval of others, that no insult could anger him. He must have had no other choice, Kevin assumed. And when he heard the story from someone in the crowd, he decided he had been right. Marcus, the boy John fought, was a friend of the most popular boy in school, Thomas, who had ordered him to beat up the "white trash boy". Thomas and his friends were notorious. Somehow, they were a bit larger than the other 5th graders. Thomas wore very large jeans and colorful sports clothes which made him look even bigger than he was. His dark brown eyes, pointy nose, and the protruding ridge of his parted ear-length black hair had the tendency to point confrontationally at whomever he was talking to. He and his friends sat on the back of the bus, causing a ruckus and chastising Kevin and John who sat in

the very first seat opposite the bus driver. This greatly bothered Kevin; he feared getting on the bus. He was embarrassed of his old clothes and cheap shoes. John on the other hand, didn't seem to care. He would probably have said, Kevin thought, if he ever talked, that expensive clothes were a waste. That's what Kevin wanted to believe also, but he couldn't bring himself to that kind of resoluteness, that's what he needed John for, not just to think rationally which they both did, but to actually live and feel more rationally, to stick up for them and the way they are.

After the fight, he saw Thomas talking to John, following him in the halls, and chatting with him after school. Thomas had given him an expensive shirt to put on after he ripped his already torn shirt to pieces fighting Marcus. It looked so silly to Kevin, John wearing a name brand shirt, with a big company logo on it. Waiting on the bus after school that day, Thomas resumed talking to John. When they got on the bus, John sat next to Kevin. Kevin laughed at the incongruousness of the shirt. John looked at him blankly for a long time. It was not a smiling stare, for John smiled with his eyes alone and one could tell if you knew him well, it was contemplative, melancholy. Kevin sensed that he didn't want to hear him talk today, he was probably tired from the fight.

After he got home that day, his mind began to plague him. He kept seeing Thomas talking to John, John with Thomas's shirt on, and that stare that was not a laugh, but a cry. He kept trying to put it out of his mind, telling himself it's just jealousy, the embarrassing partially sexual kind that you're not supposed to have over a friend, it is

therefore illegitimate. His mind kept re-running the images and he kept trying to dodge that crucial reality that was suggested to him. Now it was upon him again. His mind trying to tell him a truth he didn't want to hear.

He opened his eyes and peeped out of the coat. He was startled to see John standing right there at this right side staring directly ahead. It had gotten darker outside. They did not speak to each other which was not unusual. Kevin began shaking more violently; there was still the same look in John's eyes that he had seen yesterday on the bus. It was so foreboding that Kevin considered retracing the morning's short trek back up the project steps to his home, where the TV and heater were on. But he felt the inevitability; whatever it was, it must happen. To his left, the metallic sky above and the tall buildings of the Hanley homes and the Bishop school opposite it made an eerie corridor of Bishop Drive where they stood. The yellow bus appeared in this corridor braking far from its stop and screeching slowly to where Kevin and John were standing. Darkness leaked from the windows. The door slammed open. John's eyes caught Kevin's for a brief moment, the equivalent of what had often been a greeting for them, then John hurried on with the least composure and the most struggle that Kevin's sensitive perception had ever registered. Kevin followed still shaking and now sweating under the heavy coat. As soon as the door slammed, an explosion of ear piercing screams assailed him from all sides. They reminded him of the sounds he had often heard walking past the hog slaughtering plant, each scream distinct and crying the dread of the impending death of each individual animal all blending into a single wail. He

became dizzy and disoriented, his vision blurred. He looked down the length of the bus at the terrifying faces screaming and clapping in the darkness that got increasingly intense till at the very back in the corner, a figure stood with a sinister grin motioning and gleefully illustrating that a seat had been saved. He could hear the boys chanting, "John, John, John, John!" Someone was saying, "I like your new sneaks, John!" and someone else "You really whooped that black kid's ass!" He stood there at the front of the bus looking at John's back as John faded into the darkness and took his seat in the back corner. Kevin's lungs were painfully pumping and expelling hot air and the impatient beating of his heart was violently shaking his coat. The darkness and the cheering voices were rushing in upon him where he stood, frozen. By the time he realized the bus was moving, he was already falling over backward, and the loud sound of the back of his head hitting the floor of the bus invoked another wave of hysteria.

He found his way to the empty seat at the front of the bus and sat watching the landscape fly at him through the window. He felt that he had been rent in half, but the moment of tension was over. He could see ahead now. No tears gathered on his face. He could no longer feel pain from the hateful eyes upon him and he could no longer fear the childish ridicule. He no longer had the embarrassment of being an incomplete person. He felt all alone; that he was the only one in his bus seat, the only one on the bus, the only one in the school, the only one in the city, the only one in the whole world, and it was all his.

*Lines Written at the Old Post Museum in
Washington D.C.*

Shannon Hofer

Hearkened back to the days of J. F. K.
and “my old friend, Martin”
and then of “American Pie”

I stood —

still

in the crisp, January Air.

Atop a tall, antique mail tower,

warmed only by hope;

I watched the marchers,

the lay politician,

the student,

and the women cry,

from collegiate wombs;

their banner, their faintly-heard

whisper.

Eyes toward an ionic Masterpiece—a Center-Law-
Piece and again, I am assured of
the dream harbored therein:

20

Freedom.

To protest.

To make love.

To fight.

Indeed- to stand

Still

in the crisp, January Air.

A Midsummer Night's Walk
Ronald Smith

Gary Reese's house was in Skokie. After killing Reese and my brother, Steven, I began walking down Skokie Boulevard, onto Lincoln Avenue into Chicago proper, then onto Halstead Street. I had been walking for nearly four hours. It was the middle of the summer and still light out at seven o'clock at night and the temperature was in the nineties.

I continued walking and hadn't even noticed the polo shirt I was wearing was soaked through with sweat. The streets were fairly crowded with people out on Friday night. I passed by a restaurant and looked in the window at all the happy faces. There was a family of five: father, mother, two sons, and daughter. From outside I could see the mother was wearing a lot of makeup. Does her husband beat her? I saw four young men at a table; they were wearing hats and shirts that denoted the different colleges they were from, and each was sucking down a bottle of beer. They all seemed like they had had six too many and I was content with the knowledge that each of their faces would be over a toilet bowl in the morning. I saw a young married couple; they had wedding rings on and neither could have been much over twenty. They were not speaking; the wife was staring at

her food and eating, the husband staring straight ahead and eating. Then I saw a little girl who must have been eight or ten years old staring at me. After several seconds she smiled; I tried to do the same but couldn't. She was wearing a pretty pink dress and was seated at a table with a man of about thirty who I assumed was her dad. As I walked away she was still staring at me.

Gary Reese had been my wife's boss for almost a year. He was a prominent tax lawyer and she was his secretary. About six months ago I became suspicious the two were having an affair. My wife started working late and at times I would call the office and get no answer. Her explanation for this was that at night she was rarely ever at her desk and therefore couldn't hear the phone. Three weeks ago I went to the office one night when she said she was working late and found the office locked shut. The night security guard, who I knew, told me that everyone had left hours ago.

I continued walking and soon came to a group of people, about a dozen or so, arguing with four police officers. One officer was putting a young black male into the back of one of two squad cars. The other officers were attempting to calm the growing crowd without much success. The people were yelling insults and obscenities at the officers. Two more squad cars arrived and four more officers joined the clash. I watched three more people get arrested. I was about to continue walking when I noticed the little girl in the pink dress. She and her father were on the same side of the street as me; her father was watching the cops try to bring order to the other side, but she was staring at me, still smiling. Again I couldn't smile back at her, so I just turned and continued on.

When I confronted my wife with what the security guard told

me, she said that she and Mr. Reese were out having a business dinner. I called her a liar and accused her of having an affair and she slapped me. Then we argued for what seemed like the millionth time. For three long weeks, things continued that way: I would have my suspicions, confront her, she would deny them, and we would fight. Earlier today she had had enough and left; she was now staying with her sister.

I continued walking and after a while I noticed a homeless man huddled under a blanket at the mouth of an alley. People were walking by him not paying any attention, not caring in the slightest. I watched him for the longest time, maybe as long as an hour. Who was this man? What cruelty had life dealt him? It was ninety degrees outside and he was covered up with a thick blanket; was he sick? I walked over to him and found him asleep. I took what money I had in my wallet, seventeen dollars, and tucked the money under the blanket. I stood up, went back to the mouth of the alley and looked up and down the street. Once again, there was the little girl in the pink dress. She was on the other side of the street, seated at a table, eating ice cream with her father and staring at me. She smiled at me again; and again I couldn't smile back. She was still smiling and staring at me when I turned and continued walking.

After my wife left, I got in touch with my brother, Steven, and told him the situation. I said I wanted to go over to Reese's house and confront him. (I knew his address from my wife's papers.) Steven said it was a bad idea and we argued. When he realized that I was determined to have it out with Reese, Steven insisted that he go with me. We got to Reese's house and I accused him of having an affair with my wife; he denied it and threatened to call the police. He

turned to pick up the phone and that's when I pulled the thirty-eight caliber revolver out that I had brought with me and hit him over the head. Steven was horrified; he didn't know I had brought the gun. He came at me and tried to get the gun; we wrestled and the gun went off, hitting Steven in the chest and killing him. I don't remember what I did after that, but I do remember shooting Reese when he came to.

I continued walking and found myself in front of the Dawson Hotel. The place was shoddy, run-down looking and this premonition was reinforced with the type of people I encountered when I walked through the lobby. I passed the lobby, came to the door to the stairwell, and took the stairs up to the roof; it was quite a walk, due in large part to the Dawson being fourteen stories tall. I walked out onto the roof just as a summer breeze hit me in the face; this distracted me only momentarily. I walked over to the edge of the roof and looked down at the street. Then, I prayed—not for forgiveness and not for mercy. I prayed for the little girl in the pink dress. I prayed for her all the way down to the pavement.

Tuesday Weld
Nick Norwood

I.

Look home: a subtle sunlight's leaking in,
Illuminating the scene. Faint shadows fall
In all directions, overlapping one another
On the sidewalk. Generic season, time of day,
City blocks. She steps out in chinos,
A leopard-print coat, climbs in the convertible
Parked topdown at the curb. Lines and delicate
High-tension wires, a cream-colored cabover
Shuddering quietly through its gears.
Because Tuesday exists here, welded
Into the cosmos, beamed into deep space,
Which goes on expanding forever. Watch
While she demonstrates, Honey West,
The mole impeccably placed above her lips,
The scarf and sunglasses. She's everywhere
And always has been. She couldn't be *was*.

2.

Meanwhile, Frank and Joe are out in the powerboat,
Diving for demiculverins. The house still stands
Upon the cliff, above the sea, and elsewhere
There's another house, isolate, intact and waiting,
Mr. Braun's stolen Kesselring parked beside.
The Sleuth stays in tune, and unlike 007
The boys go on not fucking forever. But this
Somehow is less than what is meant. Here,
A better example: the two boys slipped into
Ripple-soled shoes and put on dark jackets.
Joe, who had blond hair, was a year younger
Than his dark-haired, eighteen-year-old brother.
Their shiny convertible gleamed in the light
Of a street lamp on the corner of High and Elm.
The building stood in deep shadows and they
Reconnoitered in silence. No one was around.

3.

The fugitive works for a while in a warehouse
Outside of Wilmington. He's wiser
Than his fellow wranglers on the ranch
Near Walla Walla. Yet that tomorrow's
Wednesday's news about which he's

Unaware. It's always Tuesday. Tuesday,
Tuesday everywhere. He doesn't care,
Only wants to disappear. His central conflict
Is that he exists here. He can always run,
But he cannot abide, nor conjure a successful
Suicide. Then, suddenly, Ann Francis shows up
In her B-movie silver jumpsuit. She's come
From outer space, the forbidden planet.
She has a pet ocelot named Bruce. She will
Try to comfort him through the long afternoon,
And, later, let him escape in her ragtop.

4.

In a corner of a room, somewhere in the middle
Of space, there exists a place we can't go to,
Yet can't get away from. Mr. Hardy
Has been there. He knows what secrets
Would be revealed. And so he guards them,
Guards us against them, against the folding in
Of that space, collapse under the pressure
Of its own weight, that stage of becoming
In which we enter into the black hole.
He will give the boys another assignment,
Something to keep them busy. Tuesday
Will continue to exist in a perpetual state
Of possibility, the career that shows such

Promise, the smile that gleams, that seems
To beam our endless entropy, the honeyed hair
That remains golden and artfully out of place.

Company
Doraine Bennett

There are some places where guests are not welcome. While I was touring the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, a few years ago, I was awed by the stately magnificence of the mansion. Built in the mid-1880s by Cornelius Vanderbilt's grandson, the estate was an attempt to bring European grandeur to America. The house boasts marble halls, ceiling frescoes, intricately carved woodwork, rare pieces of art, and furniture that once belonged to Napoleon. Visitors are welcome to roam the halls, inspect the servants' quarters, and admire the elegant gardens. Occasionally, however, one encounters doorways tastefully barricaded by velvet ropes, rooms where visitors are forbidden to enter. Even now, I remain curious about those rooms I was not allowed to view.

What lay behind those barred openings? Boxes of discarded family portraits? Remnants of antiquated draperies? Broken pieces of Louis XIV furniture? Or, was it something more ominous, like cracking plaster or sinking foundations? And why do I remain so intrigued by what might be found there? Because deep in my soul, I want to know that behind all that elegance, there is also humanity.

I have my own forbidden doors when visitors come to call. I am

unwilling for my guests to see beyond the order that the front rooms present. I gather piles of unwashed laundry, stacks of week old newspapers, tennis shoes my children left in the den, even unwashed pots and deposit them in a heap on an unmade bed behind closed doors. No one can guess that I am not the perfect hostess.

Something about those closed doors intrigues us. We want to know that we are not alone in our imperfections. Have you ever been to the home of a business acquaintance or a new friend and admired the immaculate setting that looked as though the maid left only moments before you rang the doorbell? At some point during the evening you excused yourself, found your way up stairs, down hallways or around corners, and encountered the closed door next to the restroom. You stopped quietly and peered behind you to make sure no one could observe your movements. Very carefully, you cracked the door just enough to see a pile of unpacked boxes and an overflowing laundry basket. Did you not breath a satisfying sigh, as you noiselessly pulled the door shut, knowing that your hosts were merely human after all?

Though the boundaries are less visible, the human heart carefully guards its own back rooms. Guests are not welcome to examine the closets stuffed with broken relationships, the untended hoard of secret longings, the counters cluttered with disappointment, anxiety, and rejection—the places where character is still under construction, where the mind and emotions are not presentable. We imagine that in order to be successful, productive individuals, the front rooms of our lives must be dust free. If we give evidence of disorder, we feel that something structurally wrong in our character may disqualify our contribution to the human household.

A writer must be willing to blur these boundary lines. If she cannot open the door, she must at least tell the reader what lies behind it, albeit indirectly. Words lack life and vibrancy when they come only from the presentable portions of the soul. They are superficial and do not move us. Real life occurs in the back rooms. For a writer to influence, to touch the reader, she must draw from the store of experience and emotion that is kept tucked away in the rooms behind the velvet rope.

When Faulkner wrote "Barn Burning," what devastating choices hidden in his own back rooms gave him the ability to convey Sarty's inner struggle? It is Charlotte Gilman's battle with mental illness that gives her the depth of character understanding we see in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Who did Eudora Welty love well enough to walk miles for on foot? There must have been someone. This is not to say that writers must experience every emotional situation they create for their characters. But much like the gifted actor who reaches back for the memory of childhood loss when the script requires tears, the gifted writer draws from her store of hidden experience to create lifelike characters. She takes the unfit emotion and transforms it into art.

We all have junk hidden somewhere in a back room. I do not need to know the contents of the junk in yours, but I am more willing to enter into your life and enjoy the hospitality of your home if I know you are not perfect. Though I enjoy the beauty of a perfectly cleaned house, I realize that very few people live in such perfection. In fact, most tend to relax when there is a bit of dust on the furniture or a stray magazine on the floor. They step more easily into the warmth of real life with me.

The same is true of writing. A writer who can reach into the

hidden rooms of the heart and infuse her words with an authenticity that rises from the imperfections she would prefer to keep hidden draws the reader into her art. Writing is difficult because we prefer not to allow others to see beyond our presentable rooms. I may want to sit in the Victorian chairs of the Biltmore Estate and imagine I am an elegant lady having tea with dignitaries, but in reality I am a middle-class Southern girl who would prefer to be digging in my flower garden. I may want to invite you to dinner and pretend there is nothing behind the closed door at the end of the hall, but good writing must be more than that. It must invite the reader to come in and sit down. Do not mind the dirty dishes in the sink. I will vacuum the floors tomorrow. Come and visit with me.

Truth
Eric Mosley

Listen not to the voices of man.
How can they see for you?
They can't help you understand.
How can they know for you?

They have copied me
Marketed me
and sold me to the masses.
Molded me into oppressing vises.

They have taken the meaning out of being
And drained the life from living.
A hundred times re-translated
Sixty-six books discombobulated

A loving God is not what they show
For your obedience is what they desire
Your resources to keep them in power
Power in man's name is not of God.

To find me is simple
Just breathe
Take notice of things around
For in nature's beauty I am found

I course through the veins of the earth
Flowing through rivers
And seeping into the dirt
I see no sinners

Follow not the sheep to heaven
For they know not their way
The paths of others
Will only lead you astray.

Driving at Dusk in Open Country
Nick Norwood

The railroad right-of-way was furred with tawny grass,
And she thought, Look, there he is, lounging beside the tracks.
It's the miraculous beast who appears in my dreams.

She thought it better to look away. But in the end
She couldn't resist, glanced again. Still there. Stretched out
Like So-and-So reclining on his couch, eating figs. And

It occurred to her that she might be in love with him.
She began looking ahead to the arc lamps under which
His coat glowed golden in cones of light, imagined the feel,

The sleek suppleness, of his arms and legs, the dark
Strangeness of his torso. She knew it was just the dream,
But she pulled over anyway, between distant poles,

Where there was only the dim starlight, the night, the grass.

Reflections
Stephanie Ledbetter



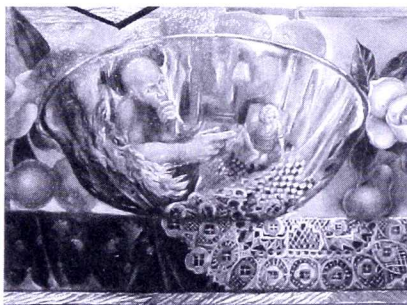
*Scars**Diana Best*

I remember well
The monstrous pounding of guns
The roar of bombers overhead
The screams of men
The odor of sweat on my body
The smell of gangrene and piss
The stench of death
The faces of men I shot
The bullets ripping through flesh
The bodies piled dead
The hardening of my heart
The scars left unseen.
I remember well the end of the war,
A hollow Victory.

*Eleven**Susan Georgecink*

Because you never seem to fail
To trip me up or under table kick my shins,
Your rough demeanor leaves me bearing purple marks
As testimony of your boyish love.
At three, you cracked my jaw
While leaping up impatient with the urge to race away
Outraged, I crouched there panting
At the price of pulling off your socks.
And now I see a time not far
When seldom our two bodies will collide;
Brushed cheeks then will suffice, not crushing hugs,
Nor ambushed backs nor elbows jabbed in sides.
Abandoned, I'll just hope the wounds I've made upon your heart
Are no worse than the recollected stinging of my skin.

The Visit
Euginia Bates



Sadistic Sonnet
Diana Best

Hey Cinderella, guess the slipper didn't fit
Or else Prince Charming was really a toad.
You didn't want him anyway.
He was just looking for a housekeeper.
Still trapped in that tower looking for love aren't you.
Let down your own hair and climb out.
Tall, Dark, and Handsome's not coming to rescue you.
He got saddle sore on that white horse of his.
Curious about why the guy left?
You just keep walking through Wonderland
One day Tweedledum might let you know.
Or else send Tweedledee to do the dirty work for him.
Still waiting for that fairy tale ending and the happily ever after?
Might consider settling for this modern day drama.

Faceless
Doraine Bennett

"I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly...How can they meet us face to face till we have faces."

—C.S. Lewis

Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold

A face?

Of, course I have a face—
one for every day of the week.

Two on Sunday.

Come.

Let's have tea.

We'll sit and chat about
tennis matches and 401Ks
and Sally Weston's latest affair
and ...

Me?

Let me tell you about my latest operation.
It's my heart you see.
It races like a thoroughbred
Headlong on the homestretch
Then drops to nothing.
Like I'm almost dead.

Harry's heart attack?
Oh, yes. He's recovering.
You should see the terrible bruise the
needles made on my thigh.

Me?

I must show you
the trophy Jimmy won.
First place in the spelling bee, you know.
I keep it polished,
sitting on the mantle.
I don't let Jimmy touch it,
fingerprints might ruin the finish.
It's only tin underneath.

Is it Thursday?
Ah, we'll dissect Chekov
over coffee and Coltraine
and talk of Yaddo and blackbirds
and the color of hunted hearts

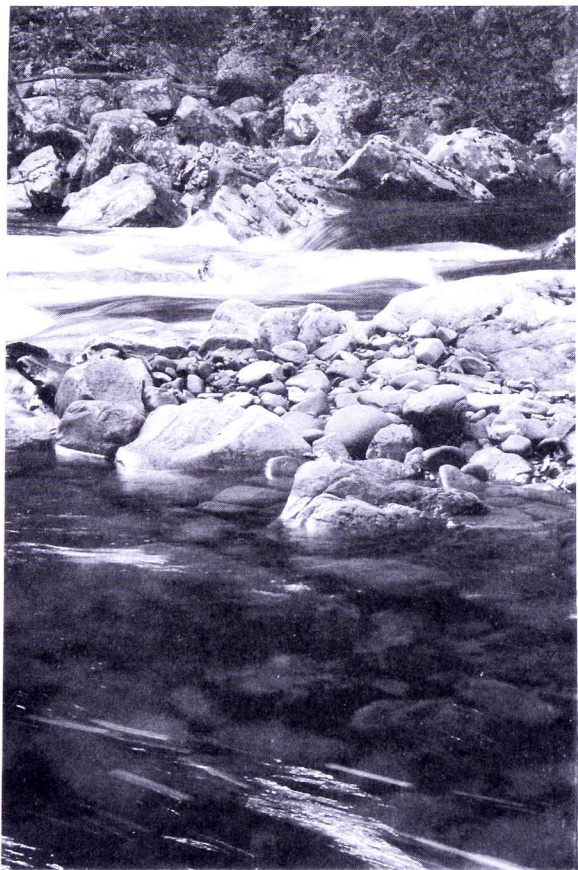
that shrink smaller and smaller
until they cannot be found
at all.

None of those will do?
What do you mean?
They must.
I have worked so hard
at keeping them presentable.
I haven't the time for another face.

What face is it you want?

Me?

Rocks and Water
Mark Ahlman

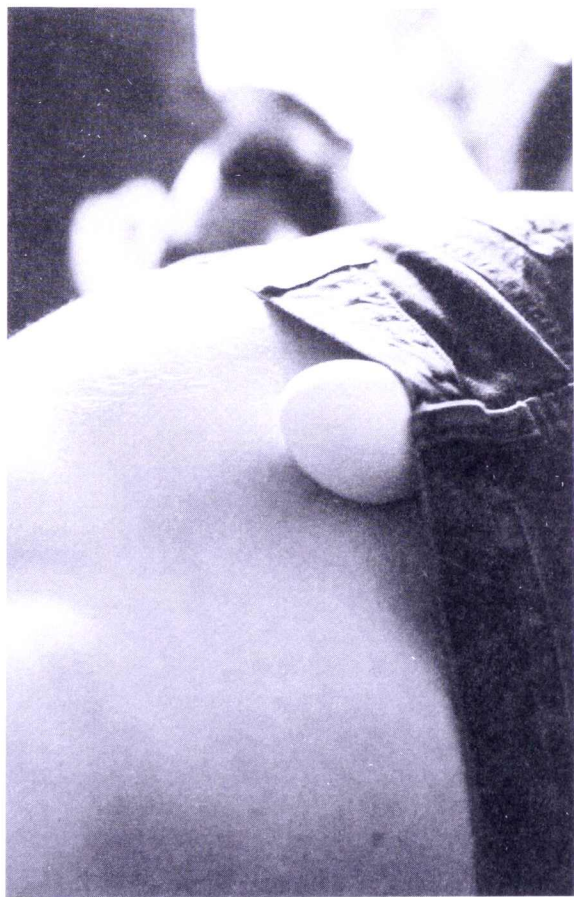


*Loneliness**Brenda French*

Sitting in a park on Sunday afternoon, with no one in sight
Driving down a country road late at night
Writing letters but never getting a reply
Having the answers but never getting asked why
Having friends but no one to talk to
A telephone that never rings
Playing solitaire
Having a song but nothing to sing
Going somewhere but not really being there
A feeling inside but emptiness
A car but nobody in it
Mirrors that only show one reflection, yours
A voice that never speaks
A sign that says keep out
Wanting to share but not knowing how
Wanting to be loved, but no one who cares
Ears that can't hear, eyes that can't see,

Legs that can't walk
Loneliness is me.

Femininity
Stephanie Ledbetter



Kissing the Cast
Meaghan McGurgan

The Cast

Adrian Willis
Lane Porter
Jeremy Morris
Thomas Kitford
Marilyn Carriage
Mark Seaver

Scene 1

Adrian

Lights Please! (To audience) I've always been a quiet guy and I can't explain why. I feel much safer just talking to myself. Not that I'm crazy or anything but I find most humans annoying and immature. So why am I here? Not on earth but here at the local arts society getting ready to do a student run production. Easy, it

would be because of Her.

(Enter Lane)

Adrian

Lane Porter. My best friend and the most talented writer I've ever met. She's all about real sincere theatre and revolution. I know one day if a world leader is assassinated then I'll get arrested for hiding Lane in my basement. I'm here to be her confidante and stage manager. I design costumes so I'll also be doing that. No acting for me thank you, I prefer to stay behind stage. The idea of being in front of a group of heavy breathing college kids terrifies me.

Lane

(Enters wearing boxing gloves around her neck) Yo Adrian!!
(Pause as Adrian stares at her) Yeah, I know it's cliché but it fits my dear. (Looks toward the light booth) Uh oh. Trigger's in the light booth again. Let's just hope he wasn't drinking this time or we'll have to do the whole show in the dark. (Lights go out)
TRIGGER! (Lights go on and Lane sits down in her director's chair) Now we've got you and me. Director slash producer slash writer and Stage manager slash designer slash gay and yet faithful friend. What's missing?

Adrian

Actors Lane, we need actors.

Lane

Huh?

Adrian

Actors? You know people who present the WHOLE show to the people in the audience?

Lane

Oh right, actors. They're overrated anyway. (Goes about her business as Adrian stares at her) I'm thinking about doing the programs in pink! What do you think?

Adrian

Lane! We need actors to put on a play! Who's going to do it, the two of us?

(Enter Jeremy, Thomas and Marilyn)

Jeremy

Of course not! We're here, don't get your panties in a knot.

Lane

The programs Adrian! I need your opinion!

Marilyn

Why pink?

Lane

It's leftovers from my mom's garage sale.

Adrian
Pink's Fine.

Marilyn
And it's pretty!

Lane
Hell yeah! (Looking around) Wait, where's Mark?

Thomas
Emergency.

Lane
And what would that be?

Marilyn
I think it involved a shoe sale at The Banana Republic and a
Navy man by the name of Antonio.

Lane
(Growls) Damn Fags...

All but Lane
Hey!

Lane

Sorry guys. (Looks at the script) No big deal, Adrian can play the part.

Adrian

No way! I don't act and you know that!

Lane

You're just not trying. Remember what our second grade teacher said, "You can play dodge ball Adrian, as long as you try."

Adrian

Yeah, I tried and I broke my nose in the process.

Lane

And in middle school you wanted to learn how to speak Japanese. Your Dad said you couldn't do it on your own.

Adrian

But Lane I can't speak Japanese! I quit when I found out it was hard!

Lane

Do it or I'll torture when you're trying to sleep for the rest of eternity.

Adrian

(To audience) Never live with a woman.

Scene 2

Adrian

(To audience) Lane's play is called *The River of the Soul* and it's a homosexual love story between the two main characters David and Brian. The two are deep in love while David's parents are trying to get their son to break up with Brian. It's an erotic theatre production complete with on-stage sex scene and a large finale with singing and ribbon dancing

Lane

Ribbons are pretty.

Adrian

This is going to be a long day.

(On stage)

Jeremy

Love is the glue that holds us together my dear.

Adrian

(Uncomfortable) And when I look to the future I know I'll be happiest in your arms. Just as we are now David.

Jeremy

(Breaks character) Lane! I can't do this! He's not convincing at all

and if he doesn't do his job then how can you expect me to do mine.

Lane

Easy, I'm the director! Either do it or I'll fire you!

Jeremy

Fine... (Grabs Adrian again) And I'm happiest having you in my arms Brian. For you fill what ever life has voided in my life. You are the stars on an overcast night and you are the river in my deserted soul.

Adrian

You are a true poet David. You make me feel like I'm flying without the need of an air sick bag. (Jeremy leans in to kiss Adrian but he can't because Adrian's giggling too much)

Lane

That's where you are supposed to kiss and get naked.

Adrian

No way.

Jeremy

I need the rehearsal and with a real actor. Thomas get over here!
(Thomas gets up)

Thomas

What? (Jeremy kisses Thomas) I'm supposed to be playing your father!

Jeremy

Just showing him how it's going to happen. (Grabs Adrian who starts giggling again. Jeremy screams in frustration) I can't work like this!!!

Marilyn

This is too funny.

Lane

Adrian grow up! It's just a kiss, it's just nudity we've all seen it before, honestly! (all but Adrian nod and she leans into Adrian) Work with me, babe. You are a starving man in the desert then all of the sudden you see a ham.

Adrian

I'm Jewish.

Lane

Okay, a steak.

Adrian

Vegetarian.

Lane

Okay it's a God damn Eggplant! (Adrian nods) Just imagine how

much you want that eggplant. (He nods again) Now pounce on it and suck the fire out of it! (slaps him on the back of the head)

Adrian

Okay. (Goes in for the kiss and starts laughing again) I can't do this!

Jeremy

It's not that hard! (Kisses Thomas again)

Adrian

(To audience) But he was...Trust me. (Indicates to Jeremy's groin)

Thomas

Anyone can do it! (Kisses Lane)

Lane

Even the director! (Kisses Marilyn)

Marilyn

Your turn! (Turns Adrian toward Jeremy)

Adrian

(to audience) Oh my God. I couldn't believe I was about to do this. I mean I'm sure you're asking Why are you so scared of kissing this guy? But all I kept thinking was about all the great kisses ever filmed and how mine was going to suck.

Lane

(Breaks freeze as if talking to Adrian in his head and becoming part of his day dream. The rest of the cast soon follows) What is that supposed to mean? What great kisses? Everyone kisses the same!

Thomas

Not true but that's something every actor thinks about.

Marilyn

They're the kisses that make everyone squirm in their seats when they're on the screen.

Jeremy

Silent Orgasms of Cinema.

Lane

But what great kisses??

(During the next part of the scene when Adrian mentions one of these "Great kisses" the four other cast members act them out.)

Adrian

Scarlet and Rhett Butler from *Gone with the Wind*. (Marilyn and Jeremy act this one out by Marilyn slapping Jeremy and then him kissing her) Wesley and Buttercup from *The Princess Bride*.

Marilyn

Oh Wesley. Kiss me!

Thomas
As you wish! (they kiss)

Adrian
Humphrey Bogart and Audrey Hepburn in *Sabrina*.

Jeremy
(With fedora on) It's all in the family. (Kisses Marilyn again)

Marilyn
Wait Adrian, this may all be in your head but my lips are hurting!
Lane, take over. (Adrian shoves Lane into Thomas' arms)

Adrian
That movie with the beach kiss and that song... Oh what's the name of that song!? ("Love Is a Many Splendored" thing comes over the loud speaker) That's it!

Lane
You're joking!

Adrian
This is my inner monologue! Just do it! (Lane and Thomas act out the kiss and lay down on the stage while Jeremy and Marilyn make swishing sounds and move their arms around) What are

you doing?

Marilyn
We're the waves.

Adrian
Oh and finally the kiss that sent every gay and straight man straight to the restroom! Selma Blair and Sarah Michelle Gellar in *Cruel Intentions*! (Lane grabs Marilyn and kisses her) So you see why I'm afraid now, Lane?

Lane
No. Just do it! (The cast gets back into the pose where they were and Adrian pulls out mouth freshener.)

Adrian
Oh the torture we artists go through! (He then kisses Jeremy and they fall back onto a chair or chaise lounge and start making out. They continue to kiss through the rest of the cast's lines all while the lights occasionally flicker)

Marilyn
Wow.

Thomas
Had I known I was going to be involved in an orgy this morning I would have worn underwear.

Lane

Let's go on! Next scene! (Jeremy and Adrian continue) CUT!!!
(Lights go off) Not the power cord! The scene! (Lights go on)

Marilyn

Maybe we should go on to the scene with just Thomas and I.

Lane

Let's take a five minute break. Thomas go grab the hose and
Marilyn and I are going to catch a cigarette.

Thomas

(Walking off) Sure, go make the one without the disgusting life
threatening habit go do the work.

Lane

Go! (He exits)

Marilyn

Lane, I don't smoke.

Lane

No one's perfect. (They exit)

(Jeremy and Adrian stop kissing)

Adrian

(To the audience) I love the theatre.

(Blackout)

Scene 3

Adrian

Wait! Wait! I'm not done yet! Turn the damn lights on!

(Lights go on)

Now I'm sure you're all just on the edge of your seats wanting to know how Lane's play went? It went surprisingly well. Mark only showed up once and only to have Lane's shoe hit him straight in the face. (We see this happen behind Adrian)

Lane

You're fired! You'll never work in this town again! (She chases Mark off stage screaming)

Adrian

I was permanently cast and it was a struggle but since Jeremy and I were now dating it was much easier to have sex with him. We opened to an audience of exactly 25 people and they were all friends and family. We had performances for the next three weekends and they went surprisingly well. We got three great reviews and were all nominated for a Patrick Award. The Patrick Awards are the local Oscars. Lane was only one to win and she made an unorthodox speech saying all the names of people she didn't want to thank.

Lane

First of all I would not like to thank my kindergarten teacher for telling me that my poem about my kitten Julie was not happy enough. After that I had to go to therapy with a woman who forced me to color HAPPY pictures! Just because I colored my *Care bear* coloring book all black doesn't mean I'm insane!

Adrian

Now she's on her next production an unorthodox comedy with drag queens, dancing milk men and a 12 foot banana dressed in a coconut bra and grass skirt. The mayor has reserved 6 seats for opening night... I can't wait. I bet you can't either. But I can't help but think back to that first day as an actor and how kissing on stage was really terrifying. Cause first I was afraid, I was petrified... (smirks) MUSIC! (The cast goes into a production number to the song "*I Will Survive*") Okay, now you can turn the lights off.

(Blackout)

THE END

Production Crew for Kissing the Cast

Director: Meaghan McGurgan

Stage Manager: John Lee

Choreographer: Christopher Seabrooke

Sound Designer: Aaron Gotlieb

Lighting Designer: Bekah Jeffords

Written by: Meaghan McGurgan

Éminence
Stephanie Ledbetter



The Afro-Saxon Melody
Gurjot K. Singh

And even though I pray I'm wrong
I can't stop thinking of this song....

That Afro-Saxon melody,
Performed in two part harmony,
The trebles bass, the woofers tweet,
Euro-jig value rhythms set me free,
Without knowing why,
They beat the black out of me...

This harmonic melody is mentally terse,
Written by a people with little time to rehearse,
The reasons why white is pure and first,
And the reasons why all black things are cursed.

Revealed through Winthrop Jordan's hand,
Anglo-Saxon reasons for blackness expand,
From Sun theory
To Plague Theory

Even the Story of Ham
Behold the 16th century Saxon plan:

It begins with finding an evil clan,
Their skin was black, West Africa their Land,
The dogma that's used to justify this libel,
Found under your roof in the King James Bible...

Britain was a land where property was king,
And the pirate John Hawkins set out to prove one thing:
"These devilish black beasts could serve the image of God"
Blessing property with free labor, through a red whipping rod,
On black backs, standing tall, getting paid, livin large

See the charge, of Yoruban beasts to sell their own kind...
You see very few Africans were of the same mind,
They bought, raped, stole and raided each other,
Centuries before they ever called themselves brothers...
Black Slavers sans honor march beaten men to shore,
Losing wars their women become victimized whores,
Males and females having no other skills to sell,
New world slavery in harmony with West-African Hell...

Stripped of family ties, and traditions berthed from ancestral clans,
African Slaves became outcasts in their own fucking land,
Doom befalling these people before ever seeing a White-man...
But after seeing him they become new chattel,
Their cultural soul now attacked in high pitched battles.

Spanning hundreds of years black kinship is relegated,
 To a predetermined lineage of bondage and segregated
 Manhoods, womanhoods, neighborhoods and worth...

Integrated into the Massa's sins
 Taken away in a black driven hearse.
 The driver's pallet is dry and for freedom he thirsts,
 As Shakespearian angels whisper "put money in thy purse"
 And, biblically remember what makes mine yours and yours mine,
 Covering your hubris with earth,
 Is the sin you bury within thee... thine?

Perhaps we must open the casket to see what face we may find,
 And listen to that face's voice singing in time
 To a beat that may seem like music divine,
 At least in a U.B. Phillip's description of a Sambo mind,

Remember old ones telling you how to cover your behind,
 If a white person gains notice you've reached the end of your climb,
 I'm telling you all about the Child-like, docile and tractable kind
 Where you'll find benighted souls
 Described by Wheatley prose
 That will never ever shine...

This verse speaks as if the past
 Is a present that will always be?
 Achieving standards of Afro-Saxon perfection
 That will make us anything but free...

As if our people dance a syncopated step,
 With a deep desire to be Anglo-sired...

Is this because the motivation to move

I mean the reason to groove at all,

Is to get a nodding approval of a God

Who we no longer regard as Master;

Averting disaster through words like reparations,

True restoration of what our people have lost

And, can never buy back no matter what the cost...

The value of my sub-Saharan Name,

The blessed song of my family's fame,

The blood written law that forbids adultery,

An African crime marking progeny faulty,

A wind blown language teaching ancestral lore,

The rules about hair, head covering, sacred trees and more;

All this shit lost in a diluvium dance that dehumanizes our seed,

And fills our head with two-step dreams of occidental need;

A little evangelistic vanity,

A dash of proselytizing greed,

The main ingredient for gaining autonomous respect we still fail to see.

The values and beliefs that we hold dear,

Were taught to us only to make us fear

An image of a gospel, a savior, a universal creed;

Historically expressed with bloodied hands stretching
 From across desert, savannah and sea...
 A religious nation, built on shitty western foundations,
 Ask Richard Allen, you know the Founder of the A.M.C.
 When Free, and I'll be damned if he won't agree;
 We be seintas heathen savages in their holy family tree,
 To be called orphans or at best step children with bad pedigrees;

While history depicts a holy jackals decree:
 "First enslave black bodies they'll do their own minds for free",
 Do we still validate this depredating process?
 Please take in the magnitude of this scheme:
 We define ourselves through Anglo-status!
 We pride ourselves on Saxon-esteem!
 And if you don't recognize names like Allen, Jordan, Phillips or
 Hawkins,

Your pulpit squawking of the Christian Tradition, is less than it
 may seem...

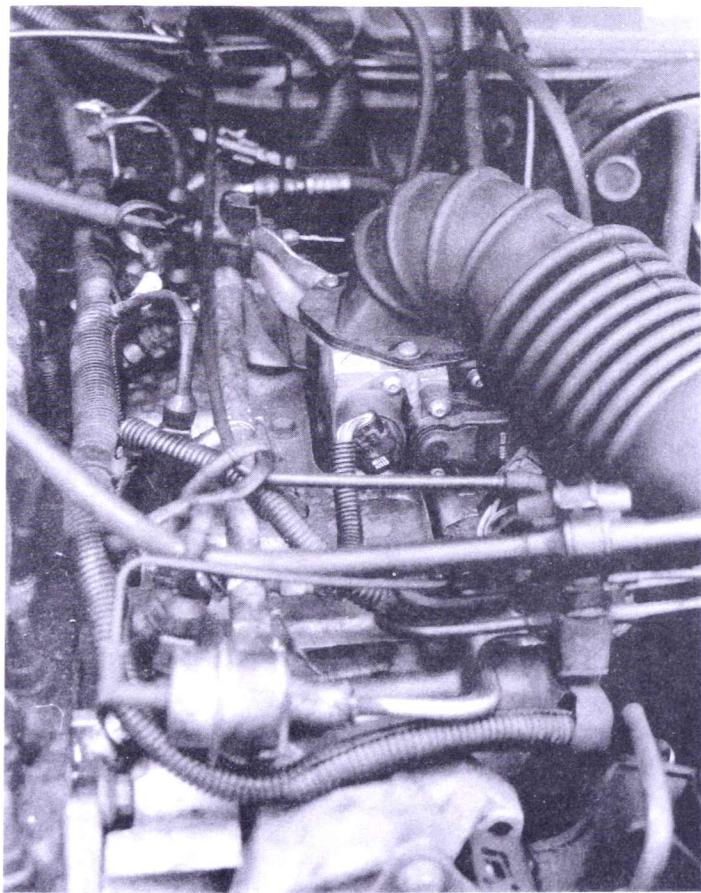
Lending them a Darwinist proof,
 Of a Jim Crow truth,
 That is still plain to see;
 The monkey's dream to be human will never ever be...

To them a brother, to them a sister, to them a lover
 You'll soon discover that to many of them our mothers,
 Have only given birth to simian figments,
 Of malignant gene retarded beasts,

Who dance to their music
If you break'em off a piece...
And even though I pray I'm wrong
I can't stop thinking of this song:

That Afro-Saxon melody
Performed in two part harmony
 The trebles bass,
The woofers tweet
Euro-jig value rhythms
Set me free and without knowing why
They beat the black out of me...

Engine
Lara Hurston



Acquiescence
Michelle Viers

We just had a fight
And now he wants me to do
His laundry, yet I have a gripe.
I don't want to,
No, definitely not.
I hate him right now.
But he'll only scream, "What!"
And we'll have another row.
I haven't done his bidding,
Despite his demands.
It's only fitting
That I didn't obey his commands.
I better hurry for this is June,
And he'll be coming home soon.

Dusty at Home
Daniel Ross

How many coaches had told him,
“Never slide in head first”?
But he was thirteen and invincible,
Walked with a swagger that
Made boys like you call him obnoxious.
But he could run, run so fast
That we knew he would steal every base
Until he was home again.
I was just thinking that you could
Have stood to be more like him,
So confident that no ordinary name would do.
If I had named you, my right-hand son,
Dusty, would you have had his confidence,
His speed, his daring?
With a name like that, you could be a World Series hero,
Like Dusty Rhodes or Dusty Baker.
But now he lay motionless at home
And I saw you stand calmly in left field,
You, who took our advice

And never slid in head first, never imagined
Yourself immortal. Thank God for that!
Even our forty year-old minds fell prey
To the lie, surmised, as they immobilized
His neck, that it was just a joke or panic
That kept him from getting up.
His olive skin had seemed to swallow
Late April sunshine just before the slide.
Now the sun lurked behind a cloud both luminous and dark.
Having scored, he lay like a sacrifice
On the altar, his head touching the home
That he had dashed for so wrecklessly.
He was carried away with such care
That you knew his body had become brittle, fragile,
Like an old man's.
He might need a new name now if he were
To be wheeled about in a stainless steel chair.
Surely, I thought, they would name the stadium for him,
Embellish the story with heroics that we had never seen,
Create a myth of Dusty, make his life a tragedy,
A subject of training films for coaches.
The neck brace held him absurdly,
In Frankensteinian pose, as he was carried away.
Then the game resumed and suddenly
You and the other boys were thirteen once again.

The sun turned bright again, the clouds swept away.
Next inning the Cardinals had a new catcher.

Eye
Mark Ahlman



*Boots**Kerry Bowling*

When I was a little girl my father spent a lot of time away from home because of his job. As a military officer he came and went from my life like a swinging door between the kitchen and the formal dining room. My mom, sisters, and I lived and played in the bright messy kitchen, a kitchen where our friends rang the back door bell and my mom fed us Pop-Tarts for breakfast. My father lived in the world of the dining room, with all its large dark furniture, grown-up stories, and bottles of wine - a separate place from us.

And as my father passed back through the swinging door, the only thing that was familiar were the boots on his feet. I was sixteen years old when my father retired from active duty and in all that time the boots never changed.

Then last August, I saw the boots again. I sat on the corner of my boyfriend's bed and watched him lace up a pair of green and black jungle boots as he was getting ready to leave for a four and a half week training exercise in Louisiana. The sight of him in the uniform pants and brown undershirt of an Army officer, hunched over with his head down and his strong broad shoulders lacing up his boots,

sent a feeling over me that I never told him about. It wasn't dread or anything quite as dramatic as that, more like a sense of having done this before. It was an unknown feeling, yet it wasn't unknown. It was the boots.

The snapshot of this man, who is now my husband, stayed with me for a long time. He left later that afternoon, and while he was away, the image of him tying his boots kept creeping back into my memory. How many times had I seen my father perform that very same task? Wearing those exact same clothes?

This was a real slap to my personal identity. I had resented my father for years because of his absence. All the missed soccer games and school plays and then he thought he had the right to come home and play "Dad" all of a sudden. He scared me. His dining room world felt surreal and too big for my small self. I wanted more. And now here I was in love with a military man, a man who wanted to make the Army his career. He wanted to do every elite, crazy, tough-guy job they would allow him to do, which inevitably meant time away, but here I was ready to make it my life again. We weren't even engaged and I could already see my life mapped out in front of me—on government paper. The strange thing was that the more the boots freaked me out, the more intently I looked at the things I loved about my husband, the reasons I would live this life, and the past that had brought me here.

And I realized that the boots made all the difference. The boots he put on weren't the same as my father's. They didn't look the same. They weren't the same size or color. It wasn't... isn't the same man putting them on.

* * *

We're married now, and I brought my baggage with me. I love him enough to be with him, but I dressed him up as someone else. I expected him to fail me. I looked for it everyday. I expected him to fail our son, but his patience is endless and our son feels his love everyday. And when he stopped me one day and said, "I'm not your dad" I had to face that swinging door again and realize that maybe my dad hadn't failed me either.

I had always felt my dad's love as a child. He'd always been the one to take us trick-or-treating with his top hat on and I can't remember a Christmas spent without him. He was the one who put our Barbie Dream House together and taught us how to swim. Somewhere, in the middle of our lives, we splintered apart and lost each other. He talked to me like a soldier and I yelled at him that I had never enlisted. He took me to get my I.D. card and didn't know my middle name. The house became our personal battlefield and my only solace was the fact that he was almost never home. Everything was his fault and I would never, ever back down. Our war became our lifestyle, and when I left for college, I left triumphant that my father knew how terrible he was.

But he wasn't terrible, he was trying. He tried to be all these different roles and my adolescence wouldn't forgive him. I had confused my childhood into something it wasn't. I had mistaken our fights for negligence on his part and never let him forget it. All this stayed with me for so long. As a grown-up daughter I looked through my father's eyes and saw a parent struggling to complete college, work full time, be with his wife and daughters, and have the threat of war standing around to greet him at anytime. I am a parent myself now, struggling to complete college, an internship, spend time with

my husband and son, and the threat of my husband going to war sits just outside my back door. I am my father. I understand about giving everything you have and still falling short. He wanted to be in the kitchen the whole time, but responsibility kept him in the dining room.

* * *

My husband got dressed for work this morning, and I smiled when I watched him put his boots on. It's taken me seventeen years to move from little girl adoration, to hatred, to acceptance. My husband knows I'll separate the two of them, and he loves me enough to bear through it with me. His boots make him a strong, proud man full of integrity and caring - like my dad, but not my dad. And those boots will bring him home.

Smooth
Stephanie Ledbetter



Old Love Letter
Joseph Francavilla

I

Transfixed in time and time again
the momentous this or that of experience
lies unnoticed, forgotten
like a crumpled paper on the floor
or a track upon the beach
to be indifferently crossed or smoothed over,
or like that far plane's smoke trail,
the rings teasingly unraveled
and buffeted apart by strong winds
into the absence of direction
and the disappearance of record,
into wisps and whispers and echoes of nothingness.

II

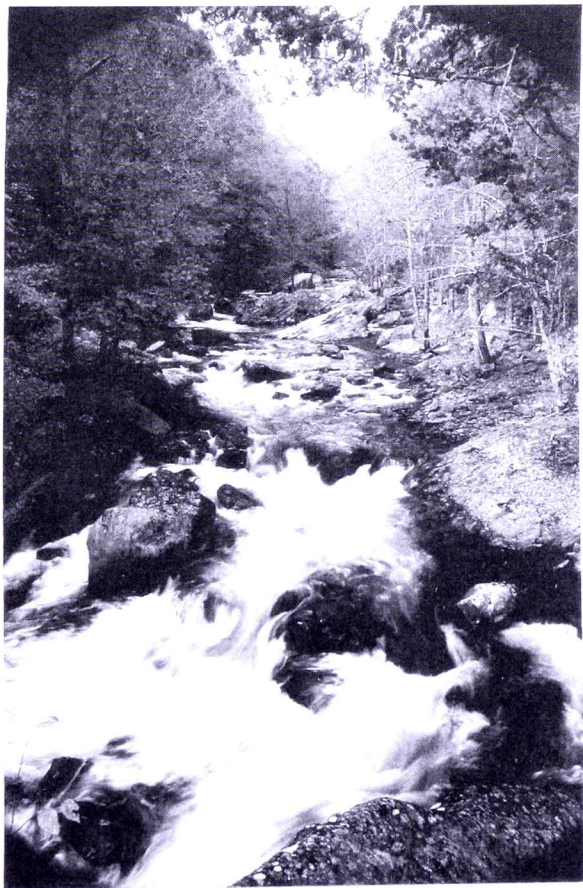
What *is* this little scrap of nothing,
this tattered, dusty letter
full of uncontrolled passions and impossible promises
from another age

that will not be thrust beyond my reach?
I found the uncanny place
I thought I had forgotten
with the sureness of a pianist's fingers
on an old melody—
the uncanny place where darkness
hides in folds from the light.

The strange handwriting
of someone I thought I knew well
but forgot
(or never really knew)
I try to remember.
The once-familiar voice
I haven't heard for many years
sprawls on the wrinkled stationery,
static, disembodied,
sounding out-of-time
like garbled peals of distant church bells.
The life-or-death, once-intimate phrases
now strange hieroglyphics
of an unknown, dead language,
a parody of feeling, a voiceless phantom.
The uncommunicable loneliness of memory
lost on a forgotten voice—
found in the black scrawls on yellowed paper.

Water

Mark Ahlman



The Novel of Grisly Details
Nick Norwood

Now, in this late-afternoon sinking, the lakeshore
May remind you of a magnificent city

Brought to ruin: the talus of silt-stained rocks,
Those leggy weeds strewn up the hill—and the waves,

How they lap against it, listlessly, as if they
Didn't care. Soon, we'll hear from the bullfrogs.

Insects will emerge to grind away the night.
The barge of shadow will slide over us like the lid

Of a sepulcher, and then we'll have the spectacle
Of a million eyes watching us from right here

Inside our dusty, drafty little crypt. Supplanted
By a taste for the artificial, the colder and less

Illuminating, what we will lose is something

Traded away for comfort. What we'll miss most

Is that which we paid dearest to give away.

Remember the porch light. Remember to lock

The door. Remember, before turning out the lamp,

To set the alarm, and to remind yourself to wake

With a renewed sense of the inevitable.

Remember to mark your place in the story.

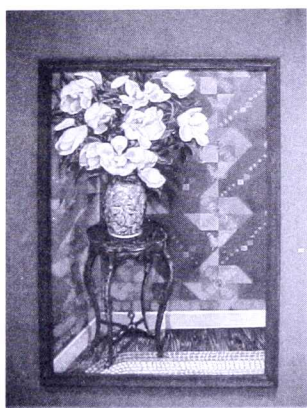
Untitled
Gregory Smith



Madonnas of Conflict
Euginia Bates



Magnolias #1
Euginia Bates



Betrothed
Eugenia Bates



Path
Mark Ahlman



Black Coffee
April Cook

He was my friend, I told
the one who used to be.
On Saturday mornings rainy and cold
he would brew strong coffee
and hand me my steaming cup
before settling down beside me
on the couch, under piles of blankets up
to our chins. In silence we listened to
the patter on the windowpanes, each drop
a soothing rhythm. Wrapped in a warm cocoon
we sleepily sipped our black coffee.
I sighed and rested my head on his soft-too-soon
belly, while he stared at my hand on his knee
wondering, as I was, if we were strangers.

A Valentine Undelivered
Bill Andrews

It was our anniversary. However, the marriage was rocky and divorce had been discussed. Our precocious six-year-old woke us up by knocking on our bedroom door bearing a gift. It was a hand-let-tered sign in eight watercolors. It read: "I love you, Mom and Dad." We picked him up and kissed him. He looked at us with his big blue-turning-brown eyes and said, "You won't go apart and leave me? Not now? Will you?"

Memories from my own childhood flooded over me like a Tsunami. It was two days before Valentines Day, and I was six years old. I was coloring in my coloring book in the living room as my parents fought in the dining room. The argument escalated.

I pretended it just wasn't happening. It was like covering your eyes with your hands to make yourself invisible. I just kept coloring. It had to be accurate. If they could see my coloring was perfect then, they would see they didn't need to fight. I really could be a good boy. The louder they got the more difficult it was to stay inside the lines. You could look back at my coloring books and count the

arguments by how many pictures I had messed up and the intensity of the argument by how far the crayon strayed. Both frequency and degree had been increasing recently.

“I don’t have to take that from you...” Mamma’s voice.

“You can’t just run away from this...” Daddy’s voice.

The door slammed!

Daddy came to the living room door. He said thickly, “Bill... get to bed.”

That’s it! That’s why they were fighting. This never would have happened if I had gone to bed! I was in bed before he could come back to check. I scrunched my eyes closed real tight and wouldn’t even scratch my bottom when it itched. That’ll show Daddy that I’m asleep and that they didn’t have to fight.

He looked in and said quietly, “Go to sleep, Bill.” How could he tell? I hadn’t even scratched my bottom. I cried myself to sleep because I had caused so much trouble.

Early the next morning, while the dew was still on the grass, I was in the yard waiting to go to school, when a gold colored Hudson pulled to the curb. Mamma got out. Her wrinkled silver-blue polyester dress glittered in the sun as she ran to the house. It looked as if it had been slept in all night. She came back out carrying another dress.

“Jeanne, get back in here! We have to talk!” Daddy said from the front door.

“I can’t! I’ve got to get to work!” Mamma yelled without looking back.

He said something about “God” and he was mad.

She said something about “Hell” and she was too. Then she

got into the Hudson and was gone.

I looked down at my feet and thought, "Why are they angry?" Then I noticed my shoes were wet with dew, very wet. And I realized that they were mad because I messed up my shoes. Daddy was on his knees at the front door. He was crying. I'd never seen my Daddy cry. Boy, he must be really upset with me. I ran to him in my wet shoes, "Daddy, don't cry." I realized I was crying as I threw my arms around his neck, "Don't worry they will dry."

He looked down at my wet face, wiping the tears from my cheeks, then his own and said, "I know, Honey. Don't worry everything will be all right." And we embraced and cried together.

Then he had to go to work and I had to go to school – but he knew I loved him. The arguments would stop if I could only convince Mamma that I loved her, too.

That day the teacher passed out little paper hearts to write upon, some white paper doilies to glue on the back with some of the white paste that tastes so good. We had been learning how to print our capital letters and "I LOVE YOU" had seven different letters to practice. But, I thought I could make it for Mamma. "MAMMA, I LOVE YOU! BILL" had nine different letters to practice and, if I did it correctly, Mamma would have to know I loved her and needed her. Then she wouldn't leave. A perfect Valentine would show her.

The idea excited me, but the more excited I got the more difficult it became to do just right. It had to be flawless to show her I really love her. I drew each letter scrupulously. The teacher came around to check our lettering before we pasted them on our lace doily. I was proud to give her my present to my Mamma. With this Valentine she would see how faultless was my love for her. Then we

could all live as a family happily forever...and ever...and ever...and...

“Oh, no, Bill,” the teacher’s voice held criticism. “You made your ‘E’ backwards. Let me show you.” She took her big black marker and it came down on my Mamma’s Valentine making the ‘E’ face in the right direction. I was devastated. Mamma wouldn’t know I loved her. She and Daddy would continue to yell at each other. We wouldn’t “live happily forever after” because the Valentine was defective. The black mark destroyed it all.

Hot tears ran down my cheeks. The teacher noticed. Surprised, she put her arm around me and comfortingly said, “Now, there’s no need to cry. It’s nothing to worry about. You can make another one tomorrow during play period, and give it to her on Valentines Day. Okay?” She gave me a hug and I nodded dumbly.

She was right. I could do it again. I could do another one without any mistakes and then Mamma would know how much I loved her. For the moment, all I could do was stand there in the middle of my first-grade class and weep while the others giggled at my tears.

That night my Mamma and Daddy had a whopper of a fight and I knew it was because I had messed up her Valentine. But tomorrow I would make another one. Just wait; I’d stop the fighting.

But I never got to give Mamma her valentine and show her how much I loved her. The next day Grandma and Grandpa came and took us to live with them. Mamma and Daddy divorced. The tear was beyond repair and no one helped me to know that I was not to blame. It was many years before I realized that I was not responsible for their divorce, nor could I have prevented it.

Now, our own little boy was feeling responsible for our mar-

riage problems. We picked him up, hugged and kissed him. We assured him that our problems were not his fault, and no matter what happened between us, we would both always love him. In talking to him we began talking to each other, and in talking to each other many of our difficulties were resolved. Reclaiming our marriage was the best gift I could have given our son. Although the valentine was never delivered, perhaps it accomplished its purpose years later in saving our own marriage.

Mark Ahlman
Euginia Bates
Doraine Bennett
Diana Best
Kerry Bowling
April Cook
Joseph Francavilla
Brenda French
Susan Georgecink
Shannon Hofer
Lara Hurston
Stephanie Ledbetter
Meaghan McGurgan
Eric Mosley
Nick Norwood
Daryl F. Seldon
Gregory Smith
Ronald Smith
Anne Xuereb

