

ARDEN

Columbus State University Literary Journal

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A Message from the Editor,

The title of this journal, Arden, perhaps needs a bit of clarification for those who are unfamiliar with the reference. Arden was taken from the name of a forest in As You Like It by William Shakespeare. In this play, Arden serves as a locale in which all that seems to exist may or may not be real. It is a land in which creativity flourishes and love blooms. A home for the oppressed as well as for the virtuous laborers of nature, Arden, is considered to be a “green world,” a place away from the strict rules and structures of society, where the imagination suspends reality, allowing disguises, trickery, and wit to enlighten and entertain the mind.

This journal was started as an outlet for those among us who indulge in creative writing and drawing. Upon its pages one will discover many forms and styles of poetry, prose and visual art. From the classical heroic couplet to the honored sestina and the stream of consciousness prose popularized by such writers as Faulkner and Kerouac, the pieces of work contained on these pages serve as a partial representation of the talent and insight of this campus.

Arden is honored to have for its first issue an esteemed guest poet, Dr. Raymond Federman. Dr. Federman, the Melodia E. Jones Distinguished Chair of Literature at State University of New York at Buffalo, has submitted several previously unpublished poems for the enjoyment of the readers of this journal. He is an accomplished writer of fiction, poetry, and literary criticism having been awarded, among others, the Guggenheim Fellowship and a Fulbright Fellowship. He has been translated into a dozen languages and has had work published in such journals as The Partisan Review, The Paris Review and The Denver Quarterly. His latest book of fiction is entitled Loose Shoes.

I would personally wish to acknowledge Professor David Johnson for his assistance and support on this endeavor and Leslie Maxwell and Lisa Kiger for their insight and assistance on the trying task of producing this journal. Also, I wish to thank Dr. Lape for her seemingly endless support and encouragement on this work.

John Kocian

Advisor – Dr. Noreen Lape
Editor – John Kocian
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Raymond Federman

THE BILINGUALIST

To answer the question I'm always asked [voyons réfléchissons] No I do not feel that there is a space between the two tongues that talk in me [oui peut-être un tout petit espace] On the contrary [plus ou moins si on veut] For me the one and the other seem to overlap [et même coucher ensemble] To want to merge [oui se mettre l'une dans l'autre] To want to come together [jouir ensemble] To want to embrace one another [tendrement] To want to mesh one into the other [n'être qu'une] Or if you prefer [ça m'est égal] They want to spoil and corrupt each other [autant que possible] I do not feel as some other bilingualists have affirmed that one tongue is vertical in me the other horizontal [pas du tout] If anything my tongues seem to be standing or lying always in the same direction [toujours penchées l'une vers l'autre] Sometimes vertically [de haut en bas] Other times horizontally [d'un côté à l'autre] Depending on their moods or their desires [elles sont très passionnées vous savez] Though these two tongues in me occasionally compete with one another in some vague region of my brain [normalement dans la partie supérieure de mon cerveau] More often they play with one another [des jeux très étranges] Especially when I am not looking [quand je dors] I believe that my two tongues love each other [cela ne m'étonnerais pas] And I have on occasions caught them having intercourse behind my back [je les ai vues une fois par hasard] but I cannot tell which is feminine and which is masculine [personnellement on s'en fout] Perhaps they are both androgynous [c'est très possible]

ROAD

And if I told my story to myself ?

It is true that along the rocky story
I often stumbled, and when I fell
I would get up saying to myself
that no one had seen me, and I
would continue saying to myself,
it was an accident, and I set out
again, hobbling along, saying,
it's okay, the fall was not a fall,
the rocks were not rocks, and even
if some bystanders laughed at me,
others encouraged me, saying that
I had a beautiful story in me, and
that I had to tell it, even if to myself.

Raymond Federman

THE YELLOW CHAIR

I have just written
the yellow chair
title of the poem
I am in the process
of writing
but I could have
just as well written
the green chair
because there is
no yellow chair
anywhere in sight
of where I am writing
the poem entitled
the yellow chair
nor is there
a green chair
for that matter
as far as I can see
and even as far as
I can imagine
no there are no yellow
and no green chairs
to serve as models
for my poem
therefore I can
only conclude
that the fact of writing
the yellow chair
or the green chair
does not in any way
authenticate the reality
of the chair in question
nor does it validate my poem
there may be a physical chair
and there may be a mental chair
somewhere in the universe
both equally yellow or green
if not equally real or virtual
but both are equally useless
until I can seat my ass
in one of them

Raymond Federman

IN THE PARK

Remembering Zibgniew Herbert

I never met Ziggy
would have liked to
he was a great guy
he really believed
what he believed
in politics & poetics

and now he has joined
the circle of cold skulls
[thank you michnik
for these good words]

there is a piece
of a poem of his
[I forgot the name]
that goes this way

A Poet's statue was in the park
children would roll their hoops
and colorful shouts
birds sat on the Poet's hand
read his silence

[the translation from polish seems ok]

j'ai toujours eu envie de traduire
ce beau morceau de poésie

tiens j'avais essayer

DANS L'PARK

Pour Patricia

y'a une statue d'poète
dans l'park
des moutards roulent leur cerceaux
avec des cris arc-en-ciel
des oiseaux viennent se poser
sur la pogne du poète
pour faire caca
dans son silence

Sorry Ziggy
I couldn't resist
adding the bird-shit
It had to be there
can't take ourselves
too seriously can we.

STATUES OF KINGS

Statues of kings can be categorized as follows:

1. Kings seated on:
 - a) a throne
 - b) a stool
 - c) a boulder
 - d) a horse (often)
 - e) a donkey (rarely)
 - f) a quadruped (an elephant or a camel in exotic places)
 - g) the shoulders of another man (occasionally)
 - h) the roof of a building (extremely rare occasions)

2. Kings standing on:
 - a) the ground
 - b) a podium
 - c) a stage (official occasions)
 - d) a stool with a back
 - e) a stool without a back
 - f) a pedestal (often)
 - g) a horse or any other animal (awkwardly)
 - h) a man lying on the ground (unusual circumstances)

3. Kings seated or standing with:
 - a) their arms falling to their sides
 - b) the left or right hand on the chest
 - c) both hands on the chest
 - d) one hand in the pocket of their trousers
 - e) both hands in the pockets of their trousers
 - f) one hand on top of their head (almost never)
 - g) their legs crossed (very often)
 - h) their eyes closed (only when they are dead)

4. Kings lying down:
 - a) usually during insurrections or revolutions
 - b) normally while making love
 - c) when they are dead

(i and me)

i laughs at me a lot
'cause i often finds
that me is quite funny

me gets excited
over little things and
gets busy doin' nothin'

me is never too old
for fairy tales
even though i outgrows them

me loves people
and colors and music
a bit too much now and then

me is romantic
deep down inside while
i pretends to be stoic

me gets hyper
from Kool-Aid or chocolate
and then sometimes acts crazy

me wrote this poem
as i sat by wondering
if it made sense,

so when i laughs
i's not laughin' at you
but rather i's laughin' at me

Sestina

She stares uncertainly at the door
And aimlessly flicks cigarette
Ash into an empty coffee cup
As her life scatters like smoke
In the oppressive air of the room,
Vanishing among images on the wall.

She tries to ignore the picture wall,
She negates the possibility of the door,
But to separate herself from the room
Is impossible. Her life is only the cigarette,
Burning, turning into hopeless smoke
And ash that fills the coffee cup.

She wants to shatter the filthy cup
Against the offending wall
With its pictures, and stains from smoke,
But her helpless gaze returns to the door,
Drawn like the smoke from the cigarette
To escape the stifling room.

Vestiges and remnants fill the room
Along with this, another dirty coffee cup.
Discarded dreams, like butts from cigarettes
Litter the space from wall to dismal wall.
Her only escape is the frightening door,
If she could seep through the seams with the smoke.

Now, she exhales hope with the smoke,
Gathering strength over the dingy room,
Still unsure of the beckoning door.
But the bright lipstick on the cup
Reminds her of life, frozen in images on the wall,
Not life in ashes like the dwindling cigarette.

She extinguishes the cigarette
And contemplates the unfettered smoke,
Rising effortlessly against the wall,
Across the memories, out of the room.
Awakened to a small purpose, she washes the cup
And looks again at the promising door.

She sets the clean cup to dry, lights a new cigarette,
And taking only bright pictures from the wall, opens the door.
And the room vanishes into the smoke.

Leslie Maxwell

Reflexiones de Poema 20

Oír la noche inmensa, más inmensa sin él,
Y el verso cae al alma como al pasto el rocío.

El rocío frío cubre mi alma y mi corazón,
Y hiela en la noche tan frío, blanco y muerto.

No tengo nadie para tocarme la alma,
Tampoco para tocarme el piel,

Ni para protegerme del fuego frío de los astros.

Antes de que el me tocara, yo era sola (y alegre)
Pero el espacio jamás era tan infinito.

No recuerdo como era antes de él,
Como estaba alegre con nada más los astros.

Cuando, por un momento, su alma me tocó la alma mía
Entonces, cambió mi vida y me hizo querer. . .

Algo allá entre la noche tan inmensa y yo.

The Waste Land . . . in four lines

winter enchants the heart like death
I weep solitude into a vision of spring
eternity manifests ethereal moments
of spiritual fertility and ancient intuition

David Johnson

Places We Live

Under the house where my father lives there are rats
They have honeycombed its foundation

When the heavy rains of April come to the mountains
water weeps into the cellar rising high as the first shelf

where his canned tomatoes float in their own plasma
the sturdiness of their summer bodies limp from the heat

of preservation. And in the corner the top of the potato
bin seems to stretch barely above the water's moldy top

And my father rubs each joint of all his fingers
occasionally soothing his knees rubbing them with long simple strokes

He looks out a window and down through the bottom
land that used to be a pasture and says

Son, do you remember Nip the best squirrel dog
I ever had You hit him in the head with a hammer

And I say yes Papa
He was a good dog followed me everywhere

He died when you were four Poisoned I reckon

Under the house in which my child lives
cars park daily come and go like jerky little gerbils

in and out of their matchbox beds
and if the air conditioner is on carbon monoxide

is sucked into her rooms. She opens windows
But at night the cars are peaceful Some sleep

When I visit she brings me vodka over hard ice a piece
of lemon peel in the bottom of a stemmed glass (I like it cold and with slow melt)

We look out her east window where in evening the flat city
shines and blinks rolls like a head that softly aches

I can say to her Honey do you remember back home when we lived
outside of town and had the few pet chickens and two peacocks

Ans she says yes Papa That rooster tried to attack me
You tried to hit him with a stick and he jumped

but you were determined and angry ran him all over
the place hens squawking and flying squawking

Feathers everywhere And he won

David Johnson

I got him that night though His replacement was a nice
bantam for twelve hefty Rhode Island Red hens

And we laugh Fall into silence
Watching the aching city The vodka cold And my child

rubbing lotion into her dry hands perhaps dreaming of a painting
she will begin tomorrow, how she will pay the rent next week when I am gone

Elegy I

Now you may go home.
Vacuum and broom
are in the closet. Clothes are to be washed.

(And you, too. The rake and mower
sit and wait. The lawn is ragged,
even this early in spring.)

You may place plates upon your table.
(And you will scrub your hands before the meal.)
Each of you will lift your napkin with grace.

The house is yours. Friends will let you be.
You must dust everything. (And you
should clean the shower and mop the floors.)

The terrible list awaits, the stationary
box is full, good ink. A dictionary.
But your words are gone for a while.

Watch game shows. Say your prayers.
Any ordinary thing will do. Set out
your many masks. Know you may use them all.

In two weeks or to months, food will begin
to taste familiar. You might feel the sun
by then. Rain will be your friend for yet a while.

You will have to endure fall with
all its leaves. And winter with its sodden
sticks and sleeping earth. The absence of song.

You will love the seasons once again,
but it will not be the same. Love,
nonetheless. And at moments, music.

So now, the house is yours. Neighbors go to work.
Birds build nests. Trees grow leaves.
And we don't understand how any of this can be.

Molly Henderson

IMMERSION

She relaxes into the bathwater, her arm falling gently over the side,
Her body as if a painter had arranged it just so.
She sighs and closes her eyes as the petal-scent of her bath oil reaches him.
Dipping her thumb in the liquid she reaches to her forehead and traces the
Seal of Christ she says still tingles from her childhood anointing.

He brushes the hair back from her flushed face.
It is difficult to see the sick woman behind it,
The weakened body, the stilled shallow breath.

Read to me, she says, pointing to the poetry on the windowsill.
He thumbs the pages. I don't care what, I just want to hear a voice, she explains.
He stops at random, and reads. She mouths some of the words with him,
The ones that she knows. Her hand reaches out for his, smoothing the rough places with
her thumb.

It's good, like this, she whispers.
Yes, he whispers back.

Sometimes life is worth the dying.

WATERLILY

Floating tenuously in a wild clear sky I turn
Bright-eyed as liquid starts to fill my nose
Gagging, seeped in the delusions of death and life
And what my cat understands. The Virgin Mary
Glowing on my wrist like some pure candle in the middle of the fury.
But dirtier by the second she grows older and dimmer and cynical.
My salvation growing smaller as the light in the tunnel approaches.
The edges of my well-orderedness ripped and tattered by the wind around me.
Grasping a waterlily on the way across,
Its sweet smell crushing against my slick cheek I realize
As it comes off on my hands
My life has been coloured by washable marker,
And the water is coming down in torrents.

Pressed Flowers

delicate paper beauty
embalmed in thin wax
no scent
no life
no laughter
just a token
like the image of our ancestors
pressed between the pages of our mind
and we the soft white light
from some extinguished source
radiate
with life
and laughter
the longitude and latitude
of our exhausted ancestors

Tree

Striking Rock
like the staff of Moses,
lance piercing
the heart of Styx.
Tomb and Cross-timber
of our crucifixion,
Solid post and beam
branching, like rafters,
to stretch
the canopy of heaven.

Poet forced to write Prose

Caught in the fickle form
of demanding detail
a golden calf
full of fat
bond in a blind box
— a tethered bird
sentenced to circle
the same solid ground.

Tricia Foster

Sphere

Compressed expansion
of simple expression
the energetic trance
of a molecular dance
a complex code
in mathematical mode
the parent of pi
which logic defies
the endless consequence
of universal substance
an enclosed, yet constant continuum
a state in which we
all long to be
complete
perfect
yet, free

Motor Bike

*(In memory of former CSU student Christopher S. Johnson -
October 3, 1971 - October 4 1997)*

*I have no mind of my own.
Yet, I hear you raging,
"wretched racing power,"
like I threw him
to the ground.
how could I help
he could not hold,
and wound up in a heap.*

*Why am I a villian?
Made more than mere machine
when finally
with full force
I hit /
a mortal,
mangled wreck.
A victim
just like he.*

Bibb City Night, 1965

It was fried catfish, plaid-bottom
ash trays, and a rickety gate
bowing like an old tombstone.

It was beige, plastic curtains snapping
in the breeze and a clawfoot bathtub
with a white stopper on a chain.

It was a spinning window fan and
Gunsmoke on black and white TV,
with tinfoil-balled rabbit ears on top.

It was a third shift mill whistle
moaning in the night like the old man
trapped at Verdun.

It was smooth, white lard melting
in a cast iron skillet,
and fried catfish. Fried catfish.

The Atomic Psalm or, 19th Psalm: Reductionist Perspective

- 1 The atoms declare the glory of God,
and the elements show forth his handiwork.
- 2 Eon unto eon uttereth speech,
and nanosecond by nanosecond knowledge.
- 3 There is no matter that from such
is not composed.
- 4 Their protons are gone out through all
the earth, and their neutrons to the end
of the world. Around the nuclei hath he set
a course for electrons,
- 5 Which are like comets ceaselessly
circling, and swirl like clouds of gnats
about the face.
- 6 Their going forth is from the inner
shell, and they leap unto the outer one,
and there is nothing hidden from the charge
thereof.

Pale Green Plymouth

Stand out front
in khakis and undershirt
(never shorts)
handling the hose at
arm's length to
keep the stream from running
off your elbow
and onto your sandtan
Hush Puppy
suede shoes. Colossus of Rhodes—
planted on
sopping grass fertilized to
valiant verdure
just last Sunday, though Deacon Jones
says a fine
lawn's no excuse for sin.

Helios, shine
on pale green Plymouths with
white wall tires,
antennae that wobble with spray
that overshoots
roofs and spreads midair
into rainbow
soft currents that move and breathe
and have their
being.

And summer sun, rise
on days like
this so men can stand
in suede shoes
and sing till their windshields gleam
and shine and
oceans go the way of all great
bodies of water—
into the sky to fall
some other day.

Lisa Kiger

A Letter from Anne B. to Anne H. Banished from the Colony

The name we bear a bond between us makes,
And to that end I wrote for both our sakes
Of Hannah who through grace a child conceived,
Though none but she God's promise had believed.
With tearful pleas she knelt alone to pray,
To Him who hath the power to heal or slay,
And asked of Him a son in faith most strong
Who, though he were her child, to God belonged.
Her womb, an empty place, no life could give;
A tomb, infernal space, where naught could live,
Did by the hand of God begin to swell
And fill her heart with joy no strife could quell.
To feel the prophet child within her strive,
Was more than human tongue could feign describe.
Beholding, then, at birth his comely face,
She marveled at God's glory and good grace.
So, now, we two our name from hers derive,
And in our hearts two unseen offspring strive.
Though not of flesh and bone are these composed,
Nor may we hold them to our breasts reposed,
Yet surely as that son to Hannah was born,
Despite the scold of priest and rival scorn,
These too must live to see the light of day
And stand against the might of mortal sway.
To stand e'en though all round should give no heed,
And their paternity but few concede.
Thy words like darts well aimed have struck true home;
They linger in men's minds where'er you roam.
My words, though not so sharp, have their effect;
They show of woman's mind a new aspect.
Then, Anne, though we be two in time and space,
Our bond be ever true by God's good grace.

*Jim Brewbaker***Martin Studies Bigotry, 1939-1998***Bigotry 101:*

Bigotry was Martin's by birth
 true
 but his grandmother taught him his superiority
 their superiority
 "The best blood in Virginia flows through those veins,"
 she told him. "Remember," she said.
 And he did.

Remedial Bigotry:

Martin and Eddy saw Lena Horne in a movie
 Technicolor
 She sang "Stormy Weather" as dancers spiraled around her
 in tight Cuban pants and florid shirts.
 Her milk and coffee arms and shoulders looked like dessert
 and Martin loved her.
 "She's a Negress," his grandmother said.
 "You mustn't forget that - ever."
 So he did as he was taught.
 Yet Lena Horne remained his secret
 his milk and coffee dessert until the day he died.

Applied Bigotry:

Martin toured the Civil Rights Institute
 saw the water fountain for colored
 a burned Greyhound bus
 heard voices of angry white men
 heard black people sing "Oh Freedom"
 saw dogs and hoses and people running in all directions.

He remembered his grandmother's lesson.

In the lobby, a large book was open on a table
 a sign told him to register
 to tell about his role in the Movement.
 Martin wrote, "I did nothing."

For Her Sake

She slowly spun,
twisting, tip-toed,
a perfect pirouette,

Dancing naively under
pale moonlit streams
glistening sweet.

Her life watered,
quenched by crystal
droplets echoing silently,

Liquid glass pouring
like sheets of ice,
cascading jaggedness

Forming milky puddles
splashing carelessly
about her feet.

She dances, alone,
tonight petalled desires
blooming to the evening sun,

Always growing though,
growing toward pink neon
and faded gray lampposts.

Her freedom scares
and ignites her spirit
(she curtseys to the moon)

Her trunk straightens
twists under and curls
proudly glowing gracious.

She is pleased, solitude
comforted by nature
soft touch without contrast

Memories of seasons,
Pain weighing down
weeping branches,

But aware that spring,
with its rebirth shall come;
she shall hug the sky again.

John Kocian

Her petals unfurl,
 crisp white satin,
 sway a sun-soaked breeze.

She arches and sways,
 roots buried deep, firm
 in the moist soil.

Alive for her own sake.

To Allen Ginsberg,
April, 1997

Star-bursting, silver-lined words,
exploding through opal imagination,
blowing across cosmic inner-consciousness.
You, to use the words you created,
Angel Headed Hipster,
Buddha and Messiah of the soul's free spirit,
with Kerouac and Burroughs, trinity of masters,
founders of a generation of enlightenment.
Rexroth inspired you to write from heart,
prophetic words Howling to Carl Solomon,
Ferlinghetti supported observation obscenities.
Chillingly black, backed by whiteness,
elegizing lines tribute to Jewish mother
stricken, sick with diseased mind.
Forever shall your words illuminate, shining,
Sunflower sutra in California supermarkets.

Natural Process

Set,
positioned,
deep driven
into moist ground,
illuminated anticipation,
Start with heat,
a bit of fuel,
late breath
of heavy air
(perhaps not so fresh.)

Lit fuse,
gaining strength,
throwing sparks,
seems to shrink,
growing inside

Lifting off,
streaming forward,
upward strong,
penetrating deep
into the dark
recesses, unknown,

Rising higher,
pressure building,
air thinning,
thicker, hotter,
cutting through
natural resistance

With color flaring,
spectrum burst,
shattered sparkles,
spewing lucidity
into the night

A pop sounds,
spectacularity
fades as light
softly fizzles
until the sky holds
onto darkness
once again.

Analytical Perspective

The tangents were all wrong in my head
And I couldn't handle all the telltale sines
Triangles filled my mind
I only plotted the few points I knew
With a one eighty degree slant
You see my radius
Yet, want to find my diameter
That I hide in quadrants never known
Secants pass by my eyes
And I was stabbed by your hypotenuse
Don't ever give me your adjacent over opposite
Presents a nice round cotangent
Because radicals were never right for you
So I see the same in those weak measurements
I thought your angles could consume me
Maybe two-pi was part of your past
And perhaps you had a circumference
But I didn't expect proofs to prove me wrong
To inform me you cheated with rays
Who could not tell what it was like to be a line
I gather what radians were left
To create a new circle

Helen Keller

A senseless void
No thought
No sound
Blind, without sight
Is there any feeling?
What is it that goes on
In the empty space?
Where nothing seems to exist
And wonders of what life is
Smells waft in
And the hands feel
But there is no language
No way to talk
Or hear another
How to communicate
In a dark world
Where nothing happens
The mind is empty
A neverending black hole
That sucks in the blankness
Of thought
Confused with no emotion
Anger amounts
But what is it
With no thought or sound
No recognition of beauty;
Life
Comprehension blurred
Reality, based upon fiction
Thoughts, emotions?
What is real
What is false
How do your thoughts
Come into being
Full of swirling tornadoes
Just where do they form
How are we to know
About a senseless void?

Travis White, Lynda White, and John Jackson
In The Mirror

Verse 1

N/C G
 I can run
 C 9
 I can hide
 G
 To the World
 C 9
 I can Lie
 G C 9
 But I know that inside
 G
 I must face myself

Verse 2

 G
 Brace myself
 C 9
 For the tears
 G
 I will cry
 C 9
 Through the years

Verse 3

 G
 Ambition
 C 9
 Stole my Dreams
 G
 And I look back now
 C 9
 But it seems
 G
 That I only fooled myself

Chorus

 G C 9 F#/G Em C G
 And I don't know why things have to be the way that they are
 G C 9 F#/G Em C D7 G
 And I Wish I had the breath to speak a wish on every star
 G C 9 G
 And I want to find the answer
 C 9 Dsus4 G
 Somewhere beyond the sea
 G C 9 F#/G Em C D7 G
 And I wish I had the strength to cry a tear for every lost Dream.

Verse 4

Saving Face and Saving Pride
Deception leads no where this time
Where do you draw the line
Decide how you stand.

Chorus

Solo

Bridge

Stare at your reflection.
What is it that you see?
Beyond the make-up and the masking
What fire that drives your heart to beat?
What is the seed of your confusion?
What leaves you standing in the Aisle?
And what judgement do you render
Behind the mirror in your eyes?

Guitar Outro:









Brendy Blomke '98

Ugly

Ugly. Ugly is such an unattractive word. It sounds ugly. Ug—ly. It looks u-g-l-y. One couldn't begin to pick any more unpretty letters to describe something or someone who is unattractive. Ugly.

Ugly is a friend of mine. We've been hanging out ever since the doctor smacked me on my butt and brought me into this cruel world. I used to hate being ugly, but now I accept it. Ugly is just a description. Just like tall and skinny or short and fat, ugly is just a word. It has taken me almost 30 years to accept that being ugly is not a bad thing and sometimes it can be a blessing.

Of course when I was younger I thought being ugly was a curse. As a child I knew something was wrong with me, but I wasn't sure what. I just remember limited amounts of human contact. I watched other children, including my three brothers receive undivided attention, but I was always overlooked. Everything was cute. When Junior, Michael, or Bernard did something it was so cute. I can hear my mama's friends say, "Them boys is just the cutest little men. They will break all the women hearts." But when they talked about me they always scrunched up their faces like I had a booger on my nose or something. I wished it was a booger, at least I could have wiped that off, but ugly can't be wiped off.

Like I said before, ugly cost me pounds of love and attention. My brothers were always getting hugs, kisses, and candy, while I was getting ignored. I even think I got more butt whippings just because I wasn't cute. Mama might say to Michael, "Man," that's what they called him because he acted just like a little man, "you better quit hitting your sister!" All the while she would be grinning and her words would be coated with the overflowing love for her baby boy. But let me do something and she would say, "Alisha, if you don't stop acting like you look I know something!" Then I'd hear her whisper to one of her girlfriends, "Just because you ugly don't mean you have to act like it." Now wasn't that terrible to say to a child? I mean I might have turned out pretty if she hadn't prophesied it so much.

It was probably Mama's fault anyway. Bet she had ugly thoughts while she was pregnant with me. She probably didn't eat properly and didn't get enough folic acid and calcium in her diet. I can imagine she met a horrible possum or raccoon that scared her while she was pregnant and marked me for life. All the speculation is pretty pointless now, but still I got to blame somebody.

Of course being ugly was always rough, but being ugly during schools years was rougher. School was hell. I never knew one could be called ugly in so many different ways. Ug-mug, Musclehead, Liz (short for lizard) are just a few of the heart wrenching names I had to endure. Of course it didn't help that I started wearing glasses in the second grade and since my mama was on Medicaid they were the thickest, medicated looking glasses possible. Kids would say, "You look like you walking around with two Coke bottles on your face." All I could do was cry.

Who's laughing now? Me that's who! All those pretty girls in school were too busy being cute to learn. Of course they had all those distractions like dates and dances, but all I could do was read and learn. Now I see those previously attractive people and I think, "Damn, what happened to you?" Can you say overweight? Can you say teeth missing? Can you say a basketball team of kids? I can and it's almost depressing. I can't believe all the beauty queens look as far away from beauty as one can get. And guess where "Miss most likely to succeed" works at? All of them work at the Quick Mart or at Krystal's. Don't get me wrong it isn't anything wrong with honest work, but I pray to God that I'll over 30 years old and working fulltime for \$5.25 a hour. Talk about embarrassing, I would want to die a quick and painless death.

Speaking of death that what most of former classmates look like. I thought I looked bad, but I've always been ugly. Like the old folks say, they went from sugar to sh—t. Thank God I was ugly from the beginning, at least I got my education. And they had no excuse. Hell, I never knew what pretty looked like, but they used to be beauty queens for God's sake.

Let me tell you how I finally accepted this ugly thing. It was when I met this guy named James. I hate to admit it but I met him at the club. It wasn't really a club to tell the truth it was one of those hole in the wall places that people go to get laid. Okay so ugly folks need love too. So anyway way one night I was in the club sipping on a wine cooler trying not to get depressed cause I had been there an hour and nobody had bought me a drink but me. I thought I was looking kind of cute for a ugly girl. I had my hair looking nice. My outfit was brand new. I had the bait so where were the fish?

Speaking of fish I was looking at the menu trying to decide on a fish sandwich or some hot wings when up walked this ugly man. He was looking at me like I was on the menu. I felt like the last pork chop

at a family reunion the way he was looking at me. I thought either he is crazy or the new wig I bought is working. But that's what I was in there for so whatever.

He tried to slide in the seat like he was Billy Dee Williams, but he was too goofy looking to even try to look that cool. I thought, I hope he ain't this goofy in bed. Now I know I am ugly and I shouldn't really judge others, but brotherman was really ugly, until he opened his mouth. He started talking and I became hypnotized. I couldn't believe such a beautiful voice came from such an ugly creature.

He went to talking about how he couldn't help but notice me. I was like whatever he's just trying to get some. He said he could tell that I had a certain quality about me that attract me immediately. Now I had to give it to him, he was smooth. I liked his style. He knew what he wanted and how to get it. So I had to give "it" to him.

Before I knew it we were at a hotel. He really impressed me because it was a nice hotel. Usually a guy in the club takes you to a cheesy roach motel, but James took me to the Hilton. I have never been to the Hilton. I was trying not to hold my mouth open when I walked in there, but it was really nice. When we got to the room I liked to have died. It had a Jacuzzi. He ordered room service. I was blown away.

Now it won't be ladylike to give the hot steamy detail of this long toe-curling eve, But I will say I felt like Julia Roberts in "Pretty Woman" when he got through. Child, James had it going on. I could have sung an opera afterwards. I could have been on the Olympic Gymnast Team.

I know in these women's lib day I shouldn't need a man to affirm my total essence and being. I know I shouldn't need a man to make me complete. But baby James made me feel like a natural woman. And I felt like I could go out and conquer the world after James. Ugly. What was ugly? I was beautiful. He was beautiful. The world was beautiful. James had transformed this mean evil world to the Garden of Eden. So I can't tell it to Ms. Magazine, but now you know how I came to recognize ugly as being a relative term. Now I am not restricted to the physical realms that others impose upon me, because someday I can be ugly and others days I can sing opera.

Mary Holmes

Love's Black and Blue Prints

Hearing voices, I struggled to open my eyes. They wouldn't open. I am in a bed, but I don't know where I am. I'll just keep quiet until I get my bearing. I wondered what wrong with my eyes. Melvin always says that they are my best features. I hope I'm not blind. If I can just feel my face, I might be able to tell what is wrong. OH MY God! What's the matter with my eyes? They hurt when I touch them and my head is killing me. Be quiet. Calm down. Remember what the shrink said. Breathe. Suck air in through your nose and let it out through pucker lips. One, two, three, whe-e-ew. One, two, three, whe-e-ew. I feel calmer already. This stuff works.

I didn't believe the doctor when he said, "Dorothy, try breathing deeply when you're angry, frightened, or upset. It will help you calm down." I remember shaking my head in disbelief and saying to myself. "This man is crazier than I am." Damn, if he wasn't right. I'll just take a few more deep breaths. Oh God, it feels as if I have two heads and the pain is so bad. I'll just lie still for a few minutes and maybe I can remember what in the hell happened to me.

My mama always said, "Dorothy, you too fast. You got to slow down, girl. Take your time and you won't get in so much trouble." It's all coming back to me now.

I was standing at the stove stirring the chili--You know chili will stick if you don't stir it--now was that yesterday or the day before? I can't put my finger on the day. I do remember Melvin shoving the kitchen door open. I cut the fire, moved away from the stove, and backed up into the hallway as Melvin stumbled into the kitchen. Please God, I remember praying, let him pass out before he starts something. I'll keep my big mouth shut this time. Maybe I can go over to Rachel's until he falls asleep.

"Dot, what chu running for?" I heard him say as he was upon me in a matter of seconds. "The man's quick on his feet," I thought admiringly, "maybe he's ok." I always loved the way Melvin moved. Like a cat.

I recall telling him that I was just going into the front room to turn on the T.V. He just looked at me from beneath half-closed eyes.

"Come ere," he said, "And give your sweet man a kiss." I remember thinking, "Should I or shouldn't I?" It only took a minute, but I could see by the look on Melvin's face that it was a minute too long.

He said, "Now you've gone and done it. You know how much I love you and you don't even want to kiss me. I pay the cost to be the boss. I deserve to be appreciated. All I asked for was one goddamn kiss. You know I'd give my right arm for you."

At that moment, my head betrayed me. The damn thing swung out to strike his right hand. My head, the dumb thing, wouldn't stop. It kept getting in the way of his fist over and over again until
... I don't remember anything else.

Where am I? It smells like sick folks in here. Where is Melvin? I want him to come and take me home. I will cook his favorite meal as soon as I can see again. I know what I'll do. When I get him in bed, I'll make him forget this little incident. He'll be all upset and sorry just like those other times. We can work it out, I know we can. It's just him and me against the world. You don't know how hard it is for a black man in this world. We, women, have to take care of our men. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to show him how much I love him. Melvin's right. I should have met him at the door with my lips puckered up. I should have shown him how much I needed him. Just wait until I get home. I'll do better.

"Hey! Anybody! Let me out of here. Somebody give me that telephone. I'm going to call Melvin and tell him to come and get him sweetheart. I've learned my lessons. I wanna go home."

Dennise Brogdon

As She Lay Dead

Charlene

I knowed something would happen today. I could feel it the moment I woke up. I sat up in bed and started making my list of things to do. I'm sure glad I read page twenty-seven in the *Better Homes and Gardens*, where it tells you to make lists so that you don't forget nothin. Page twenty-seven, boy, my subscription arrived just in time yesterday. I don't know what I'd do without it. It teaches a girl so much, like making list of things you gotta do. I started making the list of what I had to do at Momma's like go over to fix her some breakfast, wash up her dirty dishes, clean up her bedroom. I didn't put the livin room on the list cause she don't never go in there. Poor Momma, she don't do much of anything any more. Just lay in that bed watching the soaps, suckin up that oxygen. She's a tuff ole bird. She said that she smoked those *Pall Malls* for over fifty years and they ain't killed her yet, but last summer the doc took'em and gave her oxygen to suck on. When I made Momma her oatmeal, I didn't know she wouldn't wake up. I called her and shook her and got a wet cloth and dabbed it on her face but she wouldn't wake up. She wouldn't wake up for nothing. Finally I had to accept the fact that Momma was gone. It tore at my heart to find her like that. I never experienced such in my life. I could barely bring myself here, but I had to have my hair done for the funeral and all. I called Joshua and told him to get outta that bed and get over here to his Momma's quick cause she ain't waken up. I told him, I shook her and I called her, and she ain't waken up. He could hardly believe me. He told me to call Sheriff Thompson's office and get the ambulance out. So I called'em and I finally found his brother too.

When Joshua and Jud got there, I told'em there was no use, she was gone, but Joshua went in and tried to wake her up anyhow. It didn't work none. I told him that I done tried since I called and she still ain't awake. My husband was just heartbroken about his Momma. I even saw him shed a tear. He didn't want me to see, you know how men are. The sheriff's office said that the ambulance was already in town takin Old Tuner to the hospital and Doc Wilks, the Corner, he's at some convention in Atlanta so they sent out his son, Mitch, the Debuty Corner. I swear I smelled a little on his breath this morning. They say he has to go to town every week and have a test done to make sure he ain't drinkin none. Just as soon as I knew she was dead I got right over here so you could do my hair, cause of the funeral and all. That's what I'll tell Tammy, she's sure to fix my hair. She's sure to.

Joshua

What am I gonna do. I done promised her I'd have this house fixed before company came. I done promised. The screen ain't on the front door. The roof still got that leak. She wanted some new paint. What am I gonna do. I got so much work that I gotta do. I just couldn't believe it when Charlene called and told me Momma was dead. Everything seems to happen at the worst time. I got to get this house fixed up. I'll go put that screen door up now, while we're waitin. Things don't never pick a good time to happen.

Jud

"Momma, wake up, its Jud. Don't be foolin around now. You got us all here now, whatcha wanta say. We got better things to do than to stand around here all morning. Now open up your eyes and sit up here and eat your oatmeal. I was gonna go look for a job today and you done messed me up. Ain't nobody gonna hire nobody that shows up after noon time." I don't know why she wont wake up. "The debty corner is here. You done got other folks involved now. You are gonna be the talk, bringing out all these folks and upsettin everybody like this. Now get up." I just don't know what's wrong she ain't never slept this hard.

Mitch

"Alright, you just clear on out of here and let me take a look at her. I'm here now, it ain't nothing you can do, so just clear on out of here and let me do my job." I checked, she ain't fogging up her oxygen

mask none. She don't look like she's breathing none. I can't find a pulse on her wrist. She ain't waking up when I pat her cheeks. She looks dead to me.

"You can go in and visit but she ain't gonna visit back. She's dead." It ain't been long, she ain't got stiff yet. It might of happened when Charlene got here. "You need to get her over there to my daddy's funeral home. Daddy's in Atlanta at a mortician's convention, but the construction workers are there at the house. You know he's building on that additional parlor, since business has been so good lately. They'll be there and let you in." I got to go, I don't need to drive her over there, they can do it. Daddy will be home and he'll get her taken care of. "I can't take her cause I'm in my car. I know you don't know this, but folks let loose of body fluids after their dead, so you need to carry her over there in the back of Joshua's truck." I don't need to take her and daddy ain't here to come pick her up, so they can carry her on over there.

Charlene

Poor Momma. We just didn't know it was her end. We just didn't know. If I would have known I would have stayed longer when I come to see her yesterday. I just didn't know. "Get that blanket and lay it over in the bed of the truck first. I know she don't know the difference Jud, but it's the right thing to do. Leave that oxygen on. She wouldn't want folks to see her with that red ring around her mouth and nose like that. Just leave it there with the bottle, it has to be given back to the doctor anyways." They'd just cart her off any old way. They can take her on over to the funeral home cause I got a lot to do. First I got to make myself another list. Boy, I'm glad that my *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine come yesterday.

Joshua

I told Charlene, "it ain't none of your business if the debty had liquor on his breath or where he's goin this morning. It ain't none of your business and I don't want to here nothing else about it." The man has a right to his own business. I told her, "Don't you go running your mouth about nothing." If we go bad mouthin Doc Wilks' son, he'll charge us double for the funeral. I sure hope she don't say nothing.

I told Jud to get in the truck, "I'm gonna need some help gettin her in." He said he had something else he had to do but I told him, "Naw, you come on with me, there ain't nothing more important than gettin your momma to the funeral home." Her oldest son outta see her to the funeral home, it wouldn't be fitin if he didn't. Now we got her here but there ain't nobody here.

Jud

I'm gonna go over and tell Julie Ann Carson about Momma. She'll be real sympathetic. Now that I got a house and property she'll get off that high horse of hers. I done told her I was gonna get a job today. Joshua can drop me off on the way back. I'll stay a while with her, and he can go to Momma's.

I done knocked three times. Ain't nobody here. What are we gonna do with Momma. We can't take her back home that'll mess up everything. We can cover her up in that blanket and put her on the back porch. She won't smell for a few hours. Mitch said his daddy will be home directly. It won't hurt none, just leave her here and go on to Julie's house. I'll come back in a while and check on her. Won't nobody see her. Those construction workers, they ain't no good. Doc Wilks should have never told 'em he was going to be gone today. They ain't gonna show up. "Joshua, nobody's here, I done knocked three more times. We can't take her back home. When folks come over, and she's there it'll give'em the creeps and they won't stay. Just leave her here. She ain't gonna smell. I tell you what, I'll dig out a bit of this here sand pile and cover her over. I'll come back later and get her out and take her inside when Doc Wilks gets back. The construction workers ain't gonna come today, they're lazy folk. They ain't gonna come back until Doc Wilks calls 'em back. Joshua, there ain't nobody here.. No! We can't take her back! We got to leave her here, it ain't fitin to take her back. She won't smell if she's covered over with this sand. If I wrap her up in this blanket and then cover her over she won't get no sand in her hair or clothes. Now I'm the oldest and I say this is what we gonna do. I'll come back and get her out before Doc Wilks gets back and ain't nobody gonna know any different. You don't have to have nothing to do with it. Now I'm the oldest and I say it's for the best. I'll do it, you just sit your lazy self in the truck and I'll have it done directly." Now folks can come to the house without gettin the creeps. I'll go to Julie Ann's and wait for Doc Wilks to get back.

Joshua

Charlene is having her hair done and Jud is off at Julie Ann's, leavin me with all this work. Momma done asked them to get this done and they ain't done it. It ain't right. It just ain't right that they wait till she's dead to do this work. She won't never see how pretty that new paint she bought will look on the house. She won't never see how good the roof is patched up. She won't never see how hard I worked to make it look good for her. Poor momma buried in the sand. I hope she don't smell none. Momma sure wouldn't like that.

Jud

I got to get some money somewheres. It ain't that it ain't my stuff now. I'm the oldest and this here is my house now and my stuff. I can do with it what ever I please. It ain't like I'm stealing or nothing cause it's my stuff. I'll just take it down the road to Mr. Peterson's and he'll give me some money for it, if I tell him its for Momma's funeral and all. It ain't like I'm lying cause I have to entertain folks for the funeral and all. And I got to pay half the funeral bill. It's only fitin that Joshua pays the other half, he being her son too. I'll just take these things on down to Peterson while Joshua's gone after those materials.

Boy, Julie Ann was sure sympathetic. All I had to do was shed a tear and tell her my poor Momma died and she was all over me like stink on a dead possum. I told her I got Joshua fixin up the house. She was sure proud when I told her it was mine. She was sure proud. She's coming over tonight and bringing some friends. I got to get some money to buy food and drink. You can't have folks over without some food and drink, it just ain't fitin

Charlene

When I told Tammy that I found poor Momma dead this morning she told me to sit right down and tell her the whole story. She ain't never spent so much time on my hair before.

I think I got everybody on my list who to tell about Momma. I didn't put Aunt Josephine on there cause Momma and her had that fallin out last summer over the pie. Momma told me she won't never gonna speak to her again and not to call if she was dying, so I ain't puttin her on my list. I got most folks off the list at the beauty parlor. I made the announcement as soon as Tammy finished my hair and then I just ran out of there in tears. They all know I loved Momma

Joshua

If I hear it one more time I think I'll belt him. He says he's in there fixin inside the house, but I don't know what he's doing. I don't hear no hammering or fixin. The only hammering going on around here is from me. I don't know what he's a doing, but I sure don't like him telling me what to do. If he wonts something fixed he can fix it himself. I done told him I'd get this paintin done before funeral time.

I done asked him three times to go check on Momma. I told him to take the truck on up there and check and make sure she is inside and ready for the funeral. He keeps tellin me not to worry about it that its not my business cause he's the oldest and he'll see about his Momma properly. Burring her in the sand like he done, that ain't no way to take care of Momma. I don't care if he's the oldest or not, it just ain't fitin if folks should know what he done to Momma.

I done fixed the roof and the front door. I patched up the porch so nobody falls through. I got to get this house painted. I'm only gonna have time to paint the outside, I can stretch a light if it gets dark. Jud done told me he was callin Doc Wilks about the funeral being tomorrow cause Momma won't have all those folks looking at her. He done said, that Momma said it wont fitin to have folks look at dead folks and talk about 'em and all. Momma outta have a lot of folks at her funeral cause she's gone to everybody else's around. The least the living kin can do is come to hers. They ain't gonna get to look at her though cause she said it wont fitin.

Jud

I told Joshua I had to use the truck to take care of Momma and he let me use it right off. I went over and picked up Julie Ann. I couldn't go check on Momma cause Julie Ann would know and I promised Joshua I wouldn't tell nobody what I done to Momma. A man has to stick by his word.

Charlene

I told Joshua to give me some money cause I don't have a dress to wear to the funeral. He knows, I done told him, you can't wear a dress to a funeral that you wear to church all the time. It just ain't fitin. I done found a pretty one thats gonna look real good with my new hair do. I think Momma would like it too. Poor Momma didn't have much money. Joshua, he brung her most everything she asked for, but she didn't never ask for no new dress. She ain't been to church in a long time, so I guess she didn't see no need for a new one.

I wonder what dress Jud has picked for Momma's buryin dress. When I asked he told me not to worry about it cause he already picked out what he wanted. I told him I would help with all the arrangements and what I thought he should do, but he told me he already had it all done. Tommorrow at three o'clock is when the funeral will be. He said Momma told him just what she wanted so I have to go by that. A dead woman should have her say, thats only fittin.

Joshua

Jud told me Momma was just fine. He said everything has been taken care of. Everytime he talks Julie Ann smiles real big and Jud talks even deeper. He said the funeral was gonna be the talk of the county when he got done with it.

Its done got dark and the moon ain't shinnin in the back so I only got three sides of the house painted. Sittin here in the front yard lookin at it I wish I could see how pretty that new paint looks. Momma would be proud if she could see it. That new paint and all the lights on inside, all the hoppin and hollering going on, you wouldn't even know it was Momma's house. I guess it's Jud's house now. He should have waited til Momma was cold in the ground before he started having folks over though. I guess since he done buried her, he felt it was fitin after all.

Charlene

We arrived fifteen minutes before three o'clock cause we wanted to be early for the funeral. I got my tissue in one hand and my *Better Homes and Gardens* in the other incase I need 'em. Joshua went in to speak to Doc Wilks while I waited outside in the yard. Since Jud made all the arrangement we didn't know where the buryin place would be. When Joshua came outside his face was redder than fire. I asked him what was the matter but he didn't pay me no mind. He walked over to a sand pile out front and kicked a bit of it at the base and I saw somebody's arm. I let out a scream but then I stopped cause Tammy from the beauty parlor was comming up the walk. Doc Wilks he come down off the porch and stood beside me. Tammy asked where Jud was but I didn't know. Julie Ann and none of his friends were there neither. Cars started pulling up out front and folks was getting out and coming close to where we was. I didn't know why Joshua was so rude and didn't greet nobody with a hand shake or nothin. He squatted down next to that pile and started pushing the sand off the top. I started to tell him not to mess up Doc Wilks' pile but he still looked madder than fire, so I let him be. Finally with one big swoosh of his arm I could see it was Momma wrapped up in that blanket under there. I screamed when Momma moved. Doc Wilks held me around the waist and said, "Don't worry about that none, dead folks move about a bit after their dead." Joshua picked up his Momma and stood her up, the blanket and sand fell down at her feet. Momma just stood there like a statue. Doc Wilks whispered, "she's stiff." I about fainted when Momma's eye lids opened and I could see the white of her eyes. Then her eyes rolled down and I could see the green in 'em. She blinked a few times and then she raised her hand and took off that oxygen mask.

Joshua

Momma said, "Joshua, why the hell did you bury me in that sand for. Why would you do such a thing to me. You wont suppose to bring me here to Doc Wilks for another week. What'cha you doing leavin me here like this." I opened my mouth to tell her that I didn't put her there but she kept on. "You wait til Jud hears what you done to me. He'll be fit to be tied. He'd never do such a stupid thing to his Momma like you done."

Now Jud, he's done told Momma that he fixed the screen door and the roof and the front porch and he told her he done the painting too. He told her I carted her off two days ago and didn't bring her back so he fixed up the house nice and pretty while she was gone.

I was afraid to tell Momma we was gonna bury her cause we thought she was dead. I figured that would kill her for sure. Now that everything has been said and done, Momma is back to her old self and Charlene is seeing about her regular. I don't visit much cause I just can't forget how Jud buried his momma in the sand.

