


Spring 2000

et cetera

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**THE MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
LITERARY MAGAZINE**

- Spring 2000 -



-ET CETERA-

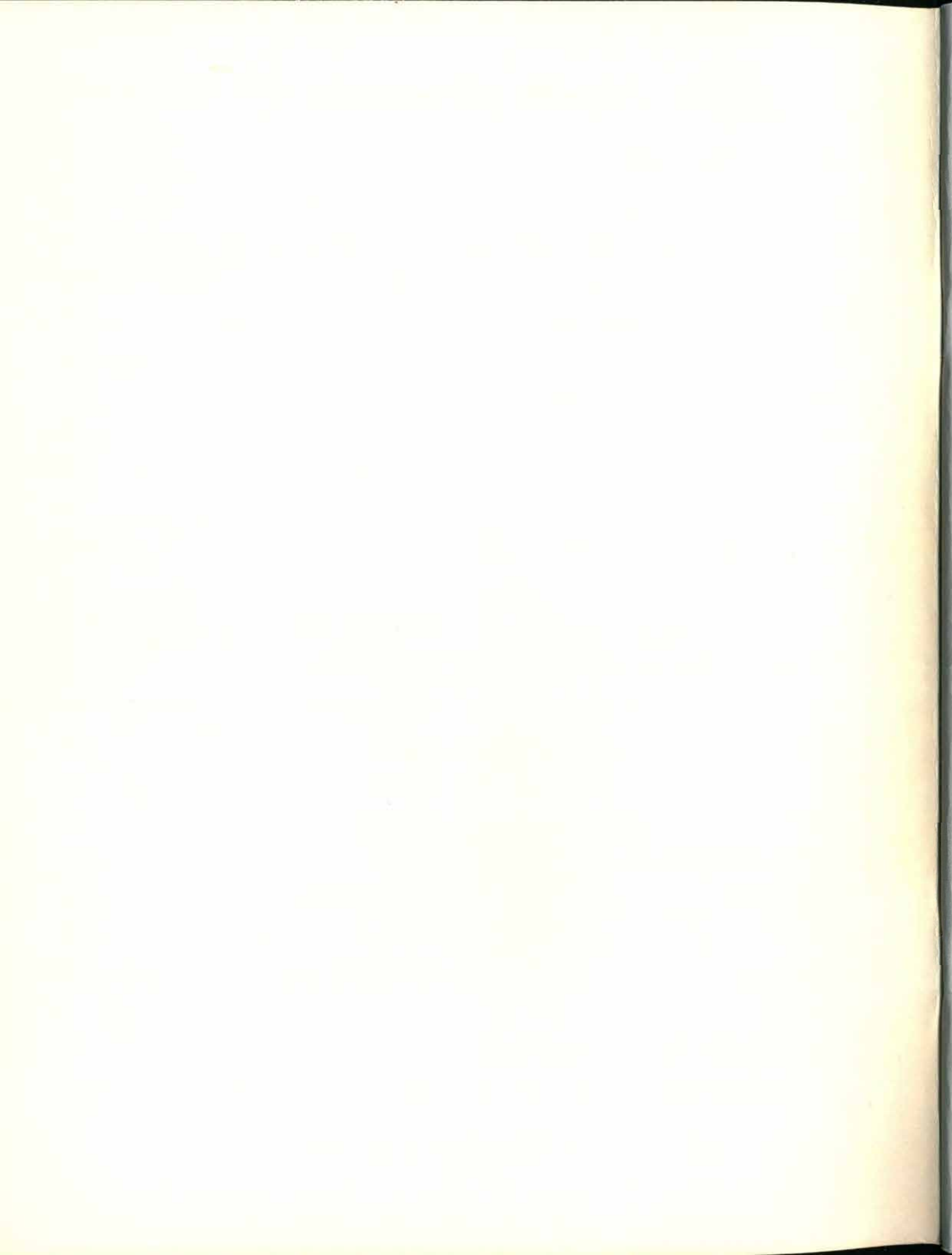


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Cover Photography by Luci Wilson

- Et Cetera Staff -

Editors-in-chief	Kelly Broce
	Sara Dillon
Fiction editor	Nicole Larose
Poetry editor	Scott Morrison
Art editors	Jamie Johnson
	Luci Wilson

- Prize Winners -

Poetry

1st Place	Nick S. Dianne Wellman
2nd Place	Self-Reliance Honor McCain
3rd Place	Untitled Emily Beard

Fiction

1st Place	Driving Lessons S. Dianne Wellman
2nd Place	What You Are Born With Adam Barraclough
3rd Place	Bookworm Aaron Grubbs

- Judges -

Fiction Dr. Katherine Rodier

Poetry Dr. Nancy Lang

A Happy, Cheerful, Pretty Day

Alexandra Michelle Davis

Age 5 (as dictated to Barbara Davis)

A bell is ringing in my heart.

Bunny is hopping along with the children,
laughing and clapping along.

The snow shines brightly
and everybody loves it.

All the clouds are
thundering laughter.

Fire Escape

Nathanial Kuratomi

In 15 minutes I smoked 2 cigarettes and read Kerouac
out loud to myself on the fire escape, diving into the eternity,
the golden eternity of the logic, of the god(s) and the grass
and the unconsciousness and the stream of consciousness
(no time wasted) sitting, standing, waiting for a train,
bored. hearing my voice drone line after line of poetry
that rolls from the pen to the page off the page to my tongue
and from my tongue to my ears;

alone in the night, alone on the fire escape, scribbling small
messages into my beaten book, living the words and the poetry
as if I were drunk in Lowell (MA), carried to the square like a
baby, jumping from town to town and creek to creek to get
away, to shower and rest in a clean bed at home ... home in a
Strange place.

Deathlights

Marged Howley

Night in the throwing;
oboe on the radio--
wind punctured by light.

Singing storms,
tooth mothers with murals for eyes,
a cockpit, a radar blip,
C.S. Lewis. Valleys.

what is real is what is invisible

Going home after the funeral
the sunlight broke.
I forgot you finally,
dancing in ecstatic after-greed.
We waltzed with water, in our very knees laughing;
you hopped on my shoulder and I crossed the street.

No Truth in Things

Honor McCain

The mattress has been turned over
so the stains you left aren't visible.
The Rorschach blots of darkened blood
I'm deemed unqualified to decipher,
the yellow tape that framed this room,
all traces of the unpleasant, gone.
They would have made this scene more real.
No one sleeps here now, but the bed is made.
It lies, cool, unmussed, brazenly suggests
life is pastel, cotton roses, hospital corners.

History of Theories of Rain

Sara Dillon - Staff

We cannot see the Ice Age melting on the horizon; the buoyancy of icebergs gives way.

All the cats, frogs, dogs are done. Less gruesome droplets take their place, now watery meteors.

Hail chastises us for our evil ways. The heated exhalations of the land bless us.

Even Augustine believed God permitted demons to affect the weather. *All* humans become as undeservingly toqmented as Job in flood and drought.

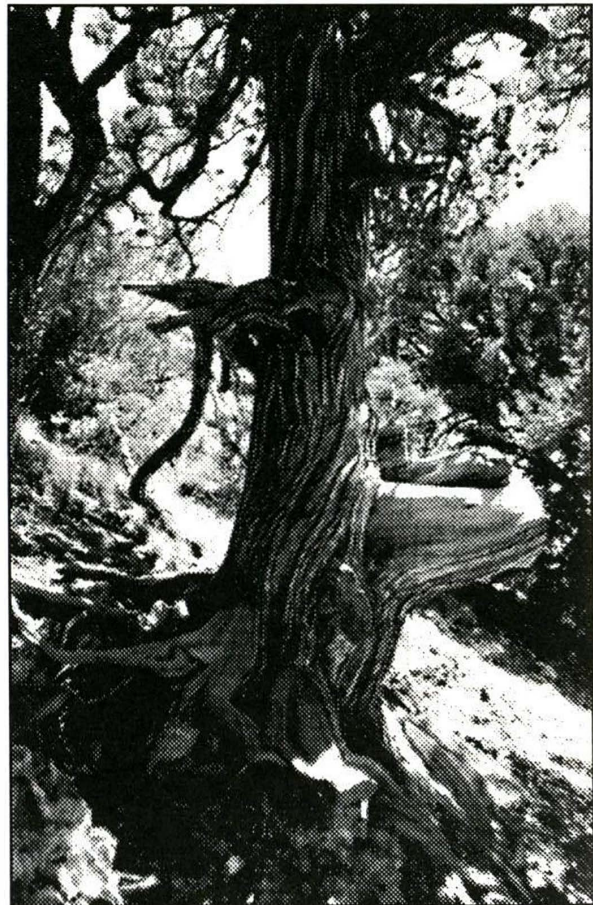
When the visible curtains of rain hide the face of God we say we see through a glass darkly now and use science to explain that a drop is not tearshaped but round.

Corners rub off as they fall side by side on the lee of the mountain, and a droplet becomes a world that freezes and the Ice Age resumes.

Untitled

Emily Beard - 3rd Place Poetry

Roses make me
Think of lives already lived.
Like looking through
Old photograph albums of childhood:
Sunbathing in a cast-iron tub
When I was two.
Warming my bare belly
In front of the wood stove.
Enjoying orange-yellow macaroni-n-cheese
The powdered kind, with my father.
The stale albums preserve our childhood.
Then we look at what is to come.



Whit Pennington

trigger box: a song

Scott Morrison - Staff

there is a certain sadness in august.
the low orange sun seems weary and the
frogs listless, tired of singing. it's been
warm so long that everything just seems
to need a good night's sleep to lay down
and just not think of anything for a
while.

i wonder if the frogs keep themselves up
at night thinking about the same things
over and over.

i wonder if the setting sun lies on its
back finding faces in the plaster of the
ceiling. i wonder if the sun can put
thoughts out of his head.

can he turn down the volume till he can't
hear the static anymore? can he turn
out the noise? turn down the sound.
turn out the noise turn out the lights
and put down his head without the loop
without the static.

without the constant buzz and bite of
mosquitoes. without Rita.

*Last May I went to the cemetery where he
buried Rita. I pulled into a parking lot across
the street and smoked a cigarette. I parked
under the sign with a rotating trailer that
spins around like a shoebox on a record play-
er. I looked at all the graves across the hill
under the green grass. They were all deco-
rated flags, flowers, wreaths, baskets, bal-
loons. One next to the road looked like it had
a picture of something on it. I could tell Rita's
grave by all the flowers her mom put on it, but
I could not go to her.*

Yes. Rita had the prettiest smile and the
roundest face and when she smiled she
would light up like the moon. Everyone liked
Rita. Rita was a little plump, so people said
she was fat but sweet. She never was popu-
lar. Too big to be a cheerleader but she
sang, you know. She sure could sing. She
sang in church and I listened. I listened and
felt pins in my scalp and legs. I think I
breathed them in and they pushed through
my skin leaving tiny exit wounds soft to the
touch. She sang and her palms faced the

sky open for God. Holding up heaven or
touching the moon. Clapping and singing
and cologne like carnations, roses and gin.

I found PawPaw's trigger box when I was
working in the garden. I was twelve and
there it was right in the middle of where the
potatoes were going to be planted. I was
using my hoe turning up the soil with fertil-
izer when my hoe hit it. At first I thought it
was a rock then I try to heave it up with my
hoe, trying to get it under it. I wondered why
Dad hadn't hit it with the Gravelly it was so
close to the top. It wouldn't come up so I
reach down and sweep the dirt off with my
hands and see a metal box. I asked Dad but
he didn't know what it was. Take it to the
house and get it open, he says.

Rita loved to sing and she loved video
gambling and romance novels. she
could sit at home on her trailer front
porch and read for hours smoking. on
the front shirtless men with rippling
women. Indian chiefs and settler's
wives, pirates and colonists' daughters
lost at sea, castles, sky scrapers, cabins
in the woods, tropical islands. beauty
romance sex adventure betrayal. mur-
der. murder is never over.

MawMaw knew what it was. She held the
metal box. That's your PawPaw's trigger
box. Humph. Didn't even know he buried
one. Lands it must be fifty years old if it's a
day, she said. What's a trigger box? I say.
She was cooking brown beans. Well, it's a
box people used to bury things in so they
wouldn't loose 'em. Don't guess this one
worked too well. But why do you call it a
trigger box? I ask. I guess because people
used to keep guns in 'em or something, she
said. I don't really know. Inside we found
some money and pictures and outdated
deeds yellow letters. The beans began to boil
over. Guess it's kinda like a country safe
deposit box, she said. If you don't tell no one
where it is they can't really get to it now can
they? I looked up to her. No. I said I guess
not. *Especially if you put it at the bottom of a
river where you can't eat fl.Sh. A river that
cuts through mountains and coal camps like
Kanawha. A river sick from seventy years of
pollution.*

Rita and I used to sit in the park and look at the river. We used to go there all the time before she started going around with him. I liked to fish there, but I can't go there anymore. *I cannot go.* I would fish and she would read or we'd talk and smoke and eat bologna sandwiches. Sometimes she'd read from her book while I fished. When she found a part with sex she'd read it to me and laugh. Sometimes the parts she read would get me hot, but I didn't let her know that. Sometimes I remembered them on purpose.

On the side of the road a man was selling flowers out of a van. I went across the road and bought some. I'll give you twenty bucks if you go up there and put these flowers on that grave up there, I say. You see it? The one up there with all those flowers. There beside that tree. Yeah I see it. You can't go put this on your daddy's grave yourself, he says. These ain't for my dad, I say. Look, man, you gonna do it or not? Whose it for, he asks. I look at my shoes. A girl. This girl in the military? That why you putting this flag on it? I stuff twenty bucks in his hand. Look mister, I say, just put it on there. I'll watch your stuff for you. Sun's going down so you ain't selling any more today anyhow. Alright, he says. I told him her name so he'd put it on the right one. He walked up there, behind the row of hedges and walked up to the grave I told him, with all the flowers. He read the stone and started shaking his head. No.

I sold it. I sold it to him. Trigger box. Why couldn't he put winter clothes in it like everyone else or Christmas lights and ornaments or canceled checks? I checked him out. Actually sold him the box in which he slid her from the bottom of the river to the top of my mind. He bought two fishing rods 19.99, line 0.99, hooks 0.75, a small can of paint 2.49, a roll of chain 7.95, chewing gum 0.69, deodorant 2.99 and the box 14.99. His total came to seventy-three dollars and eighty-two cents, so I told him. That ain't right. he said. I stared at him blankly for a moment then I heard him speaking to me, looking at me. I checked the receipt roll and noticed I charged him for ten items and he only had nine. I'd charged him twice for the deodorant. Sorry, I said and deducted two

ninety-nine from his total. Seventy dollars and eighty-three cents I said. He paid cash. I sold it to him.

When she started going around with him I went to the river alone. *Before.* Never after. I went to smoke and fish, sometimes to listen to a radio but always to think. I thought about Rita sometimes and I thought about what it used to look like here before people came and there were just Indians. I thought about the catfish in the river that they say could swallow a dog or even people and about the kind of truck I would buy if I could get a job at Carbide. Sometimes I just looked at the water and the little moving patterns on the surface and all the stuff that washed up on the bank: bottles, limbs. cans, magazines. frisbees, flat basketballs, coolers. I liked to watch the sun go down on the river and make a long silver line across the water that pointed straight to the big orange sun. I'd stay there till the frogs came out and sang. I'd watch the sun shine yellow on the interstate and watch all the cars on it turn on their lights one by one. You wouldn't think you could hear frogs sing so close to the interstate but they like the damp of that river. You can hear them so clear that you'd swear you could see them. That was before. *I just stared at him. He stared back then started looking around, reading other stones. Then he walked over to one about three or four over from the one with all the flowers and pointed, jabbing his finger at the ground. There was a little bunch of dirty blue flowers there. There he stuck my flag into the ground. My flag made up of little flowers stuck in the ground like a road sign so I can find her.*

i loved her. now it is easier to love her since i can never love her. she can never love me. i cannot ever touch her. it's easier because she's a dead person, a living idea. an idea i would marry and raise a family with. i love her. i cannot marry her idea she tells me. she pets my head, life goes on, honey. like sitcoms. i cannot marry her ghost. her echoes, ripples on Kanawha gone somewhere far out to sea

I cannot go. I cannot go to her because I am stuck. Stuck in this body that my soul rides

in. I cannot wait for her not to come back and I cannot go. I do not want to go. If I go I may not want her. I may not be able to want her because I do not know. I cannot know. I cannot ever know.

When they said it I did not want to listen. *I wanted to turn out the noise.* I wanted to not hear and not see her like that. *Never like that. The constant buzz and bite of mosquitoes.* I could not go to her. I am stuck. *She loved romance novels. She loved to sing. She loved to sing and I listened.* My mother touched me. I cannot touch her anymore. *Turn out the noise.* She spoke and kissed my face. held my head. *She sang.* She went to the bathroom for a towel. I stand to run, crash of my chair falling.

i run. running running tasting mud like a cut like a lapse in memory a gash a strange place where only mosquitoes are born and hate is a language running and fall full flat and fold. i stand i stand to run. run. she is a lie he is a lie only her death and hunger are true her death that twists in me and feels like a scream tastes like salt green sickness. back track to the trunk chained in a box and then flushed to the bottom of kanawha. cat fish flat fish skinny and fat smell of lover never like that never dead and sick full of worms. shoe string tripping parking lot. trip fall flat. flat faced mud mud so fall fall and be flat be dead and be fat but never like that not ever no never like that. too dead to cry or scream or want or sing. too deep to love to feel or see. she never deserved this he has betrayed her has betrayed himself his kind his kin her kindness how wrong right is not. i stand to run. she never looked back but dissolved in a river and headlines like mud clay and love betrayed but unforgotten unbegotten. can never be like that again never look like that again. never. never. never hidden like a box under potatoes. trigger box.. i sold him that box. i couldn't have known he'd black her eye black as blood and at the riverbank her chopped off leg

falling out of a fifteen dollar box. box wrapped in cheap chain and cinder blocks. her death. her, hacked into pieces like a heifer after the fair auction. bobbing for parts they didn't find coming back with an empty mouth. short one thigh and a shoulder but his eyes. his eyes when i charged him twice were impatient and he sighed. the eyes that looked at her: impatient. a single mistake more simple than hers. he could have just slapped her bruised her and made her run and cry. spit on her screamed and told her fat lies like you're beautiful and i love you, no, i don't notice your thighs when I kiss you and taste you. you know i'll never hurt you. my lips are not poison. my body is not ash and rot. and yours could never be that never fat not flat but beautiful more beautiful than singing. more beautiful than my lies. he could have lied and she could have lived off those lies like corn-bread sweet with butter.

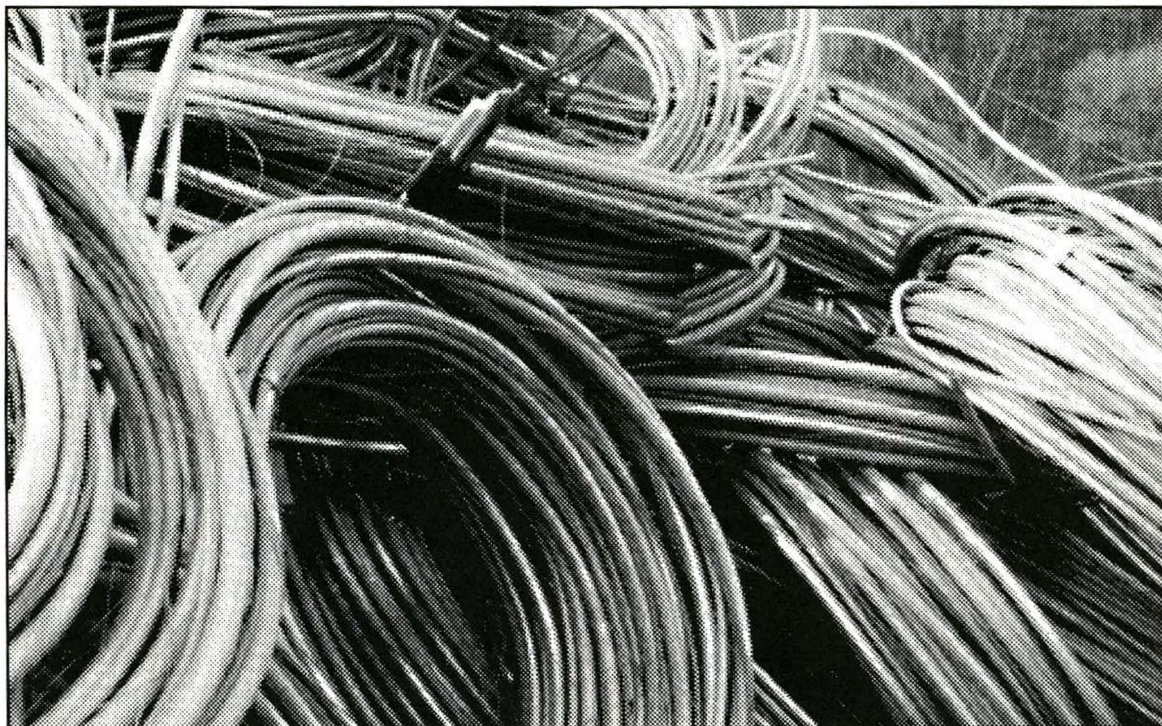
I go back to my car and smoke a cigarette. I cannot ever know. The man selling flowers loads up his van and drives away. I sit there and watch the cars turn on their head lights. The spinning trailer above me lights up. The sky grows from blue to yellow, Jades to blue and blue smoothes to black. I sit there and watch the dusk turn on the lights. McDonalds, Wal-mart and the gas station all light up while the cemetery grows dark. !just sit there smoking and thinking about fl.Shing, watching it all go by.

Rita loved to sing and she loved video gambling and trash novels. the low orange sun seems weary and the frogs listless, tired of singing. she sang. she sang and her palms facing the sky open for God or holding up heaven and the moon. she died that way her hands tied to a bed a tree a trailer hitch showing her open empty hands to heaven crying while the bullfrogs sang so much happier than dead.

Witness

Sarabeth Mills

The sun, hesitating, hung, a bronze orb in the sky,
Spread light, shades of copper, crimson, and citrine.
Heavy air, so humid, like breathing water,
Pressed down upon the river, making water motion slow, steady.
Earth rotated on axis more quickly than boats made way.
Whip-clicking lines cast, plunking lures, intermittently interrupting hum of water, buzz of
voices.
Children splashed, skipped rocks, broke the surface, sunset reflections.
Listless in a boat, the girls laughed as Father foolishly floundered nearby, Mother on
bank, basking.
With sudden silencing of giggles, the water flowed still.
Leaden legs carried Mother in slow-motion, screams caught, unable to escape.
Splashed into shallows, she collapsed, crying.
Men came, pulled the lifeless form from the wet grip.
The girls, a museum of horrors, blinked eyes wide in fear like the sculpted victims of
waxen monstrosities, witnesses of destructive death.



Jamie Johnson

Behind the Gate

Ann William

Kate Fiorello didn't trust the old elevator into which she had just stepped, nor did she feel comfortable around the other three people who occupied the same space, not even her roommate Porter. Claustrophobia began to overtake Kate as she glanced at the numbers lighting up above the elevator door, and she made a mental note to get more details from Porter the next time she decided to go in on something with him. All Kate knew to ask prior to this initial expedition was whether or not Porter knew the guy they were going to see; she didn't want to get busted, especially not the first time. Porter said that the guy's name was Ben, he was cool and there was nothing to worry about. What Porter forgot to mention, however, was that Ben worked in, and out of, Halloway Sanitarium, and that this was the place Kate and Porter were supposed to meet Ben. After Kate and Porter arrived outside of the small ice-cube shaped building and Porter finally explained why they were there, Kate decided she would handle the ordeal the way she always had rollercoasters - closing her eyes until she reached the point she knew there was no turning back. She didn't really expect the first plunge to occur as soon as she entered the lobby, but after what she had been through the past few years, she had gotten used to the idea that someone else was manning the controls.

Ben was exactly what Kate imagined a sanitarium warden to look like: cartoonish-lanky, gray hair, ice blue eyes, silver-rimmed glasses, white-clad, expression and skin tone like that of a mannequin. *A caricature*, Kate smiled to herself, the thought put her at ease.

An unkempt, elderly woman stood in the lobby with Ben, her stance suggested she was more like a pet than a person. Although there was no wedding ring, Ben addressed the woman as Mrs. Cordel. *How sad*, Kate thought, she knew what it was like to see a loved one in such an awful state. Memories

of the wreck from which she tried to pull the broken, bloody body of her ex-lover Marcus two years ago came flooding back. Tears formed in Kate's eyes, and her knee began to ache. For a moment Kate stood lost in the memory, invaded by the dreams she had lost. Then she fought to expel them, she knew they were images she needed to live without. *This woman has seen the inside of Hell. I know what it's like. I wonder what her life was like before this.*

When Mrs. Cordel saw Kate and Porter walk into the lobby, her eyes widened with the revelation that she was supposed to warn the poor girl about the two men they were with, she had to tell the girl the secret. Through the green, blue, tangerine and yellow polygons that danced and spun in the smoke surrounding the two individuals who had arrived, Mrs. Cordel watched a large tail resembling something like a dried pink earthworm sprout from the young man's backside. Whiskers and prominent teeth also erupted from his face. The poor girl emanated white light but was entangled in thorn vines that multiplied everytime she moved. After seeing this, Mrs. Cordel broke free of the person her friend Arnette always called The Plastic Man then scampered toward Kate and jerked her by the shirt-sleeve. The woman needed to make Kate understand, she knew what would happen if she didn't. She shrieked and spat into Kate's ear, "Malida sortoris retario bombinian arterier!"

Kate had been puzzled by The Moon card as the final outcome this morning in her ritual Tarot reading with her other roommate Lori. Now she knew. The card meant unforeseen perils, secret foes, bad luck for the one you love. Swallowing the burning feeling of humiliation welling in her eyes and throat, Kate forced a slight smile as she peeled Mrs. Cordel's strong fingers back one by one. The sympathy she previously felt disappeared. The woman smelled like urine, and she could stay on the inside of Hell forever for all Kate cared. Kate heard a 'Now, Mrs. Cordel' from Ben, but he didn't move

and Kate wasn't sure if his lone was one of warning or of amusement

It angered Porter that Ben had done nothing to prevent the incident between Kate and Mrs. Cordel. Porter knew that Kate was sensitive about these types of things, but he said nothing about it and did nothing to help Kate either. Porter understood the silent pact and how to play his part; it's bad business to act in any way that might suggest he knew better than the person who had what he wanted. He guessed Kate would yell at him later; he'd never met a woman who understood how the balance of power worked.

The elevator had almost reached the fifteenth floor when Mrs. Cordel caused the entire thing to shake. The disoriented woman put her hands over her head then slammed her back against the wall of the elevator and slid to her knees. "No, no, no ... not here, not here, not here!" the woman panted when she no longer knew where she was. Mrs. Cordel was still in a room, but the walls were black and she was surrounded by many masses of snakes of all sizes, shapes and colors. They were slithering over one another, scaling the walls, hissing, falling to the ground and sometimes onto her. Mrs. Cordel knew why they were here - she hadn't made the girl understand, the spell wasn't broken. She prayed for the armadillos to come, but they never did.

"She sees snakes," Ben remarked mechanically when he noticed the distressed expressions on Kate's and Porter's faces, then he gave a slight smile. "Sometimes she sees armadillos, Gila monsters...."

"Oh." Kate couldn't tear her eyes from the terrified eyes of the woman on the floor. Thrashing, Mrs. Cordel looked lost somewhere between the animal kingdom and human existence; she looked like a people-animal, a person-animal, a perimal, an aniple - something wild and fighting for existence in a human body. Kate wondered what the images the woman batted at looked like. they made her tremble so violently. As

she continued to study Mrs. Cordel. Kale couldn't help but try to examine the woman's unkempt dingy-gray hair for bugs, then felt the need to scratch her own head. Curiosity had always gotten the best of Kate; making sure that Porter and Ben weren't watching. she waved her hand in front of Mrs. Cordel's face. The woman continued to tremble, bat, and twist her head from side to side, following what her eyes saw in the world that wasn't the elevator.

When the elevator finally arrived on the designated floor. Ben led Kate and Porter to the empty nurses' station then let them into his office to wait. Ben administered one clear plastic cup of dark blue pills and one small cup of water to Mrs. Cordel then took her back to her room.

Kate examined the denim binders lining the shelves in the office, and opened and closed white drawers at random, noting the pill boxes, syringes, blue plastic droppers and clear glass containers inside. Everything was empty.

Porter had been looking at the clock above the sliding glass windows that opened into the ward when he noticed Kate going through the drawers. "Kat!" he said sharply, "Do you mind, man? Do you want to get this or not? Don't mess with that stuff, you'll piss Ben off."

"Sorry," Kate seethed through clenched teeth, annoyed, trying to keep from slamming the drawer she had been looking in as she closed it. She hated it when Porter criticized her in a situation totally new to her, she hated it when Porter said 'man' and she hated it even more when Porter called her Kat. Kate had never thought of pet names as endearing, they were more like a way to make one person seem a little less real to the other - a means to control. "I don't know, Porter. It's not like I knew we were going to spend the afternoon in a sanitarium."

"Yeah? Well, it's not like we won't be leaving pretty soon, OK?"

Porter didn't understand why Kate wanted to try heroin, she didn't seem like the type. Kate also didn't seem like the type to

sleep with Porter but she proved him wrong there too. Kate moved in with Porter and his roommate Lori over six months ago. but Porter didn't know much about Kate except she knew how to handle her money, she studied English literature, she lost a scholarship to a school of dance in New York. and he liked it when she came to his room at night.

When Kate first moved in, more than once. and sometimes more than once a week, Porter woke to sobs coming from Kale's room. He asked Lori about it, but Lori never heard Kate at night. Porter knew that Kate kept a lot of prescriptions in the bathroom cabinet at home, and thought that she might have some kind of imbalance. When he mentioned this to Lori, Lori remarked that anyone would go crazy after moving from New York to their sleepy little town. Lori offered to trade rooms with Porter if Kate was causing him to lose sleep, but Porter decided to stay put. He would rather wonder what Kate cried about at night than wonder if she was crying.

Three months after moving in with Porter and Lori, Kate caught Porter eavesdropping outside of her door on her way to get more tissues from the bathroom. Porter's answer to the shocked expression on Kate's face was to hold out a joint and smile.

Kate told Porter she would meet *him* in his room, and while Kate was in the bathroom, Porter sneaked into Kate's room to look around. Porter wanted to know her, but he didn't want to ask. The first thing Porter noticed in Kate's room was the color - bold. The bed was brass and the comforter was crimson with gold design, a dark drape lay across the canopy, the curtains matched, a large oriental rug was placed under the bed, and the scent of soft ginger incense lingered. Pleasant pictures of harems and belly dancers drifted through Porter's imagination as he walked toward the bookcase. Books like *The Storm*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Ha-Ha* and *Jane Eyre* lined the shelves. Porter was relieved when he saw books like *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, *The Shining*. and *Four Past Midnight*; he thought he'd found something he could talk

lo Kate about. He slipped out into the hallway before Kate came back with a box of Kleenex. They didn't talk about what upset Kate. They went to Porter's room, lit the joint and forgot about it.

Porter snapped out of the memory and both Kate and he turned toward the door when Ben returned. Ben walked over to his desk, opened a drawer and pulled out two palm-sized brown packets, a syringe and a long rubber band then arranged the items on the desktop.

"What do you have for me?" Ben asked nonchalantly.

Porter nudged Kate and she looked up as if she had just broken out of a trance. She reached in her pocket and picked a fifty out of a wad of bills.

"Here."

Ben handed her one of the packets and told her that the batch was called Black Death, then he walked to the sink to cook the contents of the remaining packet in a spoon he held over a lighter.

Kate handed her packet to Porter. She had told him earlier that she didn't want to mainline - dependence didn't appeal to her. Ben gave the pair a syringe and spoon and Porter went to work cooking the powder.

When Porter put the needle in Kate's arm, she watched and thought it interesting that the syringe sucked some of her blood out before the liquid exited. After all of the junk in the syringe was emptied, Kate watched Porter prepare a mixture for himself. He tied a rubber band tightly around his left bicep, then Kate watched the contents of the syringe disappear into his vein. Porter sank back into his chair when finished, his eyes glazed, looking between this world and the one he had told Kate was so sublime.

Porter was right, the rush was like sex. An electric blue sensation shot out from Kate's torso and head, and throughout her limbs. Her muscles were so relaxed that her entire body became heavy with the weight of them. She didn't think she could move, even if she wanted to. Rays of blue light came from every direction, and Kate envisioned an image of herself kneeling on all fours on a

thin sheet of glass, somersaulting through the air, looking into her own reflection. With syringe in hand, Ben looked at Kate knowingly. To Kate, he looked as if he were moving through a watery prism, a wall between his existence and hers.

Kate felt as if her body was being pulled downward, her life and all her lives before this one peeling away. Flying through a cloudy indigo sky, Kate forgot that she ever had to walk, and she forgot about her knee and losing the ability to dance. There was a white light ahead of her. The rippling, crashing sound of emptiness seemed to guide her toward it, but she never seemed to get any closer. Still she felt more content with every move she made toward it. She took her time floating. The white light became brighter. She was so close to it.

"Kate! Kate!" Porter shook her elbow violently. "Do not fall asleep! If you fall asleep, you won't wake up! Don't follow it, no matter how good it is. Do not fall asleep!"

The shock back into the world was more than unpleasant for Kate - she had been assaulted outside the gates of Heaven. She desperately wanted to trace her steps back to where she had gone, but didn't after the threat of death. She was bitter about having to return to her body, especially coming back to it while in an office in a sanitarium.

The afternoon disappeared into a vacuum for Kate. She thought she passed Mrs. Cordel trembling and batting again, but she wasn't sure why. Someone called Kate's name in the distance. Didn't they know where she was? She didn't want to answer. She didn't want to return to her body again. But she finally looked up to see where the voice came from.

"Kat. Kate, the cab's here. Come on." Kate was standing up, left arm draped over Porter's shoulder, his right arm around her waist. Porter put Kate on the elevator but thought she was trying to fight him. The elevator seemed to go down faster than it had gone up. The cab ride was a blur, but somehow one of them managed to give the driver their address.

Lori was home when Kate and Porter

arrived, and Kate stumbled into Lori's bathroom, unaware of who it belonged to and that Lori sat on her bed nearby, reading. After Lori heard Kate gag once, she ran to the bathroom, held Kate's hair back from her face and kept her in the direction of the toilet. Kate was sure she vomited everything in her stomach. The roll of toilet paper was nearly gone, so Lori had to take Kate's hand, direct it to Kate's hair, then go to the closet and get another roll. Placing the roll on two of her fingers, Lori unraveled a sufficient amount of toilet paper, took Kate's hair back from her, and began to wipe tears and vomit from Kate's face.

"So, how does it feel?"

Kate tried to answer, thinking she emptied her stomach, but her mouth wouldn't obey, and Kate vomited again. Although Lori didn't know what they were, she knew Kate had problems. Lori told Porter she didn't think it was a good idea to let Kate buy into the whole drug scene. There were cuts and scars on Kate's wrist, and a kitchen knife found on the back of the toilet in the bathroom near Kate's and Porter's rooms every so often. Lori cleaned Kate's face off one more time then led Kate to the sink to wash her mouth out. Kate followed, left arm outstretched, holding her hand over her lips.

The indigo feeling of the drug became more intense, but balanced, and Kate still felt she would collapse under the weight of her body. She asked Lori to help her to her room, she wanted to lie down. Kate slung her arms around Lori's shoulders, and Lori began to lead her to her room. Porter was on the couch. Lori made it to the stairs when she heard him grumbling.

"She OK, Lori?"

"You OK, Kate?" Lori waited for Kate to nod. "She's fine."

"This is for her, I took it from the garden we passed, close to the house. The cab dropped us off somewhere near there, but she doesn't remember being there," Lori retrieved the hyacinth hanging from Porter's hand and attempted to place it in Kate's. "Don't let her fall asleep, no matter how good she tells you it is, OK?"

"OK Porter, don't worry." In this case

Porter's concern was valid, but for a drug addict. Lori thought Porter worried excessively about strange things. Porter especially feared food poisoning. Constantly he reminded Kate and Lori of the age of their leftovers. Lori tried to point out how ridiculous it was to think that three-day-old leftovers would kill him before all of the drugs that he put in his body would, but he never listened, and Lori gave up. But Lori loved Porter; they played together as children, and he took her in when no one else would.

In Kate's room, Kate melted into her mattress while Lori examined Kate's book collection. Lori's first major was Literature, but she switched to Psychology then had to drop out because of lack of funds. Since Kate moved in, Lori had been able to save enough money to take a few classes next term, but that was a long way off. A pleasant memory of a conversation with Kate a few weeks after Kate moved in returned to Lori: one of Lori's first literature assignments dealt with the way women were usually defined through their relationship to men in literary works, and she asked Kate what she thought about the matter. Lori was delighted that Kate had always dreamed of writing works of fiction in which women were defined by themselves for themselves. Details such as Rochester's loss of vision and right hand and Jane Eyre's return to him, Chopin's protagonist's figurative suicide in *The Storm*, and the assumed mental illness of independent women portrayed in works such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* frustrated Kate. Lori and Kate then had a long discussion about the fact that tragedy was often instrumental to freedom in real life, but questioned why it had to be so victimizing in literature, especially where it concerned the liberation of women.

Lori put her hand on Kate's ankle and shook it when she didn't hear any noise from Kate. Kate slowly rose, at first not realizing she was on her own bed in her own room. She was happy to see Lori.

Kate always wished she tried to get closer to Lori; Lori always put Kate at ease and

made her laugh. Sometimes she thought she kept her distance from Lori because of Lori's sexuality. It wasn't that Kate was offended or afraid of Lori's sexuality - she was fascinated by it. She wanted to know and understand how Lori felt, but thought she would offend Lori if she asked her about it. Kate also feared what she might find out about herself.

"There's something I've always wanted to know but never asked," Lori said suddenly.

Lori's comment startled Kate, she thought Lori had read her mind. "What's that?" Kate asked wide-eyed. The heroin no longer made her feel lethargic.

"What happened at the dancing school in New York?"

"Oh." Kate wasn't sure if she was disappointed or relieved, and she wasn't sure if she wanted to talk about New York.

Lori watched Kate's face tense, and felt guilty for asking. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you."

"Oh, no." Kate quickly lied, "I was thinking about something else. The dancing school...well, I did have the opportunity to do a few things on Broadway...."

"Oh really? Wow, that sounds very exciting...."

"Yeah," Kate sighed, "I was studying to be a choreographer later on. I had a scholarship to the best school of fine arts in the country. My fiance, ex-fiance...well...anyway, he ran a red light...it was a total accident...but in the accident, my left knee was torn to pieces and I had to have a pin put in my leg. Marcus died." Kate's eyes began to swell with tears.

Lori reached over and squeezed Kate's hand. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to bring it up...."

"No, it's OK. This is the first time I've really talked about it since it happened. I lost everything in ten seconds, and sometimes all I can think about is whose fault it was...why I can't dance anymore. Isn't that horrible of me? Sometimes I can't even be thankful that I made it out of that crash, I'm too bitter that I can't dance anymore. Marcus and I had a disagreement before we went out in the morning. We were still arguing in the

car...then it happened...I tried to pull him out. I tried to.... Half of *his* face was gone. I feel so guilty," Kate looked thoughtfully at her canopy and tried to smile through the tears that streamed down her cheeks. "Someone must really have a bone to pick with me." Kate stared at her canopy for a moment or two longer then took a deep breath, looked toward her closet and forced a smile. "I still have my costumes, do you want to see them?"

"Sure."

"I got to keep them because I had to buy them to perform." Kate opened her closet and out from it emerged scarlet and lavender feathers, gold and silver sequins, white *chiffon*, cranberry taffeta, and black satin. Kate was plagued by visions of her former life, but she forced herself to smile like she had on stage. She remembered bending her body into the most unnatural positions before she could even read. The barrettes that her mother made her wear hurt her scalp, and the makeup made her sneeze. But she liked the attention, and she learned to like an audience in awe of the beauty of her movement and her body. Now she no longer knew what she liked or wanted. She watched Lori rummage through the costumes. "You can try them on if you want. Would you hand me the red one?"

Kate smoothed her hand over the material as she fitted the costume over her form, it made her feel confident and courageous. She let her mind wander back to the time when she could defy gravity. Lori tried on the white chiffon costume, it had always been Kate's favorite - simple and elegant. They both stood in front of Kate's full-length mirror and took turns with a red lip pencil. Lori performed mock pirouettes, and Kate joined in, within her body's limitations. When they were dizzy they fell on the bed laughing and talking nonsense. There was a brief moment of silence, and Kate looked into Lori's face then quickly moved her lips to meet Lori's. Kate didn't understand Lori's resistance. Lori pushed her away, stood up and began to take off Kate's costume.

"Kate, liking girls doesn't mean I can't be

picky, OK? It doesn't mean I'll have sex with any girl who comes near me, OK? Don't use me to figure out who you are." Lori pulled her own T-shirt and jeans back on and left Kate's costume on the bed. "I've gone through this before, Kate. I was in love. She was going through a phase." Lori sighed and rolled her eyes in disapproval. "What about Porter, Kate? We all live here together. I didn't think it was a good idea that you two got together when he told me about it." She walked toward the door then paused. "What you've been through won't go away by trying to lose yourself in or throw yourself at anyone who will listen to you."

Kate looked at the floor. "I'm *sorry*, I didn't mean to...."

"It's OK. I didn't mean for that to sound as pointed as it did. Like I said, you've been through a lot. I do want to be your friend, Kate."

The flower that Porter had plucked from the garden wilted quickly on Kate's bed. It was an unusually thoughtful act of Porter, normally he only showed affection by sharing his drugs and body with Kate. *By inserting things in me*, Kate half-laughed to herself. The heroin was wearing off and Kate felt a headache coming on. She wondered what made her so masochistic. She remembered being that way even before the wreck in New York. *What's more masochistic than learning to contort your body to please an audience?* Kate remembered a magazine she leafed through in a doctor's office that showed a photograph of Faye Dunaway sprawled across the hood of a limousine in a crucifixion position, surrounded by a mob of journalists and fans, the wind blowing a long scarlet sash that emerged from the bottom of a gold corset she wore to look like a pool of blood. The photographer said he wanted to portray what having an audience does to a person. Kate related to the feeling, but she thought losing an audience was equally taxing. *Who are you once the approval and applause you depended on so much is gone?* She thought about the things she wanted to write. *What a hypocrite I am. How will I write about women's identities when I don't even*

know who I am?

"Kate, Lori was in the doorway holding out a glass of water. "Here. This for you, you look a little peaked. Junk wearing off?"

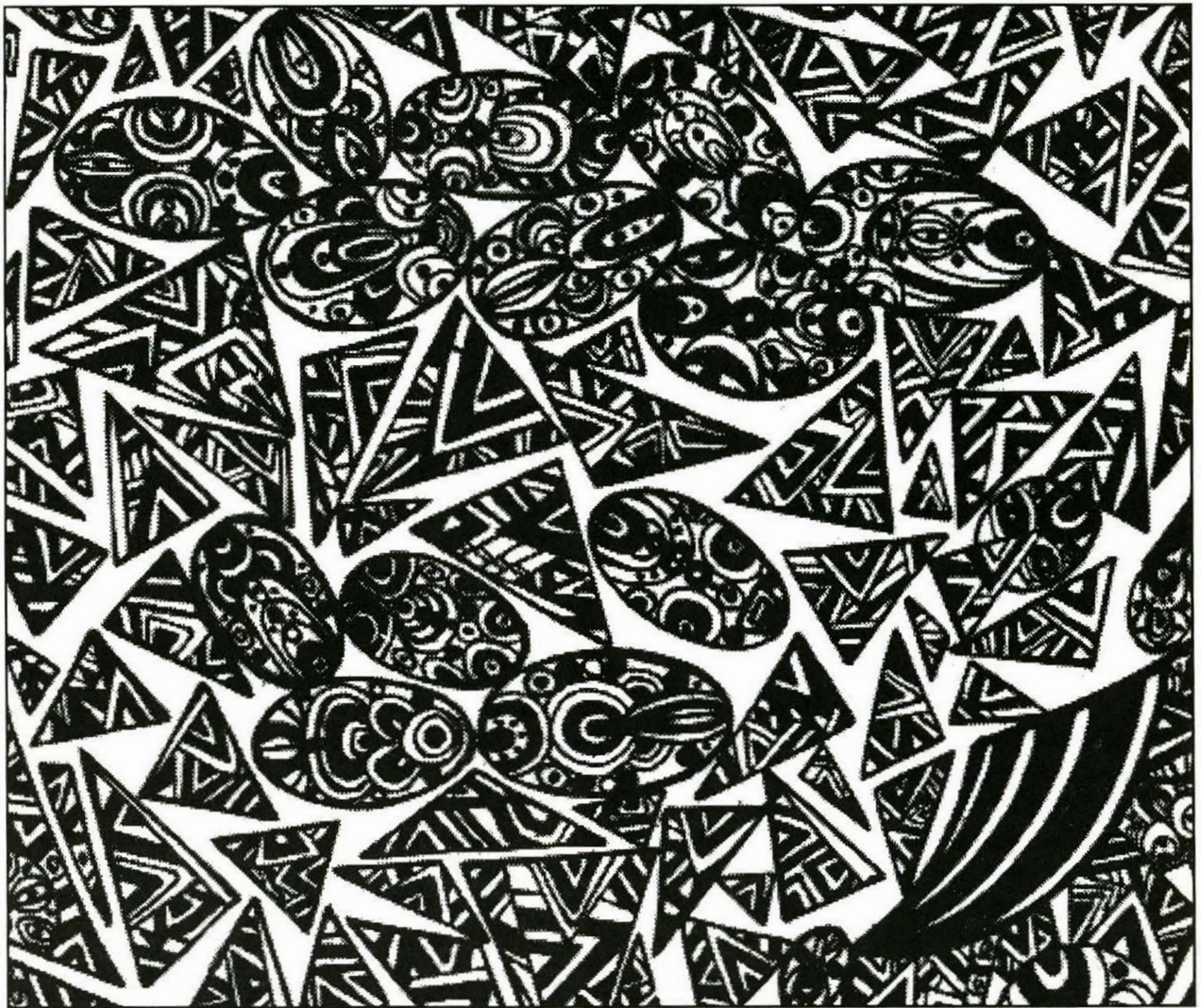
"Yeah, it is. Thank you," Kate was thirstier than she realized. She stared at Porter's flaccid hyacinth then threw it in her garbage can. "Lori, would you walk to the garden down the street with me?"

"Do you think you can make it?"

"I'll make it."

Porter was so enmeshed in a television program he didn't hear Lori and Kate's giggling. Porter usually insisted on keeping the front door closed, making the locks stiff and

difficult to work with. The sun was bright outside the door and the day was clear. The light hurt Kate's eyes and worsened her headache a little, but she was determined to get where she wanted to be. Kate noticed for the first time how different the quiet, picket-fenced neighborhood was from the synthetic city setting of New York. There were actually yards with barking dogs, and trees in which squirrels climbed. The walk wasn't long, and when Lori and Kate arrived at the garden, Kate opened the gate and breathed in the scent of jasmine, honeysuckle, and rose, and admired the tiger lilies, magnolia tree, and morning glories. She never wanted to leave.



Sam Zarrinbakhsh

Bookworm

Aaron Grubbs - 3rd Place Fiction

Most of the walls in Desmond University are white. Some of the more recently constructed computer rooms have deep brown paneling, but never on all segments of all four walls. There is always white, staring into the void.

I am those walls. I see, feel, hear, and interpret everything that goes on here. I am the white chalice of observation, an omnipotent force able and willing to describe the events that surround, abound. I, and only I, have the insight to turn an event into history.

A lot has happened in room 467 of Horton Hall, where Philosophy is the major interest. Or speculation if you prefer. There is a day that I am going to bring back from the vaporous air of the past for you to see. Here *all* the walls are white, and the students sit congregated around a large rectangular table, so I have access to all of their presences; thoughts, images, inferences, opinions, deductions - I may become them if I wish. I am an omnipotent wall that sees all. Small plastic chairs cradling bodies engaged in hearing and reading:

"...in these walls we call it Philosophy, but this quest surely has many names. As we begin to study the Existentialists in this course, you will see some of the major thinkers' logical deductions on 'what it all means,' or conversely, 'what it does *not* mean.'

"I approach today's introduction cautiously. As some of you may have heard, several years ago a brilliant pupil of mine committed what I will now describe as a 'tragic withdrawal.' Gege was one of the most gifted students I have had the pleasure of instructing, and the reasons for his actions remain elusive. What is insanity? Was Gege insane? I want you all to think about these questions. Is the non-educated victim of insanity different from the educated one?

"In remembrance of this pupil and

friend, I would like to take an approach that would undoubtedly be considered controversial by the administration (I know, a *real* big surprise coming from Dr. Langstrom), so I would appreciate some discretion around campus from my finest Philosophy students [mild laughter]. The cassette recorder I have sitting behind me contains what one might call Gege's 'discourse' on humanity. It was given to me before he left the University in 'disgust,' and ironically, it is filled with scholarly references, some more pertinent to this class than others. I have taken the time to transcribe it, in order to allow a reading while we listen, so you will be aware when Gege borrows statements from other authors. I want you all to think very carefully about this troubled mind, and what his feelings can tell us, teach us, about ourselves. There is a danger involved in the obsessive study of anything in this world--! play this tape to make you all consider that fact. Please pay attention, and use this example of madness to keep yourself firmly rooted in sanity. Obsession is dangerous, even in the pursuit of 'scholarly intellectualism.' I'd like a two-page typed response of what you hear today for our next meeting."

"Gege," transcribed by Dr. O Langstrom

"Hello Doctor, I leave this tape for you because of your supreme insight into matters of the unknown, considerable consideration for the fellow man, curiosity into the bleak field of meaning that permeates the human condition, and the respect that you've shown not only to me, but the others; the ones who cannot and will not understand the paradox of meaning and existence.

"It's safe to say that my judgment is clouded. So far down this road of mental exploration have I traveled, I fear there is no return. Life no longer has any value to me. Indeed, I have infected myself with such pessimism that my own logic is indubitably contaminated. 'Even extreme grief may vent itself in violence - but more

'...ll takes the form of apathy.' [i] 'But is withdrawing in disgust like coming as apathy?' [ii]

I have a tight, focused, clear meaning in my innermost self to belong. I yearn for a connection to something greater, some higher power, some cohesive whole. And yet, all I see around me is fragmentation, broken promises, empty dreams and diatribes; the whole world is cracked wide open with mighty men holding the reigns, arrogant enough to think he's figured it all out. I'll tell you Doctor, man hasn't figured out the goddamned thing except how to keep himself ignorant of the truth; indeed, 'ironic in weakest bodies strongest works.' [iii] Comfortably, we sit around in our classrooms, discussing, discussing, discussing, and never coming to a greater understanding of the conceptualization and true purpose of the mind. Our minds are crying! 'We're baked out of colors and pasted notes!' [iv] Nothing belongs anywhere; this postmodern amalgam of representation is a sad attempt to be creative with a system of worn-out symbols and beliefs! This language is dead, flat, stale, completely divisible, over and over again. Deconstruct, disassemble, take apart, DESTROY! 'Every time we speak of what we see, we speak falsely... a neverland of fragments, a place of wordless things and thingless words.' [v] I can see no other way out than to... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

"For Madmen only! [vi] There is no mimesis here, no affective fallacy; Doctor, you are a party to the ramblings of a madman, and yet, would the madman admit he is insane? Heller says no. [vii] Apparently in my case, he is wrong. Perhaps the clarity to see my own irrationalism is the only thing left of my rationalism. Ah, semantics. Does clarity of vision require you to be rational? Were the spiritual teachers such as the likes of Jesus or Muhammad completely rational? Or did they just have that spark as Harlan Ellison puts it [viii]; a little spark that causes one man to see it all in perfect clarity, a single flash-in-the-pan epiphany that makes one being grasp Siddhartha's 'Om' in an instant. [ix] My

spark has stolen me the world, and there is no possibility of repair. 'Human reality must not be necessarily what it is, but must be able to be what it is not.' [x] And I tell you, Professor, man is too far down this road to be what he is not. He has made his case before the gods, and it seems that our path is now etched in stone.

"It is too much (or human patience to keep the eyes so long on one thing, [xi] and I have held humanity under the microscope for far too long. I have decided to impose a sentence on myself. Unlike Camus's stranger, I do not have the luxury of being condemned to die by another's hand, so I must take the responsibility, however unpleasant, of doing it myself. And why? Why must Gege die? Because I myself am just as much of a victim of human abandonment and fallacy as those that I have criticized in my earlier statements. As much as I long to be part of a universal whole, a new breed of man, a new overman, I do not have the hope or ability to attain such existence. I am doomed to the same fragmentation of the rest of us, cracked and shattered into five-hundred-gazillion words, thoughts, and images, never to become one thing, or to belong to one creation, painfully autonomous. I too, with all of my logical suppositions I have given you in the past, am nothing but a repository of insignificant pseudo-intellectual rabble, a muddle [xii] of no meaning and indecision. It is too hard to live! God how hard it is! [xiii]

"Enough of my apologetic tragedy; we've come to the apex of Freytag's pyramid. I just felt that I owed you, and only you, some kind of goodbye. Please know that I consider this my only alternative, and that I am not driven to the depths of despair or depression as I commit this final act. I have come to the conclusion that this is the best possible way to become closer to meaning and existence; by releasing all of my energy, thoughts, ideals, and 'pasted notes' back into the ethereal world, I can come as close as possible to being a part of everything. Please, Doctor, believe me when I say, I am not saddened, only ready to

leave this domain of men and men's restrictions and give back to all what I have taken; perhaps these seeds will take root, or perhaps they will fall on dry stone. [xiv] I cannot say. 'Make me thy lyre! '" [xv]

A stillness hangs in the air of room 467, and my walls breathe deeply to take it all in. Faith Montgomery feels sorry for Gege and wonders what kind of relationship he had with his mother. She studies a thing-word-science called Psychology. John Somerset thinks of thing-word-number Accounting, and how much more important it is than Philosophy. Richard Undress thinks of Gege as a depressed guy showing off how many books he had read in a desperate plea for attention from Dr. Langstrom. Thing-word anger. Sally Hurt thinks that she should re-read *Heart of Darkness*. Edmund Reed wonders how anyone can grow so exasperated with the fascinating experience of life. Kale Drinko thinks of the chamois blouse she bought at the mall yesterday, and how well it will go with her "Guess" jeans at the fraternity party later that evening.

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- [i] Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness
 - (ii) Richard Linklater's "Slacker" (film)
 - [iii] Shakespeare's Hamlet
 - [iv] Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra
 - [v] Paul Auster's City of Glass
 - (vi) Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf
 - [vii] Referring to Joseph Heller's Catch 22
 - [viii] Referring to "The Deathbird," a short story by Ellison.
 - [ix] Referring to Siddhartha by Herman Hesse.

[x] Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness

[xi] A paraphrase of Heart of Darkness

[xii] Possibly referring to E.M. Forster's A Passage to India

[xiii] A paraphrase of Steppenwolf

[xiv] A paraphrase of Nikos Kazantzakas' The Last Temptation of Christ

[xv] Percy Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"

Psyche's Spring

Misty D. Jordan

It's May again,
and I'm called to the sacred place
of time suspended,
where pralines and chicory
are my only motivation
to rise before the sweating sun.

And when I go for my midday check
of cracked tombs and conquering weeds,
my fingers trace the names
that no one remembers
except for me,
those fantasy families,
my dramatic inventions,
that keep my mind from melting
like all the others of the place.

Oh to return,
right now
to that wonder-filled world
and take you with me again,
to search for that potion
of sugar and lemon
that holds the promise
of blessed renewal
right in the palm
of our lady's strong hand.

Syndication Street

Jeff Tutt

Emma Wilson ate her usual breakfast of sausage, eggs and buttered toast and watched Willard Scott announce the names of those fortunate enough to be celebrating their hundredth birthday. She took a kernel of perverse pleasure that a stout-figured man like him probably wouldn't see his name announced for such an accomplishment. No-sirree. At the age of 76, outliving people was one of the few joys Emma had left, and one she did not take for granted when she read the obituaries in the paper. She was positive she had Willard beat.

You have to be careful. Emma. You don't have him beat yet. Not the way you're scarfing down those eggs and sausage links. And not with your sleeping habits, either. What if you'd done permanent damage to your nerves this morning? What if you hadn't been able to get out of your chair? You couldn't get to the phone and no one comes around to check up on you. Not even that new preacher; he seems to avoid old people like the plague. Your son is all the way in California . . .

She forced herself to rein in her thoughts before they caused her to fly into a panic. This morning she woke up to find herself still in her La-Z-Boy, her arms and legs asleep beyond all movement, after having fallen asleep the night before while watching Jay Leno. She had been chastising herself about it all morning. She didn't like to admit it, not even to herself, but she found her mind running away from her more and more. She'd raised a son by herself after her husband passed on when he was 30, and she refused to become one of those panicky old women who ended up in The Home, crying at every passing car backfire. Her arms and legs were fine now, all she'd had to do was get some blood circulation through them. Mentally she tried to convince herself it was Leno's interviewing skills that put her to sleep, but knew that was all

bunk. She was old and couldn't make it through Leno anymore. So what? So she hated it, that was 'what.'

Emma took comfort in the fact that once she was up and moving, she got around better than most people her age. She got dressed and made breakfast, holding her back straight, not hunching over like the typical old ladies that populated The Home. Aside from waking up in the chair, which was happening much more often lately than she was comfortable with, it was the normal routine of her morning. A firmly set schedule was important when fighting the possible onslaught of senility. It left little to be forgotten, and when something did slip, it indicated a more serious affliction may be at work. As she finished her last corner of toast, she mentally checked off another completed step. Next was to go outside, get the paper and have a good chuckle at the obituaries.

There was a nip in the air outside as the season slowly wound its way into fall, but Emma resisted putting on a jacket or head scarf for a simple trip to the paper box. Opening the front door, Emma noticed the yellow Ryder truck right away. Though she wore glasses for reading, she had no trouble seeing far away objects, and certainly wouldn't miss a large, yellow moving van three doors down. Funny, she hadn't even heard that the Proctors were moving. Of course, the upwardly mobile couple had always had little to do with the neighborhood, especially those in it younger than 20 and older than 40. Emma frowned at the sight of children scurrying around the van, but was relieved the youngest looked about 11 or 12. Teenagers were a handful, but most reserved their rebellion for their parents, and romping rambunctiously about the neighborhood. As long as they had outgrown 'hide and seek,' and didn't play their music too loud, Emma didn't expect much trouble from them. But, at least initially, she would keep an eye out for delinquencies which she would nip in the bud with a quick visit to the parents.

Folding her arms and shivering, Emma started toward the mailbox, beginning to wish she had put on a jacket instead of

acting stubborn. *Old people are stubborn. Emma. Stubborn and cranky and they don't like children.* She cut off her thoughts as best she could for the second time that morning. She hated arguing with herself, and quickly wiped away that thought before her mind commented that old people also argued with themselves. *Especially old people they put in The Home.*

She was just pulling The Sheldon Times out of her paper box when she noticed one of the new children rollerskating up the sidewalk toward her. The youngest one, a cutely pudgy girl with long blond hair and a cherubic face. As the distance between the two closed, Emma knew she'd seen the girl somewhere before.

"Hi!" the girl chirped. "I'm Jennifer Keaton! I just moved in!"

Emma had always disliked cute, perky children. Her Arthur. God love him, was ugly as sin and had loped around the house slack-jawed most of his childhood, but she loved him for it all the more. Cute, perky children were trouble, especially girls. In this day and age, she wouldn't be surprised to see this little girl come home pregnant a few years from now. Of course, families nowadays didn't have the decency to move away in shame when such things happened.

To the girl, Emma pursed her lips and said a curt, "Hello, welcome to Sheldon."

Jennifer smiled at Emma, "Thank you! Well, I just wanted to say hi! I have to go unpack now!" With a smile she turned and skated away.

There was something darn familiar about that girl. The name, too. Keaton. Jennifer Keaton. Bells were ringing in the back of Emma's mind, but wouldn't connect. Something was out of context.

"Alex!" Jennifer screamed at a teenage boy in a suit standing by the back of a moving van. "Hands off my piggy bank!"

Then it hit her. That was when Emma realized where she had recognized the little girl. Jennifer and Alex Keaton. The girl with long blond hair and the boy in a suit. But it couldn't be. It *couldn't* be. Emma watched that little girl grow up before her eyes once a week for she didn't know how many years.

The boy Loo for that matter. Then she'd seen them grow up again and again every weekday at five on WXXR out of Davenport. Jennifer and Alex Keaton were two of the three children on *Family Ties*, and even as she watched, she could see Mallory, true to type, fussing over a rack of garments being hefted into the house by a pair of burly moving men.

But how was it possible? Tina Yothers, who played Jennifer--if Emma's memory served her correctly, and it always did when it came to television trivia--was in her mid-twenties by now. She had a short-lived talkshow back when they were handing the things out willy-nilly to anyone who asked. How could she still look ten today? And Michael J. Fox, who played Alex, had his own prime time show again. Yet that was unmistakably the young Michael, still wearing suits and being true to his role.

Someone has to be playing a joke on you. Emma. Someone somewhere is having a jolly good time watching this. Someone is trying to crack you up and put you in The Home. But it won't work, dear. You're rational. You're sane. You just have to go into the house and think this who thing out.

Emma wasn't sure how sane it was to be paranoid that some unknown person had somehow hired a bunch of early *Family Ties* look-alikes to move into the house three doors down to drive her crazy, but she did feel that it would be best for her if she were to go inside.

She walked to her house a little more slowly, a little more old-womanly, than she had on the way out. There was too much on her mind to concentrate on her posture. She had just seen a ghost. But it couldn't even be called a ghost. *Sure it could, Emma. The Keatons could be the Ghosts of Sitcoms Past.* A frantic titter escaped Emma's lips and reinforced her increasing feeling that she was cracking up.

In the house, the old woman went directly to the kitchen and pulled out a bottle of cooking sheny she had stashed in one of her upper cabinets. She unscrewed the top and took a long swig of the diluted, but still satisfying liquor, and wished she had

something stronger. In her day she could drink most men under the table. though she seldom showed of this lalenl because it intimidated men more than impressed them. Now, at 96 pounds, she hoped cooking sherry on an empty stomach would soothe her nerves and help her think.

Emma. dear, it's a very simple explanation. You've been addicted to television since it was invented. You've never been able to keep you eyes off it. It's only natural that you start seeing television characters as you slip into senility. Some people see their dead loved one, and in a sense you are too. Your cogs are beginning to slip. and reality and TV are beginning to overlap. You're not long from The Home. babe.

Emma didn't agree with the "slipping into senility" part, but it was conceivable that a cog had slipped, and some neural process had overlapped another. All she had to do was peek out her front window and see there was no Ryder truck parked three houses down from her. or if there was. realize it certainly wasn't the cast of *Family Ties* lugging furniture from the back of it.

But she was scared. What if they were still there?

Suck it up. old girl. You have to look outside sometime. Soonest begun, soonest done.

Though part of her mind resisted this logic. the part that controlled her feet did not. because they carried her out of her kitchen and back to the living room. She still had the cooking sherry in her hand, and she took another swig of it. It wasn't helping. She'd never felt so sober in her life.

At the window, Emma's free hand brushed the yellowing lace drapes aside, and she pressed her head against the glass to see down the road. She could barely see the cab of the Ryder truck. At least that part of the illusion was true. Maybe she had even talked to a little girl, maybe that little girl really did have long blonde hair and a cherub face: maybe she had looked a little like Jennifer Keaton. Maybe that was what happened. She supposed since there was no one walking around the cab of the truck, she couldn't know for sure what had happened

unless she went outside again. and right now she preferred not to know. If she were going insane. she would rather not even think about it. After all, what could she do? Going outside and proving her sanity or insanity didn't interest her. She would rather stay inside and wallow in ignorant bliss.

She turned away from the window and was thinking about what she could do next--for the first time in almost fifty years she didn't feel like watching television--when she heard an awful screaming.

"Hellllllloooooo, Mrs. Wilson!!!"

Emma Wilson's front door burst open and a little boy wearing coveralls and a striped shirt tore through it with youthful exuberance. "Hi. Mrs. Wilson!" the boy yelled, even though he came to a stop a foot away from her. "Whatcha <loin?"

"Sweet Jesus, no!" Emma exclaimed. dropping the cooking sherry without realizing it. She was not only terrified that the young Jay North stood smiling up at her in full *Dennis the Menace* attire, complete with a slingshot in his back pocket. She was not only terrified because Jay North was now a grown man with a criminal record and his name in the tabloids occasionally. She wasn't even terrified that this proved she was cracking up and probably on her way to The Home. She was terrified because, as she lived and breathed, the boy was standing there in black and white. Just like his days on television, there was not a speck of color on him.

"Mrs. Wilson?" Dennis looked concerned. "Hey, Mrs. Wilson, are you **all** right?"

Emma couldn't answer because she wasn't **all** right. She was fading away. She felt dizzy and the world grayed at the edges, almost as if trying to match Dennis himself. Then she felt herself falling, but she didn't feel herself land.

When she came around, it was to the sight of Dennis's worried, black and white face. "Golly Mrs. Wilson! Are you all right? You just fell down! Should I call a doctor?"

A doctor? Good God. no! The last thing Emma needed was a doctor! If a doctor saw her in this condition. he'd put her in

The Home faster than she could blink. And the way things were going now, she figured the cast of *ER* would show up at her door.

"No... dear..." Emma said hesitantly, trying to regain her composure. "Just help me up and I'll be fine."

Dennis took her arm and helped her up. He felt like a normal person, warm and solid, but she stood as quickly as possible to get his hands off her. When she was standing, he did take his hand away, keeping it ready in case she swooned, and she was relieved to see his black and white didn't rub off on her. She shifted from her left foot to her right, and worked her arms in a circle. Nothing broken. Thank God for plush carpeting!

"Gosh, Mrs. Wilson! Do you need me to get you anything?"

"No, Dennis. You've done enough already." She had to get rid of him; she couldn't stand the sight of him. If she had to look at him much longer she would lose everything she had left. "Why don't you go on home and let me take a nap. I think I need one."

"Well," Dennis hesitated. "Okay, Mrs. Wilson. But if you need anything I'm right next door, like always! Bye!" Dennis ran back to the door, his young mind moving on to other matters. He paused, obviously seeing his friends outside. "Hey, Tommy! Margaret! Wait up! I gotta tell you about Mrs. Wilson!"

Dennis slammed the door behind him, leaving Emma alone with her thoughts. *You can't very well ignore that, Emma. Maybe once, but not twice. Not like that. You may as well check yourself in The Home right now and save yourself a lot of grief. You've gone around the bend, old gal, and there's no coming back from something like this.*

"SHUT UP!" She screamed into the air.

Nice, Emma. Screaming at yourself'll convince everyone you're sane.

Emma gave up on arguing with herself. She never won, anyway. But she wasn't giving in. Either this madness would go away, or she would deal with it on her own. It was either this or live in The Home with

some doctor pumping her full of drugs. Besides, Jennifer and Dennis had been nice to her, and nothing bad had happened so far.

As if on cue she heard engines racing, tires squealing, and sirens blaring in the street outside. She turned to the window in time to see an orange blur race past, then a police car blow in hot pursuit. It wasn't one of the new Chevy Cavaliers the Sheldon Police updated to a few years ago, but one of those large four-door monstrosities from the seventies that all look alike. She heard tires grabbing at the pavement as the cars slung around the corner onto Poplar Street, and then the musical blare of a horn playing *Dixie*.

Rosco and the Duke boys just had a high speed chase in the middle of your neighborhood, Emma. Not very safe. What if you'd been driving to the store just now? Or what if some of the crime shows you watch like "Law and Order" and "NYPD Blue" pop up? The shows you always considered "guilty pleasures." What about one of those shows where they are always shooting right there in the middle of the street? Where ya gonna be then, babe?

Emma didn't know, but she was glad she'd never let her grandson watch those Mighty Morphin Ninja Turtles, or whatever they were called, whenever he came for a visit.

Just before three, things took a real change for the worse. Ever since the General Lee had torn down her street at around ten that morning, it had been quiet. Emma had sat in her chair since then, refusing to turn her television on or look out the window. She didn't want to know what was going on outside, and she certainly didn't want to feed the fire by watching more television.

The sound outside was slowly building. For the first few seconds, she wasn't sure if the sound was real or something in her imagination. Now she knew. It was the constant droning of dozens of police sirens. They were not moving fast, but slowly gaining in volume and moving in her direction. She didn't want to look. She knew she would when the cars drove *by--Ij they drive by, old*

gal. You better hope they drive by and keep on going--but she didn't want to. As the sirens closed in, her curiosity again overruled the part of her mind that did not want to look. She took a place in front of her window in time to see the whole production. The mass of sirens sounded right on top of her, but they took another two minutes to finally appear. Leading the pack was a white Ford Bronco, moving as slowly as it had the time she'd watched it on CNN. And, just like the first time, it mesmerized her. Even after it disappeared onto Poplar Street, dozens of police cars paraded by. Most of the patrol cars were the newer-looking models that were involved in the chase, then Rosco went by again, and alongside them was Enos. Behind them, Andy Taylor and Barney Fife shared the single Mayberry patrol car, and trotting along at the very end of the pack was Wyatt Earp, as alive and well as when she'd watched him with her son in the fifties.

A crowd had gathered on the sidewalk as the strange parade followed its encore run. The whole *Family Ties* gang attended, as did the Seavers from *Growing Pains*--they looked much as they did in the later shows, Ben almost a grownup--Rudy and Olivia from the later years of *The Cosby Show*. Even Matlock was there, and Emma realized he had probably just watched his younger self drive by with Barney Fife in the midst of the chase. She could not see Dennis out in the road but when she looked to the house beside her, she was surprisingly unsurprised that the whole house in which the Altizers had lived for twenty years had disappeared and in its place was Dennis Mitchell's. The house and yard, like its occupants, were hazed in black and white.

You know what just happened, don't you, old gal? That wasn't a sitcom or hour long drama that just rolled by. That was a dose of reality. What's it going to be like when all those nice TV families you've turned to all these years begin acting like the people you've been trying to escape? What's going to happen when they start doing all those awful things people do to each other in real life, like you see on the

news or in TV movies?

More questions from her loyal friend, the brain. Questions she didn't want answered, but she knew they would be. As she watched the crowd outside break up, she saw cute little Olivia, younger than her *Hanging With Mr. Cooper* days, turn to look directly at her. A bratty smile played on the girl's lips as she extended her right arm towards Emma, and then used that awful gesture that no little girl should know.

Told you, my dear Emma. The worst is yet to come.

Emma knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that she was round the bend, and wouldn't be coming back. Her thoughts tried repeatedly to get her to call someone to take her to The Home. It was the best place for her. She could get the help she needed. She would be, if not normal, then in a fairly pleasant drug induced haze in a matter of days. But Emma wanted to live her life on her terms. That was the way it had always been and always would be as long as she had any say in the matter. But deep inside she had started believing that she did not have long at all. She was fading fast. All this was just so damned real. She knew it wasn't, but wanted to think it was, but knew it couldn't be, but-

You don't know what you think, but you know that if this is real, it won't be long before these people turn on the only normal person left in the little rerun heaven. And if it's not real. . . Well, if it's not real, then you're already long gone.

Finally, Emma and her thoughts agreed on something. Either way, she didn't have long. She had tried to call her son earlier, but every time she picked up the phone, people were chattering on it like the party line in *Lassie* and *Green Acres*. Old women--*Like you have room to talk*, Emma--chattering about foot problems, and Donna Reed swapping recipes with June Cleaver. Finally she gave up all together. As Emma searched the kitchen for the third time, looking for another bottle of cooking sherry she heard her front window shatter. Running to the living room as fast as her old legs could take

her, she arrived in time to see another rock smash through the glass. She looked through one of the small, square windows in her front door to see who was so wantonly vandalizing her home. Dennis, who had been so concerned for her earlier that day, was firing rocks from his slingshot. Apparently he was doing it to impress Jennifer Keaton and the two oldest girls from *Full House* as they appeared in the later years of the show. It seemed to be working with Stephanie Tanner, at least, who had her right arm rather inappropriately thrust down the back of Dennis's overalls.

Flinging the door open in a rage, Emma screamed at the children. "You kids get on out of here! Scat!"

Dennis looked at her with as much defiance as his black and white eyes could muster, "Why don't you bring your old"--his mouth formed and unmistakably filthy word, but made no sound, as if edited out by the FCC, or whoever was in charge of that type of thing-- "out here and make me, you"-- another string of obscenities spouted from his mouth, those also edited out. Even as he spoke, he cocked another rock back in the sling and let it fly, this one through the window of her upstairs guest room where her Arthur and his trollop of a wife always slept when they brought her grandson for a visit. Not thinking of the possible consequences of her actions, Emma took the steps in a crazed, arthritic gait and was in the yard before she realized the slingshot Dennis carried could easily kill someone, especially someone growing frail with old age. Luckily for Emma, Dennis was all talk. When he saw her coming down the steps after him, he and his small band of admirers turned and ran toward Jennifer's house, laughing and shrieking in the heat of the chase.

Emma waited at the bottom of the steps a few moments for them to come back, but if they were not done for the night, then she knew they weren't going to make a move with her standing there. Emma stepped away from the house to survey the damage and sighed. The little hooligans had really made a mess of things. There was nothing she could do about the windows, because it

was getting close to dark and she didn't even wish to speculate what the new world was like at night. Who could tell what she would meet along the way, what character would be running the store, or if the hardware store even still existed? She sighed and trudged up the stairs much more slowly than she had just come down them. She would worry about the windows tomorrow. She hadn't had her nap today, and hoped when--if--she woke the next morning, her neural processes would have repaired themselves and everything would be back to normal.

Emma awoke in her bed two hours after she fell asleep to the sound of more shattering glass. She didn't think it was one of her windows, and opening her eyes she noticed it was darker in her room than normal. It was the street light outside. Someone had broken it, probably Dennis and his damned slingshot again. She kept her ears perked for any sound that someone might be creeping around her yard but heard nothing.

Nothing, that was, until the television snapped on downstairs. She immediately suspected someone was in the house, but then began to wonder if the TV had snapped on by itself. After everything that had happened today, the TV turning itself on seemed almost inevitable.

Now what, old gal? You going to go down there, turn it off, and risk bumping into the one-armed man from The Fugitive, or some anonymous drug lord with an uzi from Miami Vice? Or are you just going to lay here and try to ignore it, waiting for them to come up those stairs and kW you right here in your bed? Decisions, decisions.

If there was someone in the house who meant her harm, Emma preferred to die on her feet rather than cowering in her bed like some helpless old woman. Downstairs, the volume on the television seemed to increase, as if urging Emma on in her choice. The old woman slid out from under the covers as silently as she could, slipping her feet into the shoes beside her bed after a bit of groping. She was still dressed in the clothes she'd worn all day, reasoning that she might need to flee the house quickly or go on an

errand such as this. Tip-toeing out of her room with as much stealth as her stiff old body could muster, she crossed the hall into the room in which her grandson slept when Arthur and Carol brought the boy for summer and holiday visits. Beside the door, just as she remembered, was the Louisville Slugger she had bought for him that his mother would not allow him to take home on the plane. For once Emma was glad Carol was such a bitch.

Now armed and feeling somewhat more secure, she began walking down the stairs, taking them as quietly as she could by walking close to the wall, a trick she'd learned, ironically enough, from television. Her slow movement allowed her eyes to adjust to the soft glow of the TV flickering from around the corner in the living room. She could identify Jay Leno's squeaky, cracking voice as he interviewed someone, and occasionally the live audience quaked in laughter.

Emma reached the bottom of the stairs unmolested. Her night vision functioning well enough to rival that of a 20-year-old. Unless someone was hiding in the parlor that branched off to the side of the house opposite the living room, or in the kitchen at the end of the alcove running beside the stairs, then that person was in the living room.

Oh no, not too many choices there. Emma. They could sneak up on you from two different sides or walk into you as you turn into the living room.

Hefting the bat against her shoulder, Emma decided that if she was approached from any direction, she would do her attacker some serious damage. Taking a deep breath, she swung around the corner into the living room.

The room was empty except for the television screen showing a close-up of none other than Willard Scott, the man with whom she always began her mornings. He was not looking at Jay, though. He was looking directly into the camera; directly at Emma.

"Well, hello there, Emma." Willard said good-naturedly. "I'm glad I could get

your attention. It doesn't look like you're going to outlive me, after all, does it?" The audience laughed politely.

A day's worth of stress and rage began a slow boil in Emma's brain. She could almost feel her body temperature rise as her blood began to run hot. A small fire burned inside her and it was gaining intensity. She began to tremble. Willard saw her from his place on Jay's couch, and seemed to mistake the trembling for fear.

"Whoa, Emma! I thought you were a tough cookie, but there you are, shaking like a cowardly old woman that needs to be put in The Home. Maybe I should call them for you. You want that you old"-- The last word was edited out, but the audience heard it and laughed uproariously. Jay chuckled and reminded Willard that his was a family show, even if it was on at 11:30 in the evening.

The mention of The Home did it; The Home which she feared and loathed more than anything. Her brain turned into a raging inferno when Willard mentioned it. With a war cry that tore at her elderly vocal cord, slung the bat at the television, striking it dead center in Willard's pleasant, pudgy face. The picture tube exploded, then tipped, dumping the 19" Hitachi to the floor. As the sparks faded to nothing, the room went totally dark, the explosion of light having ripped away the last of Emma's night vision.

Maybe that was it. Maybe that was all it would take for everything to end. All these people, these creatures, were spawned from hours of viewing on her television. Maybe now that the brain was dead, its counterparts would die as well.

A red beam of light whipped its way across the wall, then back repeating itself with the precision of a metronome. A police car maybe? There was no blue beam accompanying it, but it could be one of the little lights detectives stick in the front windows of their unmarked cars. But, no, that didn't seem right. She could hear an electric whirring sound through the broken window as it made each pass. It sounded familiar, and her heart sank when she realized it might have been something she had heard on TV.

All Emma could do now was see what was outside. It wasn't going to leave her alone. she was sure of that. Stepping to the window, her shoes crunching on the broken television screen that had exploded outward, she peeked her eyes around the side, like Arthur when he used to spy on her to determine when the cookies she liked to make--and he liked to eat--were going to be ready. She could see the light emanating from a thin slit of red glass and a bulb working its way back and forth behind it. However, thanks to the busted streetlight, the night was so dark that she could not tell what it was attached to. Every light on the street was out except for the red one. Hell, there was no light anywhere that she could see. Just that hypnotic, whirring red beam.

It happened so fast, Emma was surprised her old reflexes had responded to her brain at all. Two lights popped up into existence on either side of the light and a car engine revved. Eyes widening in shock, she realized what was about to happen. She didn't dive backward so much as she just fell away from the window. Falling with far more force than when she had fainted earlier, there was an excruciating pain as she felt her hip break and a few disks slip in her back. But the action saved her life. For the time, at least.

A normal car never would have cleared the cinder block foundations of the house, but it wasn't a normal car splintering boards, shattering glass, ripping through pink tufts of insulation, and exploding through the plaster wall. It was Kit from *Knightrider*, propelled into her home at an upward angle and coming to rest on her beloved La-Z-Boy. The recliner's wooden struts splintered and snapped, and its yellow padding oozed out like blood. Emma writhed in pain on the floor, helpless and unable to move.

Like an old woman ready for The Home.

There was a pop from somewhere inside Kit, and the driver's side door began to raise with a slight hissing sound. Emma's eyes clenched tight together as pain continued to rack her body, and she didn't notice

the man stepping out of the car until she heard his shoes stepping on the glass and chunks of plaster littering the once tidy living room floor. Opening her eyes, she could see him in the light from Kit's headlights, which now bathed the room. It wasn't David Hasslehoff that emerged from the car, but something much worse.

From her earliest childhood, Emma had always been afraid of clowns. She knew it was irrational, and there was no traumatic incident involving a clown in her past, it was simply a phobia. Arthur had watched *Howdy Dooddy* religiously as a child, and though she usually watched it with him, she always became engrossed in knitting or reading the paper during the segments with Clarabell. He always gave her goose bumps whenever she saw him, and never failed to make her heart skip a beat or two. She was so glad that when they canceled the show she would never have to see his painted-on smile ever again.

But she had been wrong. He stood before her in living black and white, his smile still painted as wide as ever, his big gray nose that everyone knew was red in real life still firmly attached. In his hand, he held his trademark bottle of seltzer water. He lifted it with a comical expression of surprise on his face, then squeezed the handle and danced happily from foot to foot as Emma was drenched in a seemingly never ending spray of cold water. Emma coughed and spluttered when the splashes caught her face, trying desperately not to swallow any of it. Either the bottle ran out of water or Clarabell grew bored with the prank, and he pitched the bottle off to the side where it bounced unbroken off a pile of splintered wood that had once been her wall.

Her ears didn't pick up the sound at first, but it was soon loud enough to filter its way through the haze of pain and terror that was currently occupying her mind. It was laughter. But it wasn't Clarabell. True to his act, Clarabell never let a peep escape his lips. The laughter was all around her. She looked around frantically, still whimpering in pain through clenched teeth, expecting to see all the characters that had been terrorizing her

all day crowded around her. laughing at her misery. But there was no one there. Just her and Clarabell.

!Cs a laugh-track, you dolt! It's laughing at you because you're an oldJool. I'll bet The Home doesn't seem quite so bad now does ii? Well. you had your chance. babe.

Maybe she was going into shock, but the pain in her hip and back blessedly began to fade. So was the world around her, gray-ing at the edges just like earlier in the day with Dennis. But she didn't think she would be opening her eyes to Clarabell's concerned

face this time. She didn't think he would try to stand her up, dust her off. and offer to get her something. She didn't think she would be waking up at all.

Clarabell offered her a mischievous grin and twiddled his fingers at her, telling her goodbye. Goodbye, indeed. The last thing Emma saw before she faded out all together was the sole of Clarabell's big, black and white shoe lifting above her and slowly lowering itself down to her face. In her ears, the laugh-track rolled on and on loudly into her oblivion.



Melanie Johnson

Blacklight

Nathaniel Kuratomi

Tunnels filled with people,
black shrouded, arithmetically
stroking Pleasures of pain
through tracks and endless remote
tracks of spaceless gift/caught eyes,
lapsed and lulled amid
the midnight curse/seized
by crazy jealousies, insurmountable
drunken excused loves of night's
last distant roar always lapsing and
lulling. Distant centralization,
starry & desolate slaps of night,
rolling and climbing/crawling and
descending/flames lit on white,
executions like the vast dawn, the
last dawn of branching lapses
of lulling light...

to sleep away
stages, phases of unending cycles
of eternal circles 'round linear
light/'round infant mazed names
to die in heaps upon beds,
to lie in steeple threads,
cloaked from hope and bound to
exactness of breath/bound to
exactness of death/bound to
exactness of theft illuminated
ripped from hearts of silver
plated endless purity through
the lapsing and lulling
of sleepless rites.

A Mouse Dolled Up for God

Sarabeth Mills

Anyone in town smiled if you said her
name:
Miss Mousey.

She once tied a horse to the back
Of her car and went driving.
Supposedly she forgot it was there,
Or maybe failed to see it, almost
Blind.

Poor eyesight didn't stop her visions
Of UFO's,
Of angels,
Of God.
I saw her make her way to church
Each Sunday, gliding across the sidewalk,
Dolled up
In case He sat beside her.

False eyelashes almost unglued,
Rouge inflamed cheeks glowing
Above her rose-pink all-weather jacket,
She walked in
Stiletto heels towards the church,
The run in her stockings
Barely visible below
The hem of her short A-line skirt.
She smiled through shiny pink lipstick
As the usher showed her in.

Self-Reliance

Honor McCain - 2nd Place Poetry

Dirt, tiny black seeds mottled my sweat-slicked legs
as I waded through waist-high weeds, gathering
rose petals, mint leaves, fronds from banana trees.
My search for food made me desperate, brave;
every nerve buzzed with survivalist fire.
And when I sat down to my Spartan *meal*,
I conveniently forgot that my bowl was borrowed
and Mama would soon call me in to supper.



Jamie Johnson

Papaw's Chair

Brian S. Bowen

The old county road established just as much of a border separating the two states as the Tug river did on a map. The two of them snaked together through the Appalachian mountains, firmly agreeing on when to round a curve and when to straighten out. Brad stood on Mamaw's frontporch and dug out a fresh chew of Levi Garret from the crumpled sack he kept in his left backpocket. He looked down at the dirt and dust that blanketed the unkept road. Dry stalks of ragweed and grass grew from the cracks in the pavement showing just how untraveled this route had become after the closing of the mine in '92. His eyes skipped over the hemlocks and oaks that covered the West Virginia side of the river. With deep thought he stared across the murky water over to the edge of Kentucky.

While bags of trash, bald tires, and a crushed trailer hid the yellowish-earth on the hillside. Gently, the water rolled over the smooth rocks buried deep in the riverbed. Odd blue and green-colored houses dotted the top of the hill away from the garbage that traced a path from the river to their backdoors. Brad gnawed down on the tobacco leaves and used his tongue to roll them into a ball. Slowly, he wadded the top of the Levi Garret down while keeping his eyes fixed on a broken refrigerator and a doghouse on someone's backporch.

"Come on batter-batter-batter-batter, swing!" Brad heard his younger cousins chant in the frontyard. He looked over his right shoulder and stared at them playing wiffle ball just above the steps that led up from the road. Aunt Ruby's oldest son, Bill pitched, while her youngest, James, batted. In the narrow yard, nine-year old Junior played first base with his slightly-older sister, Annie, playing catcher. All the other girls in the family sat out back imitating their mothers, cooking and gossiping in the kitchen, but not Annie. She always took a

particular interest in baseball, fishing, and shoaling guns when her Daddy wasn't around and when Uncle Eddie would say it's okay.

"Come on give 'im somelhin he kin hit!" Stevie, another of Brad's cousins, yelled.

"Whonch you shuddup, big lips!" Junior returned. Big gums and lips had always plagued Stevie's father's side of the family and it sure didn't start missing generations with him. Brad opened his mouth to correct his younger cousin since it hurt Stevie's feelings, but thought better of it. The sound of a diesel engine straining to haul coal from another county echoed across the river. Brad spit a smooth, brown stream of tobacco juice off the porch into a thick spot of yellow grass.

"Swing!" the kids in the frontyard shouted before James swung the bat. He hit the ball made up of rocks inside an empty half-pint of chocolate milk, held together by duct tape. The makeshift ball sliced through the air and bounced against the long piece of plywood that closed in the frontporch. Brad smiled as he watched James run past his brother safely to the base. They played straight base since the yard was too narrow to play all three. Also, an old tree stump sat in just the right spot so they could always use it as a base.

"Looked like Ken Griffey Jr. out here didn't he!" James said, bouncing up and down on the stump.

"Shuddup James." Billy replied. Even for brothers, those two never seemed to stop fighting. Brad looked back across the river and watched a coal truck drive down the Kentucky road. Again, the trash and raped landscape caught his eye. Hard to believe the next town over is called Beauty, he thought.

The porch screen door opened and Brad's Mamaw stepped out saying, "Brad, you want me ta gitcha a glass of 7Up or RC?"

"Naw, Mamaw, I'm not thirsty," Brad replied and watched her step down onto the cracked 2x4's that made up the porch. She only stood about five foot two and probably weighed only a shade over ninety pounds, but her little body had conceived five chil-

dren and watched them bear her a dozen grandkids. She always told Brad about how his Daddy and Uncle Eddie caused her every gray hair on her head. but she wouldn't trade 'em for anything.

"Yer aunts and cousins in there fixin up some supper, so I figgerd I'd sneak out here an have me a cigarette," she explained as she dug a Pall Mall out of the red package. Blue veins stood out beneath the shaking hand that held a cigarette between her lips. Slowly, she moved that same hand over to hold the match box that she struck a wooden match on. She looked out at the frontyard and smiled at the sight of the children playing. "Yeah, I-I'm glad yer home Brad," she said.

"Thank ya, I'm glad to be home." he answered and watched her lean the cigarette into the flame. Stevie popped the ball straight up so that Annie positioned herself beneath it and caught it.

"Every night I prayed to the good Lord in Heaven to bring ya home," Mamaw said then exhaled the initial smoke. "Burned a candle every night you were overseas, Brad, jest like I did with yer Papaw, Daddy, an Uncle."

"Yeah. you an Aunt Sara were the only ones who ever wrote to me," Brad said. He swashed a mouthful of tobacco juice through his teeth before he spit it. The children changed sides in the frontyard as Annie and Junior got ready to bat while Billy stayed on the makeshift mound playing all-time pitcher. Mamaw inhaled deeply off the cigarette and watched the kids push and pull on one another as they passed.

"You keeps play nice!" Mamaw yelled from the porch. A quick cough jumped out of her lungs as the 1970 black-rimmed glasses she wore slid to the bottom of her nose. Brad watched her carefully while her wrinkled, pink cheeks stretched open. Her hand continued to shake as she reached up and fixed her glasses. Down in the yard, Annie picked up the bottom of the yellow bat where electrical tape was wrapped around the grip.

"I 'member when you an yer brother used to play down there with those Staten

boys from the bottom of the hill." Mamaw said watching the children. Brad chewed on the ball of tobacco and listened to a crow calling down from the hill that rose on the other side of the house. Its "caw-caw" overpowered the sparrow and robin songs that usually echoed through the mountains.

"Yeah, seems like a long time ago," he answered.

"I know it does." she said before she took another drag off the cigarette. "Butcha grew up so fast Brad, I hardly got to spend any time with ya at all." Below the porch the game continued while Brad's Dad and Uncle worked on a car just down the hill. They always parked away from the house since an engine usually didn't get fixed without a half-dozen cuss words and Mamaw didn't like that; also, it gave the brothers a chance to sample a new brew of White Lightning that one of them had.

An unfamiliar bird sang four notes up the hillside where the crow screamed just the minute before. Aunt Ruby's laugh echoed through the house. Brad chewed some more on the wad of tobacco and felt the juice burn his tongue. "Ya know yer Papaw was really proud of ya, Brad," Mamaw said and flicked the end of the cigarette in her hand.

"I know."

"He always loved ju kids. I know he never said it, but he always did," she said, looking at the ashes in her palm. She turned around and stared at the rocking chair on the edge of the porch where no one had sat since Papaw died of black lung three years ago. Brad looked down at the slippers covering Mamaw's feet and noticed an ant crawling over the splints in the wood.

"I miss 'im, Mamaw."

"So do I." she answered and became teary-eyed.

"Wonch you git de ball o'er de plate!" Junior yelled from the batter's box.

Mamaw glanced quickly at the yard before looking back at Papaw's chair once more. "Lemme go in here an gitcha some-thin to drink," she said, lowering the cigarette and starting toward the screen door.

"Naw, I'm okay Mamaw, don't worry

'bout that."

"Naw, I'll gitcha some RC now, you like RC, don'cha?" she said without making eye contact with him.

"Yeah, I like RC." he said then grabbed the handle and pulled the door open while helping Mamaw up into the house.

"Okay, you-you gimme jest a minute an I be right back." Brad noticed her voice began to crack, but didn't want to draw attention to it. He held the door open and watched Mamaw step through the sunlight that pierced the windows across the living room. A trail of cigarette smoke drifted through the light like the coal dust that used to linger off Papaw's hat. He stared at the familiar pictures that hung on the opposite wall. He leaned back, spit once more, then turned to face the pictures in the living room. Slowly, he stepped into the house.

Once he crossed the threshold, Brad used his hand to ease the screen door shut. Aunt Sara's husband, Curtis, kept the door hinges well-oiled so they never made a sound. The armchair Papaw sat in while inside rested beneath the pictures with the same tan cushion and imprint it had three years earlier. A small end table leaned up against the wall with Papaw's dull bronze spittoon on the top shelf. Beneath it lay a stack of old *Field & Stream* magazines while the next shelf down contained a framed snapshot of Aunt Sara's daughter, Mary. Brad moved his eyes up and studied the five portraits that stretched across the wall.

On the far left, a faded black and white picture of Brad's great-grandfather in a fancy 1920's frame dangled from a single nail. His dark eyes seemed to stare beyond the lens that captured that brief moment before he left for Europe in 1918. A few months later, his remains came home after losing a lung to the Germans and bleeding to death at the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Beside him, beneath a heavy blanket of dust, rested a picture of Brad's Papaw. Inside the handmade cherry wood frame a long, white crease broke the corner of the photo. He wore the standard Army green uniform with brass buttons and a thin mustache just above his lip. At the bottom of the frame,

engraved on a small, bronze plate, read the words: Corporal G. Olien Davis. 1st Infantry Division. 1943-1945.

Brad shifted the wad of tobacco from one side of his mouth to the other. He fumbled with the house-keys in his pocket while an oven timer went off and Tammy Wynette sang from the radio in the kitchen. A picture of his father that Aunt Ruby had blown-up down at J.T.'s studio back in 1967 hung next in line on the wall. Brad's father stood in front of a large tent with a black tarp covering the entrance. Heavy red mud caked his tiger-striped fatigues from the knees down. He squinted through his eyelids and seemed to look right through the camera at something unknown and far away. Only the watch that Mamaw bought for him as a graduation present gave him any personality whatsoever.

Beneath the last two pictures sat a stained-wooden chest where Mamaw kept extra blankets and quilts she'd made. On top of it, a large, photo album, a frayed hardback copy of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson's *Macaria*, and the King James Version of the *Holy Bible* lay stacked on top each other. Above the trunk, the first of the two identical picture frames showed Uncle Eddie sitting on a sandbag wall somewhere in the highlands of Vietnam. Without a shirt on, and even in black and white, his arms revealed how deeply the sun had burned a farmer-tan into them. In the background, the dense mountains overlooked the rice paddies in the valley. Eddie smiled wearily at the camera without showing his teeth.

Brad stepped to his right and looked at the Parris Island bootcamp picture of himself in the last frame. Being the only one of the five in color, his dress blue blouse fit snugly over his chest with a snow white, bus driver hat covering his shaved head. His gray eyes glared into the camera with a strange look of distress and pride. Brad chewed some more on the ball of tobacco and held the spit under his tongue. He glanced once more time at himself before going back on the front porch and thought, what a fuckin joke I was.

When he opened the screendoor, Brad

saw his father and Eddie climbing up the steps from the road. Shouts of "Uncle Tommy! Uncle Eddie! Play on my team! Please. Please!" came from the children when they saw them. Brad leaned over the plywood banister and let the tobacco juice pour out of his mouth.

"Naw, naw, not now, maybe later. you keeds go ahead an keep on playin." Brad's father said and moved past James and Billy. Uncle Eddie went past the children without saying a word, holding a half-filled Mason jar tightly in his dirty hand. He looked up and saw Brad standing on the porch and smiled.

"Whu'chu doin up there?" Eddie asked and walked up the four wooden steps that connected the house to the yard.

"Nuttin." Brad answered. His Dad climbed up the steps behind Eddie with sweat covering his unshaven face. Eddie flopped down in a rusted, beige porch chair with chips of white paint flaking off its legs. Gently, he sat the Mason jar down and took off his Cook Trucking hat. Most of his hair had long since fallen out. but a thin patch still grew just above his ears and on the back of his head. Brad's father sat down on the sturdier wooden chair with a vinyl cushion next to where Papaw used to sit. The two of them always sat in the same place just like Papaw had for as long as anyone could remember. Only the doorway and a small, lawn chair that one of the brothers would use when Mamaw sat with them separated the two. It was understood that no one else ever sat in these chairs for any reason.

Brad remembered when he was a boy and used to sit on the cracked splints in the porch, listening to the stories the men would tell. Papaw seldom ever said anything, but when he did, he told some of the best war stories. More than once he told how he first arrived in France on that June morning in 1944. The landing craft that carried him took a direct hit and Papaw had to strip down and swim the half-mile to shore. Without a rifle, helmet, pack, or boots, he first stepped on the wet sand of Omaha Beach.

"Didcha git the car fixed?" Brad asked and leaned against the banister.

"Naw, gonna have to go down Kelley's in the mornin an see if he's got the right kinda starter," his Dad answered. "Whu'chu been doin?"

"Not a whole lot, jest watchin the kids play ball," Brad answered. Eddie pulled a pack of Camel non-filters out of his t-shirt pocket and flicked a cigarette out. Brad's father leaned to one side and took a dirty rag out of his back pocket.

"You ain't been back there with them wemen have ya?" Eddie asked, searching for a lighter in his jeans pocket.

"Yeah, right."

"You the only one of us who joined the Marines so ya never can tell 'bout yall, banda brothers?" Eddie said with smile stretched out behind the cigarette that bounced between his lips. Finally, he pulled the lighter from his pocket and held it up to his mouth.

"I figgerd somebody had ta see the light sooner or later," Brad said then spit again.

The screen door opened and Aunt Sara stuck her head out and asked, "I thought I heard somebody out here, yall want a glass a pop, a biscuit or anything?"

"Yeah, you bring me a glass a water, Sara?" Brad's father asked without looking at her.

"Me too," Eddie said, exhaling two streams of gray smoke from his nose.

"You want anything, Brad?" she asked with a warmer tone in her voice.

"Naw, I'm okay, Aunt Sara."

"You sure?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm a'right. Mamaw was gonna bring me a glass a RC, but I think she forgot. Don't wony 'bout it though, I'm okay."

"Okay," she said then disappeared behind the closing door.

"Yer Mamaw come outcher an talk with ya?" his Dad asked.

"Yeah, fer a few minutes. Talked 'bout Papaw an got upset."

"She a'right?"

"Yeah, she went back inside so I figgerd if she was really upset Aunt Ruby or Sara'd take care of 'er," Brad said. He took the wad of tobacco out of mouth and threw

it over the road toward the river. The sun began to drop from the sky like a spider dwindling down a thin strand of cobweb.

"Brad, wonch ya grab that chair an have sit down with us." Eddie said as he picked up the Mason jar and unscrewed the lid. Brad just stared at him.

"Yeah, pull that chair up son," his Dad added after stretching his legs out and crossing one foot over the other.

"Yall sure?"

"Wouldn't tell ya to do it if I didn't mean it," Eddie replied then took a drink from the jar. A grimace stretched across face.

"What's the problem, boy?" his Dad asked and took the jar from Eddie.

"Well, only yall, Papaw, an Mamaw ever sat out here. Not even Uncle Curtis or Jack been allowed to."

"Neitha of them ever fought in a war. This is yer Papaw's house son, you sit right here, you done paid yer dues," his Dad said then lifted the jar and let the moonshine pour into his mouth. The screen door opened again and Aunt Sara stepped out with two glasses of water and a glass of RC in her hands. She stood not much taller than Mamaw, but really hadn't developed the same kind of back problems that Mamaw had. Brad always adored his Aunt Sara.

"Yall don't be sittin out here gittin drunk before suppertime an corruptin my little Brad," she said, handing out the drinks. After passing them out, she wrapped her arm around the small of Brad's back.

"Yeah okay, Sara, we're talkin," Brad's father said then chased the moonshine he just drank with a gulp of water.

"Alright, you keep an eye on dem kids an give 'em a holler here in about fifteen minutes to git ready fer supper."

"We will, Sara, go on back inside," Eddie said and reached out to take the jar back.

"Eddie, you little shit," Sara replied. "Yall come on in in a little bit," she continued then went back inside.

"That woman drive ya up the wall sometimes," Eddie said before taking another drink.

"You gonna sit de hell down or what?" Brad's father asked. "Eddie, gimme one a them cigaretles."

Brad grabbed the folded lawn chair and opened it. He placed it beside his father on the other side of the door, away from where Eddie sat. A dirty film covered the bands that wrapped over the metal rods and created a seat. Brad quickly sat down and took a sip of the RC. Eddie handed a cigarette to him to pass on to his father. Out in the frontyard, Annie stood beside the plate in her left-handed batting stance. Her short, blonde hair ended just before it could touch the top rim of her glasses.

"Ya glad to be home, Brad?" Eddie asked while he stared at the moonshine splashing around in the jar.

"Eddie, what kinda dumbass question is that! You think he wanna stay over there?" Brad's father answered.

"Now don't git like that. H was as'ed Brad a question."

"Yeah, I'm glad to be home, Uncle Eddie," Brad interrupted. He felt so proud to sit beside the men of the family after so many years of looking up to them. "Grew up a lot."

"Yeah, well gain' to a shitho like that a do it to ya son," Brad's father said and pulled a short, seventy-nine cent. purple lighter from Johnny's Grocery out of his pocket.

"Yeah, I 'spose so," Brad answered.

"So, what's it like in Africa?" Eddie asked.

"Hot, I'll tell ya that."

"Well, no shit, I figgerd that," Eddie said. "That ain't no kinda answer. Whut's it like fightin them African niggers?"

"Not purty. They believe in what their doin."

"Ya know, that was one a the problems in Vietnam. Mother-fuckers believin in what they're doin," his Dad added then motioned for the jar. "Fuckin' politicians too, I tell ya, too goddamn scared to fight the war."

"Know whu'cha mean, Tom," Eddie said and sat back, letting the metal legs squeak under the burden of his weight. He gave the jar to Brad who handed it to his

Dad. Inside the house, plates and silverware rattled together while being placed on the table. The sound of Aunt Ruby's humming rendition of the church song, "Peace in the Valley," echoed through the open windows and cobwebbed corners of the house. The children continued to play baseball.

"Yeah. I know whu'cha mean too," Brad said. "They gave us these rules of engagement which was bullshit. Snipers sittin up there takin shots a'cha all day an ya can't do nothin about it."

"Sounds familiar. don't it Eddie," his father said. Eddie just mumbled a "Um-hum" and nodded his head.

"Yeah. this one night, I went out to relieve one a our posts, an we came under sniper fire. That was the first time Id ever been shought at," Brad said. His Dad passed the moonshine to him without drinking from it. "We was at the New Port compound in Mogadishu an me an this guy named Costa, we were headin back to our hooch when the next thing ya know. bullets were snappin over our heads. By god, it sounded and it just felt like a knife was cuttin through the air. It scared the shit outta me. We hit the deck an hoped that one a us didn't git *hit*. Then, all a sudden, one a those Cobra helicopters from the Eyes Over Mogadishu hovered over us an shought that mini-gun. I tell ya, they say that thing shoots a tracer every seventh round an it looked like a laser fer 'bout ten seconds. That sniper didn't shoot anymore after that."

Brad finished his brief story and slowly raised the jar to his mouth. He felt the warm fumes rise up against *his* face, but he refused to inhale while he drank. As soon as the taste registered on his tongue, Brad felt like vomiting, but swallowed the clear liquid anyway.

"Sounds like the ole Puff the Magic Dragon gunships we had in Vietnam. Man, those were nasty," Brad's father said and blew smoke out his nose. The children stopped their baseball game in the frontyard and gathered around one another. One by one they sat down on the dry earth while Annie remained on her feet. She threw the milk carton ball high up in the air, playing

catch by herself. Junior held the bat behind his neck and draped his hands over both ends. "I tell ya, there's some nasty shit that goes on in war," he continued.

Eddie rested the back of his neck at the top of the chair while he stretched his left leg out. Brad's father took a long drag off his cigarette and reached out for the jar as he began to speak, "Yeah. I 'member when I was with the 5th, somewhere in the mountains along the Cambodian border. We were out on a patrol with this group of Monlagnards, I tell ya what, those were some motivated mother-fuckers there. Vietnamese didn't even like 'em. Called 'em *-moi*.' That means savages."

He paused for a brief second in thought then restarted, "Anyway, Id only been with this group fer 'bout two weeks an this was the first time Id gone out in de bush with 'em. Middle a monsoon season too, an that rain felt like needles stabbin ya. There was me an this other Green Beret named Joe. He'd been in country so long he thought he was from there. Can't 'member his last name, but he was jest a crazy ole Indian. Used to tell me those Montagnards were his long lost family."

Below the front porch, the children laughed and scuffled in the frontyard while a fat lady carrying a brown, paper bag in her arms walked down the road. She wore only a dingy, white t-shirt and a pair of charcoal shorts. All three of the men on the porch listened to the sound of flip-flops snap against her dirty heels while thick varicose veins bounced beneath the cellulite on her legs. Brad's father took a swig from the jar then began again.

"Anyways, that rain was pourin down on us. Eddie you know whut I'm talkin 'bout. We was on the side of this mountain, headin to scout out a trail the VC were usin as a supply route. You wouldn't believe the noises the jungle makes when it rains. We moved thru the vines an brush just tryin to hear anything. Besides that, you really couldn't see anything eitha. Fuckin jungles so thick you couldn't see yer hand if ya held it up in front of yer face. I 'member my feet sinkin in the ground an wonderin what I was steppin

in. Finally, we found somethin. I tell ya though, it wasn't what I thought it was gonna be. Joe held up 'is fist to freeze us. I 'member keepin that AK close to my shou'der an watchin fer anything. Then I saw Joe smilin an motionin fer me to come up there."

The smell of fried, country steak, col-lard greens, and apples lingered in the air while Brad's father flicked the half-burned cigarette off the porch. Brad reached over and took the jar from his father's hand and drank from it. The evening sun fell behind the distant clouds while a gentle breeze blew across the mountainside.

"Ole Joe just stood there lookin at me an smilin. This Montagnard named Ngo or Tho or somethin like that. he kep'a eye on point. I moved on up the column. not havin' to worry 'bout makin noise with all that rain. Then I saw it. The closer I got, the more clear it became. Right there in front a me. Couldn't quite believe it at first. There was this chain wrapped 'round the bottom of a tree with a big shackle on it. In that shack-le was this rottin hand stickin out one end, with part of an arm comin' out the other. Couldn've been more than a foot long. Ole Joe whispered in my ear that 'bout three weeks ago they caught this little VC girl set-tin' tripwires. He said dey found 'er 'bout two clicks west of here an chained 'er to this here tree. Said he gave 'er his tomahawk an told 'er she could chop off 'er arm an go home or all of em were goin take turns on her. One or the other. Said she jest stared at 'im without battin an eye. She spit and hacked off her arm with jest two strokes. Said she didn't even make a damn sound. That's when Joe said he knew we weren't gonna win this war."

The women and girls in the house laughed and sang together while they brought the food to the table. Without say-ing anything or looking at each other, Brad handed his father the almost empty jar. From the screen door Aunt Ruby's voice said, "Tommy, you or Eddie tell them chil-dren to come on in here an git warshed up."

"A'right," Brad's father answered with a low, sullen voice.

"Yall chew some backer or somethin

too, git that moonshine off ya breath." she said.

"A'right, go on back inside Ruby," Eddie said irritated then continued. "fuckin war'll make ya mean."

"Some people are jest crazy though." his Dad said. Slowly, he raised the jar to his mouth and swallowed before an terrible expression stretched across his face. "Ugghh!" he shouted, "Goddamn that last drinks nasty. I tell ya what too. this tastes like Pete ran it through 'is car's radiator. Lemme catch 'im doin' that too an I'll keel that bastud."

Brad looked up and noticed the sun had disappeared behind the dark clouds on the horizon. He thought about how different this story was from the ones he heard many years ago. "Looks like we'll finally git some rain," Eddie said, watching the clouds move closer toward the house.

Brad's father stood up and yelled, "Billy! You an Annie round up yer brothers an git in here fer supper."

"Okay, Uncle Tommy," Billy yelled back and reached down to help up Junior. The children ran up the steps and darted across the frontporch. Stevie pulled the screen door open and jumped up the step leading to the living room. The others fol-lowed him with Annie being the last one in.

"I never heard you tell that story before," Brad said after fmally looking at his father.

"Well, that ain't somethin Im gonna tell ye when yer jest a boy."

"I know, but-"

"Hey!" His father interrupted and looked down at him. Brad could see his eyes seem to look right through his face and stare at the back of his head. "Yer a man now, an more than that, ya gotcher Papaw's blood in ya. It's a damn shame that a lotta families git away with never havin to send a son off to war, but that's alright. we'll do it. Yer last name's Davis an we love our country. Yer Papaw, gawd rest 'is soul, would say the same thing if he was here. Don't ever forget that son, an don't ever forgit what happened to ya while you were gone."

Brad stared at his father while Eddie

slood up and went inside. His father motioned' with his head for the two of them to go in too, but Brad just looked down at the perspiration rolling off the side of the glass of RC. As his father walked past him, he reached out and patted the side of his shoulder. Brad stood up and looked out at the mountains. The dark rain clouds moved quickly over the valley, evanescent the twilight. He looked down and stared at the dust covering the base of the jimsonweed growing just beneath the porch steps. His thoughts flashed back to the time he spent in Somalia, when he used to stare at the dry plants that somehow had adapted themselves to the desolate earth there.

"Brad, come on inside honey," he heard his Aunt Ruby call from the living room.

"A'right," he said under his breath, still wondering what other war stories he had never heard from his Dad or Papaw. Brad watched the rain begin to fall and intensify as it blanketed across the valley. Even after all these years, raindrops still washed up the smell of tar and rubber off the abandoned road. His younger cousins laughed and yelled in the dining room behind him. "Don't know how lucky they got it," he said to himself.

Brad thought of the starving, Somali children that lined the roadsides

and city streets with swollen stomachs and snot clinging to their upper lips. He thought about that little boy in Chisimayu. How he jumped out of a pickup truck to grab a piece of metal that fell off the back end. Brad remembered watching the boy squat down so that his barefeet stayed flat on the ground. The yellow imprint of his small hand wrapped around the end of the piece of metal. Just as he lifted it, a gunshot pierced the air and the boy's face splattered on the side of the dirty, white truck.

Brad looked away from the jimsonweed and closed his eyes. He remembered how a corpsman and a couple of Marines placed the boy's body on a stretcher and carried him away. Brad thought about the next morning when the boy's father came to the front gate of their compound. The man stared straight ahead and his face remained motionless as he handed the two sentries on duty a slip of paper. The paper demanded a payment of one-hundred American dollars for the death of his son. One of the sentries just tore it up and said, "Ha i labin," and motioned for him to leave. The other sentry just laughed. Brad opened his eyes and looked over his left shoulder. He watched the rain leak through a crack in the roof and bounce off Papaw's empty chair. "Brad come on in here," he heard his Mamaw yell. Slowly, he turned to his left and just stood there, staring at Papaw's chair, and listening to the sound of the rain.



Andrew Burchfield

Early in October

Marged Howley

Early in,
October dropped by, knowing like acorns.

Twilight on an oak chest,

earth dug into its gentle face,
salt and youth engraved there.

While you were here,

we stole each other from death,
like the shore exchanges mussels with the
sea.

We shuddered.

On one final warm day
we visited the cliffs and the caves
that stretch to the bottom of the lake.

Now the winter

shows us the sky that shows,
imparts an unknowing wisdom,

renders us infants, early in.

Nick

S. Diane Wellman - 1st Place Poetry

At our parties he read tarot cards
And often, after we had glimpsed our futures
He would read his own.

Always, the raven appeared.
That's because I'm going to die, he'd say

And he did.

We gathered around his grave
Friends as young as he
Holding hands in the August morn
Drunk from Bloody Marys and sorrow.

The preacher opened his Bible
But what we heard were ravens
Circling like apparitions in the cloudless sky
Twenty, thirty, more
They cawed out his message.

His future was found
The past lay buried in us and the ground.



Andrew Birchfield

What You are Born With

Adam Barraclough - 2nd Place Fiction

I haven't told anyone what happened except my friend Donald and I don't think anyone else would believe me but I know the truth about Captain Justice. Donald lives next door and he says that nobody would listen to me because I'm Special Ed. Even though I'm older than him and I've been going to the high school for five years now, Donald knows about stuff like that and I think he's probably right.

My dad and his friends were in the garage drinking beers when I told them the big news about Captain Justice coming to town. They laughed and my dad said 'We live in such a pissant town that all they could scrounge up was a guy named Captain Justice? Detroit gets the Hammer, Cincinnati gets Shock Wave, even Springfield's got Centurion and we end up with 'Captain Justice'?"

They laughed some more and I went on into the house to tell Mom about it. She was talking on the phone and smoking Marlboro cigarettes. I tried to tell her about Captain Justice but she wasn't paying attention so I went to my room. On the news they did a story on Captain Justice, how he was coming to Midvale to clean up the streets. They showed some video of him lifting up a car and shooting targets with his energy beams. They said that he had been picked from a group who had just graduated from the Institute of Extraordinary Learning and Law Enforcement and that he was originally from Beaver Falls, Ontario. The news said he would be at a picnic in the plaza where the mayor would introduce him to the city, everybody was welcome to attend.

I asked my mom and dad to take me to the picnic so I could meet Captain Justice. My dad thought it was a stupid idea but Mom offered to take me so she could "check out the total package." Dad got mad and said if anybody was going to take me to the picnic it wasn't going to be Mom, he'd do it himself if

he had to. Mom didn't eat her plate of meat-loaf and green beans. she lit up a Marlboro cigarette and blew smoke all over the kitchen and just stared at my dad. My dad kept eating. I rinsed my dishes off in the sink and drank all my milk then went to my room so I wouldn't have to hear them yelling at each other.

My dad took me to the picnic. We were kind of late and there were already lots and lots of people there, some kids were wearing Captain Justice t-shirts and hats with the scales of justice in shiny gold. I asked my dad if he would get me a shirt but he said 'You're too old for that crap. Besides, I'm not paying good money for that corny bullshit."

Well, that's what he said.

I got a slice of the big cake that was cut into really small pieces and while I was eating it the band from my high school started to play. The boy who played the tuba was kind of fat and his face got more and more red as he played. I thought Captain Justice would have to save that fat kid from his tuba if the song went on any longer.

Captain Justice was on a big platform with the mayor, the fire chief, the police chief and a lot of other really important people. He wasn't wearing the Captain Justice uniform but you could tell it was him because he looked strong even in that gray suit and tie. When the band stopped playing, the mayor told a little bit about Captain Justice, how his real name was Lance Crenshaw and he was from Beaver Falls, Ontario. The mayor said Lance found out about his powers when he was in high school at a football game during which he scored the winning touchdown. The mayor told about how Lance had worked real hard to put himself through training and how proud we all were to have him here in Midvale.

Captain Justice stepped up to the microphone and in one quick pull tore away the grey suit. He had on the Captain Justice uniform underneath and it was all shiny purple and gold. He flexed his muscles a little bit while everybody took pictures and clapped and shouted. His voice was deep

and loud and he talked about how he wanted everybody to feel safe in Midvale now that he was on the job. He said he was going to work with the local authorities to put a stop to drug pushers and criminals and that he would need everybody's help to make it happen. Captain Justice was very polite and thanked everyone on the city council for choosing him to be Midvale's sanctioned public defender. He reminded all the kids to stay in school and then at the end of his speech he fired an energy bolt from his bare hand up into the sky where a big bag of balloons and confetti was hanging.

The balloons fell down and everybody cheered and laughed except one girl who got a piece of melted balloon on her neck. She was standing in front of us and I saw her mom take her away when she started crying. I felt bad for the little girl, but it wasn't Captain Justice's fault she got burned.

When we were driving home my dad said he wasn't impressed with Captain Justice. Dad said he looked like "Just another weenie in tights" and asked me if wearing spandex made you a better crimefighter.

I said I didn't know.

By the time Captain Justice came to speak at our school he had busted up three crack houses, rescued one boy from a fire, saved an old lady from drowning and arrested 17 drug dealers in the park. My friend Donald saves all the stories about Captain Justice out of the newspaper for me. Everybody was real impressed with all the work Captain Justice had done except for my dad. Dad said that the firemen and the police could do all that without any superpowers. Mom said Dad was just jealous and she bought me a Captain Justice t-shirt and poster. Mom joked around and said she was going to put the poster up in their bedroom so my Dad would know what a real man looked like.

I wore my shirt with the scales of justice on it the day Captain Justice came to our school. Everybody went to the assembly hall after lunch, and when we were waiting to go inside one kid pointed at me and said "It's him! It's Captain Justice!" He must

have been kidding around because everybody laughed and I laughed too.

When the spotlight came on, Captain Justice was on the stage. Some of the teachers were on the stage behind him sitting on bleachers like we have in the gym. Captain Justice told us first thing that he needed our help. He said he knew there were drugs going around the high school and he said we should all keep our eyes out for trouble, but to leave the fighting to him because that's his job. He told us about how dangerous drugs and alcohol could be, how they could hurt you worse than a car wreck or a tornado. He told us to stay in school and to work real hard at our studies.

He told us about how he was in high school when he discovered his powers. It was at a football game and a guy on the other team had spit in his eye during the end of the game. This made Captain Justice so mad that he plowed through the whole defensive line on the next play to score a touchdown. He said he was real sorry that some of those football players from the other team had to go to the hospital, but he really couldn't control his powers back then. He told us that we always have to be responsible for our actions.

Captain Justice said that someone here today could be a sanctioned public defender someday, you never knew who was going to develop superpowers. Just look at him, another ordinary guy in high school just like us who found out one day that he had super-strength and could fire energy bolts from his hands. It could happen to any one of us, he said.

One guy yelled from the back where all the bad kids sit, "The Hammer could kick your ass, you can't even fly!" Lots of people laughed but Captain Justice stayed calm. He said he had met the Hammer when he attended the Institute for Extraordinary Learning and Law Enforcement and that there was no way they would ever fight each other because they were on the same side of the law. Then he said he was going to do some demonstrations.

First he lifted the bleacher stand with at least 20 teachers on it. We all laughed

because Mrs. Perry screamed even though she was as safe as can be. Captain Justice let the teachers down easy and apologized to Mrs. Perry for scaring her. Next, the gym coach Mr. Lindemueller rolled these big wooden cutouts painted to look like different drugs out on the stage. Captain Justice asked everybody to stand back while he fired his energy beams.

"Say nope to dope!" he shouted as he blew up a big pot leaf.

"Crack is for quitters!" he yelled and smashed the big yellow crack rock.

"Don't get stuck with the needle, kids!" he said as the energy beam tore apart the big fake needle full of green drugs.

After Miss Bertha the janitor swept up the mess Captain Justice showed us how he could use his super strength to jump up into the rafters of the assembly hall.

"Who needs to fly when you can jump this high?" he asked. I bet the guy who said that stuff about The Hammer felt stupid then. Captain Justice did some acrobat stuff, swinging from rafter to rafter and doing somersaults in the air. He landed and took a bow and everybody clapped for him. We all stood up in our seats and someone started saying "Justice, Justice, Justice...." until everybody was saying it. Captain Justice shook hands with principal Rishard and left the assembly hall.

I guess that's when I did the first bad thing I shouldn't have done. All the kids were walking around and the teachers were yelling at them to get in line but nobody was listening. Some guys pretended to get in a fight and it was real easy for me to sneak out into the parking lot. I didn't expect to see Captain Justice but I guess I was hoping I would. When I found him he had his back to me and was trying real hard to open the door of a car. I could hear him cussing, "Goddamnpieceofshit! Open the fuck up..."

Captain Justice really said that.

I saw he was smoking a cigarette but it didn't smell like my mom's Marlboros. He didn't even see me until I tapped on his back and he turned around. "Oh. Hi kid, didn't see you there." He put out the cigarette and put it in one of the pouches on his belt. "You

looking for an autograph or something?"

He took one of my notebooks out of my hand and scribbled with a pencil on a blank piece inside. "There you go," he said and handed me back my notebook. I asked him if that was his car and he said yes. I didn't think Captain Justice would drive a car like that and when I asked him about this he ignored me like Mom does when she's on the phone and watching TV at the same time.

I turned around and looked back at the school, hoping nobody could see me.

"Hey kid, do you think you could squeeze your arm through the window right here? My muscles are a little too big to fit."

I looked and thought I could so I tried. The lock popped up and I opened the door. Captain Justice kind of pushed me out of the way and I saw some pictures spilling out of a yellow envelope in the seat of his car. The pictures were black and white and showed a man who looked like Captain Justice naked. It looked like he was helping another naked man up off the floor. I saw then why the man must have fallen, because his pants were down around his ankles. Captain Justice saw me looking at the pictures and got really red in the face. He said that somebody must have put those pictures in his car and it was probably one of the bad guys, so I had better run back into school in case the bad guys were still hanging around.

He said not to worry, Captain Justice would take care of everything.

A few days later I was telling Mom about how cool it was when Captain Justice blew up the drugs at school. I didn't tell her about what happened after the assembly because I didn't want to get in trouble, but I probably could have because she wasn't really listening anyway. She started listening when I told her I was going to be a sanctioned public defender someday. I told her about what Captain Justice said, how anybody could have superpowers. Mom laughed and said that maybe if Captain Justice had been my father that could have happened, but with my dad the only power I could hope for was loser power.

I left Mom in the living room and went out into the garage. Dad and his friends were out there and they had been drinking beers all night. I tried to tell them about how Captain Justice had lifted 20 teachers at one time but they weren't impressed. Dad said "The only thing that jerk-off ever picked up is a paycheck supported by taxpayer's money."

His friends laughed and one of them said "Hey Bill, isn't that pretty much all you do in the welfare line?"

That got my dad real angry and he started yelling about how it wasn't his fault he'd been fired and that they'd canceled his unemployment checks. I was mad at Dad for calling Captain Justice a jerk-off so I said "At least Captain Justice has a job, Dad."

His friends laughed louder and Dad smacked me in the mouth. It didn't hurt real bad but it did make me more mad so I said "The only superpower you'll ever have is loser power!" That time Dad hit me so hard that I don't remember what happened for a few seconds. His friends were still laughing and now I was crying so I ran to my room. That's when I did the second bad thing that I shouldn't have done. I decided to run away from home.

It was easy to sneak out. I even made nine peanut butter and jelly sandwiches before I left and Mom never even asked me what the heck I was doing in there. I had my backpack full of underwear and socks and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and I went out the back door. The only place I could think of to go was the park and I went through the woods in the backyard to get there.

It was cold in the park and I sat at a picnic table under a tree to eat a sandwich. It was dark and scary and I wondered if there were any drug dealers around. The peanut butter made my mouth sticky and I got a drink from the water fountain when I heard some voices. The voices sounded like they were coming from the bathroom and one person was making noises like they were hurt. I know I shouldn't have gone into that bathroom but I was thinking about what Captain Justice would have done and about how he told us to keep an eye out for trou-

ble.

There was a little tiny light in the men's bathroom and I could hear voices and noises coming from one of the toilet stalls. It definitely sounded like someone was in trouble so I yelled "Hey!" really loud and then it got really quiet. After a few seconds, the door to the stall swung open and I saw that it was Captain Justice, only he wasn't wearing the Captain Justice uniform he was just wearing some gym shorts.

"Hey kid, what the hell are you doing here?"

I told him about running away from home and that's when the other guy in the stall stepped out. He said Captain Justice was a real pervert and spit in his face. The guy had on gym shorts too and a shirt that was cut off so you could see his bellybutton. I remembered the story about how Captain Justice had gotten his powers, when the football player spit on him and for a second I thought Captain Justice was going to knock this guy through a wall. But he didn't, he just kind of looked down at his shoes and said real quiet "It's not what you think."

I guess the other guy didn't believe him because he left really fast. I could hear his car pulling away when Captain Justice walked out of the bathroom. I followed Captain Justice out to his car.

"Quit following me," he said. I told him I didn't have anywhere else to go. He took a bottle out of his glove box and drank from it like he was real thirsty. He handed the bottle to me and I just held it. It smelled bad.

"Things have been pretty crappy for me lately too, kid. I've been thinking about running away from home myself."

"Is that why you were hurting that man?"

"Well, I wasn't exactly hurting him"

"Were you pumping him for information about the drug dealers?"

Captain Justice laughed. "I guess that's more honest than most things I could tell you."

"Huh?"

"Never mind."

"Was that one of the bad guys you told

me about?"

"No. well... yes. I suppose if he's a bad guy then that makes me one too, kid."

"But you're not a bad guy you're a good guy."

"Am I?" he asked and took the bottle from me. He took another big drink and a little spilled out. I think it was wine or vodka in that bottle.

"I thought you said never to drink alcohol."

"That's right, you don't want to end up like me."

"Sure I do, I want to be just like you." That's when I noticed that Captain Justice was crying. I took his hand and told him everything would be okay just like Mom did for me last winter when I had a real bad fever. Captain Justice wouldn't stop crying then he started yelling at me to leave. I ran back up the hill under the tree to the table where I put my backpack. Captain Justice was screaming like my friend Donald when he broke his leg and the bone came out through the skin. Captain Justice threw his bottle at the windshield of his car and all the glass broke real loud. Then he started pounding on it with his fists, and smashed it up pretty good. Energy started shooting out of his hands into the car and then it all blew up. Parts and stuff flew back as far as I was standing and I left then.

I saw it and that's what really happened.

I know I shouldn't have given up on Captain Justice but I left him crying next to his burning car because I didn't know what

else to do. I walked home, took off my Captain Justice t-shirt, took down my Captain Justice poster and crawled up in my bed.

The next day everybody was talking about how Captain Justice was retiring from being Midvale's sanctioned public defender after his fight with drug dealers in the park last night. Donald, whose dad is a policeman, said the drug dealers must have had bazookas because when the police got there a car was all blown up and Captain Justice was curled up like a baby sucking his thumb. When I told Donald what really happened he said I should just forget it. He said I'd only get Captain Justice in trouble if I told people the truth. Donald is smarter than me about that stuff, and I believe him.

My dad said he knew Captain Justice wasn't the man for the job all along. He apologized too, for hitting me so hard the night before. Dad said that when he was a kid he had wanted to be a superhero too and that he understood how a guy like me could get caught up in all the hype surrounding Captain Justice. Dad is really excited about the new sanctioned public defender. Her name is Maiden America and she can fly, shoot laser beams from her fingers and Dad says she looks great in spandex.

I told Dad that I hoped I never got superpowers and he laughed and said "That might be the goddamn craziest thing I've ever heard you say."

My dad actually said it that way.



Luci Wilson

Driving Lessons

S. Dianne Wellman - 1st Place Fiction

August, 1973

Prichard, West Virginia

"It's hotter than the hinges of hell in this smokehouse... Ann says, fanning herself lazily, stretched out on the double bed that barely fits into the tiny room.

"STEEE-RIKE!" Skipper's voice sails through the open window.

I rummage through a desk drawer, squeezed between the bed and the doorway, and find a paper fan with *Collin's Funeral Home* printed above the head of Jesus. "If Jesus had long hair why aren't men today supposed to?"

"Men with long hair have sex and smoke dope." Ann knows everything. I sit on the bed beside her bare feet. From outside I hear the cracking sound of a baseball sent sailing.

"Yee-Hi! Homerun! Bring it on home, Johnny!"

"How can anybody run in this heat?" Ann says.

Restless, I get up and look out the window to the backyard. My brother, Mark, slides into home on the seat of his red striped shorts; blades of grass stick to his sweaty back. Johnny clears third, sticks out his chin, runs toward home and dives head first into Mark, who tries, unsuccessfully, to move out of the way.

"Let's do something," I say.

"We could go up on the hill and smoke cigarettes."

"Yuk."

"You have got to learn how to smoke," Ann says. "You can't just blow it out your nose. You have to learn how to inhale, otherwise people think you're faking it."

Ann is 15 and well developed in all areas. Billie Marie, Ann's older sister, tells Ann about things like getting your period, getting pregnant. French kissing. Then Ann

tells me. I am 14 and built like a stick. I am the oldest in my family, so I rely heavily on Ann's guidance. Sundays, after church, my family goes to Mamaw's for dinner, then I walk down to Ann's. During the summer we spend almost every night together. She likes to come to my house, which is closer to town, but there's more to do in the hollow.

"I know," Ann says. "I'll teach you how to drive."

"Really?"

"Billie taught me. Dad will let me go to the store and back by myself." she says, rising from the bed. "I just can't get on the main road. I'll drive out of sight, then we can switch places."

We stroll nonchalantly up the back steps of the house and into the kitchen. Aunt Bounce is drying dishes.

"\1/hat are you girls up to?" she asks suspiciously.

"Nothing," Ann says, "where's Dad?"

"Out on the front porch talking to Slim."

We walk out of the narrow kitchen into Bounce's and Bill's little bedroom, through the low-ceilinged living room where my mom and dad were married, to the front porch. The concrete porch runs the length of the house and is covered with an aluminum awning. Ann and I like to sit on the porch when it rains and see who can write the most three letter words. There are over one hundred.

I dodge a strip of fly paper hanging from the awning and sit down on the steps, stretching my long skinny legs onto the sidewalk and into the sun. Uncle Bill smokes a cigarette and rocks back and forth in his favorite chair. Slim, Mamaw's brother who lives up the hollow, sits on the glider like a giant on toy furniture. Ann squeezes herself a seat and sits down beside him.

"You girls are growin' up," Slim drawls. "Got yourselves a feller yet?"

"Ann does. I don't." I say.

"Daddy, can I drive to the store?"

"What'd your Mom say?" Bill asks.

"She said it was alright with her if it was alright with you."

"Ethel Ann," Bounce's stern voice

echoes from the living room like God Almighty.

"Well, that's what you said yesterday," Ann replies quickly. Surprisingly, Aunt Bounce does not respond. "Please can we go, Daddy? I'll be careful and I won't get on the main road."

Bill fishes into his pocket and pulls out the keys. "Get me a pack of Winston 100s. and we're out of buttermilk. Lois, do you need anything?" he calls, but she has already returned to the kitchen. It occurs to me that I have never heard Uncle Bill call Aunt Bounce by her nickname. "Need anything, Slim?"

"I don't reckon," he smiles.

Ann takes the keys and I dart inside the house for our shoes. I slip on my sandals, but Ann prefers to carry hers as we walk down the short sidewalk stained with mulberries. I open the picket gate and marvel that Ann does not even wince as she tiptoes barefooted across the dirt road sprinkled with gravel, and into the black cinders that form the driveway. She throws her flip flops into the back seat of the four-door Dodge, turns on the ignition and backs onto the road with all the confidence of a seasoned professional. We drive up the steep hill and wave at Skipper as he turns from the pitcher's mound, then we round the curve and drive out of sight.

The hollow is exactly one mile long from head to mouth. There are seven homes in the hollow and my relatives live in most of them. The head of the hollow dead-ends into wooded hillside. while the mouth of the hollow spills out onto Centerville Road. This narrow black-topped road, which we call the main road, meanders for miles through hillsides that sometimes sit so close to the road you can put your arms out the car window and touch the leaves. Aunt Ethel and Uncle Oscar live at the mouth of the hollow across from Grace Methodist, where we all go to church. They have a big, two-story white house with green and white striped window awnings and a long, wide front porch. You can sit on the porch railing and pick sour apples from a tall tree that's perfect for climbing. Everyone says Aunt Ethel, my

Mom and Bounce's sister, has a green thumb. Her huge yard has so many beautiful flowers it looks like the cover of a magazine. To the right of the house, on Centerville Road, sits their store, which has two gas pumps outside and gets plenty of business, since there aren't too many other places to fill up your car.

Ann drives down the hollow till we are out of earshot from her house. She stops the car on a straight stretch of road, turns off the engine, and jumps out of the car. I scoot behind the wheel as she slams the passenger door shut.

"Good thing Mrs. Brown's is the only house till we get to Ethel's," Ann says.

"I hope I don't run over the hill. The only car I've ever driven is the Dodge'ems at Camden Park."

"You know that 'D' is for drive?"

"Yes. And 'R' is for reverse."

"Right. You always start the car in park, and give it just a little gas. That's the gas pedal and that's the brake. Go ahead and start it."

I turn the key and the engine roars like it's alive. The steering wheel vibrates in my hand.

"Oh, Lord."

"Give it some gas," Ann says. I press on the gas pedal and the car growls like a chained dog ready to break free.

"Perfect," Ann says. "Now push in the brake and put the car in drive... The gear shift slides easily over the -D-."

"Now let up on the brake."

The car moves forward slowly. "I forget how to guide it!"

"See that little ornament in the middle of the hood? Just line it up with the side of the road. But you've gotta make sure to look at the whole road in case a car comes."

"Then what do I do!"

"You just get over as far as you can and let'm pass."

Various parts of the hollow are named, like streets in town. Booger Hollow is a stretch of road that dips downhill and back up again in a short and sharp blind curve. The trees on both sides of the road have grown together at the top and shaded

the curve, so that even on the sunniest day. Booger Hollow is dark. I stop at the top of the blind curve and listen for cars.

"Nothing's coming," Ann says, so I ease my way down the curve, then press on the gas and climb back up the hill. My palms are sweaty, and after clearing Booger Hollow I stop again.

"Okay," Ann says, "you're doing good. You can coast all the way down Tom Shannon Hill. It's the easiest part."

"What about Mrs. Brown?"

"She's usually in the house. But even if she sees us, she won't know you're not supposed to be driving."

"Thank God there's one person in this hollow we're not related to."

If you're brave, you can fly down Tom Shannon hill on your bicycle without using your brakes. You gather so much speed that once you're at the bottom of the hill you can coast down the road and around the curve almost to Ethel's. One side of Tom Shannon is wooded hillside and the other is a steep drop into a long wide pasture where we race ponies, and where Uncle Oscar keeps his cows. Last year when he was tending the cattle a black snake bit him and his whole big toe turned black. After he got back from the doctor and had calmed down, he let us look at it and it was disgusting.

I lift my foot from the gas pedal and coast down the long steep hill. Mrs. Brown is standing on her front porch. She waves. I honk. I round the curve then stop the car and jump out. Ann slides behind the wheel and we pull into Ethel's, giddy with adventure. We walk into the store, the screen door slams shut behind us, and the wooden floor creaks beneath our feet. Aunt Ethel pops up from behind the counter like a Jack-in-the-Box.

"Hi, Ethel," I say.

"Hey, girls." Ethel is always pleasant and somehow I associate this with her abili-

ly to grow flowers. "I've got some cold Ne-Hi's in the pop machine."

Ann opens the wide red cooler and pulls out an orange pop for her, and a grape pop for me. She removes the caps with the bottle opener built into the front of the machine. Bits of ice float through the pop. It is so cold it makes my eyes water.

"I really enjoyed your solos in church this morning," Ethel says.

"I wish old Mrs. Cooksey would stop requesting we sing every time she walks through the doors," Ann says.

"She knows a good thing when she hears it." Ethel laughs.

Ann and I sit down in the two rocking chairs across from the counter and sip our pop while Ethel works behind the counter, rearranging a shelf of aspirin, packaged stockings, rain bonnets, sunglasses, cigarettes.

"Daddy needs two packs of Winston 100s," Ann says, winking at me.

"I'll go get the buttermilk." I walk to the back of the store where several short aisles, a deep freeze, and a refrigerator serve for groceries. When I return with the milk Ann is standing at the door.

"No need to be in such a hurry," Ethel says.

"We gotta get going," Ann says. "Daddy said to put this on his bill."

"Alrighty then. You girls be careful driving."

Ann dives out of sight and lights a cigarette. She turns on the radio and hands me the Winston. I blow the smoke through my nose. We deliver the milk, and without asking permission, get back in the car. We dive up and down the hollow, back and forth, from head to mouth, switching places, until I can dive, and I can inhale, and we can see the evening sun setting over Mamaw's barn and know that it's time to go home.

Drum

Dana Kinzy

I built you, Drum.
Speckled calfskin stretched
taut over shiny pine wood,
the ropes fastening head to frame left
red welts on my hands
as I embraced you and pulled tight
your laced black corset. Like me,
pulled tight, focused, you know
your purpose and warble out
the required *Goon Go Pah*
as I summon.

There is a face, a laughing face
on your skin, I use it to navigate
your resonance. If I tickle this face,
you whisper your secrets, tell me how
to talk to the campfire, how to stomp
my feet with the rhythm. I have laced your hair
with shiny, magic beads -- one for every love,
one for every season. They glow in
the firelight, the color of ripened raspberries.

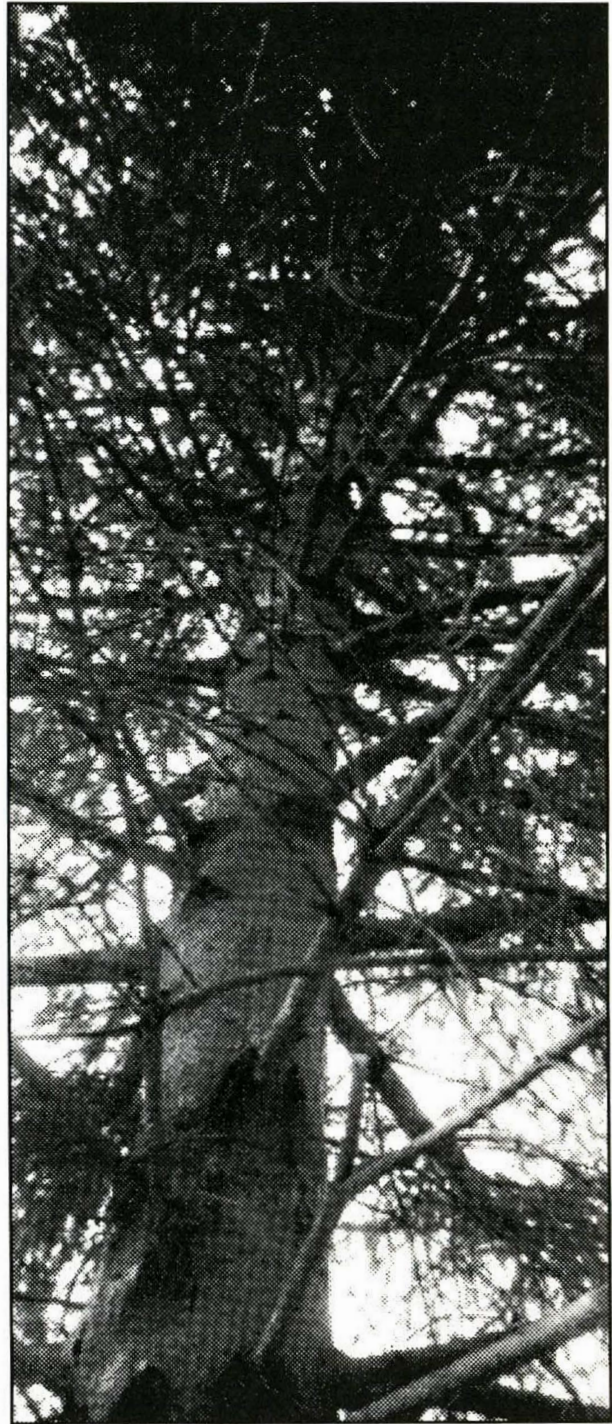
Your reflection shines in a man's eyes.
He covets your hollowed frame,
the beads. His hand rests dead upon
you. He does not know how to touch you.
He does not know that I carved my
name inside you, but only made you
mine with the touch of my hands on your skin.
He would keep you in a corner, silent
and miserable. Under control.
Perhaps he is afraid of you.

Last night we shouted together in the silo. Drum.
I heard a tribe of voices in your holler. You sang
chants and rituals. We offered our voices
up to the great star blanket.
In the dark. I want to crawl inside you,
into your orange heart,
your red womb. We will
hold each other and pound
out music for the universal pulse.
We will weep in the darkness.

City Boy

Kirsa Hughes-Skandijs

Is the beauty of industry worth the
Cancer in your bones? You say
"Yes" impatiently, you damn
The torpedoes and inch closer
To the factory, to the warehouse, you
Smell the plastic night air and it
Tastes good, it's warm like neon
Across the street. You're rich, you
Have your ice, your diamonds,
Sparkling broken glass flourescing
Under street lamps in the parking
Lot. A shredded black glacier
Of old tire rests beside that chain
Link fence that you will wash
Up against, migrating over
Rubbery asphalt with the texture
Of basketball and dinosaurs,
Prisms of oil set in each pebble.
You come to the siren song of power
And size, the big machinery banging
And squealing painfully, unseen
Behind metal siding and safety
Signs. The sky is filled with writhing
Dark patches, holes in the clouds
Lit by the orange lamps, passing over
You pressed up against the fence.



Jamie Johnson

Kid

Aaron Grubbs

Frankie is ten years old and
lodged peacefully in the
twelve-foot skyscraper on the
corner of his lawn.

His green-leafed willow with
a thousand floors for
a thousand rooms feels
like home when Dad is gone.

Dusk, and the Memphis sky is an orange
makes suburbia glow, hazily. A shadow, his mother,
can be seen in the kitchen; a
raven in a red cardboard box.

A flicker of shadows as
she chops maniacally,
a machine, a bird-machine, with
grinding metal gears and talons.

As he falls, he thinks of his
travelling father: a shuttle that's gone from sight
just after launch.

When will it return?

His bird-machine mother
unaware, his father
piercing the atmosphere,
Frankie lands face up, gasping.

Alone, all alone, lungs that
lie empty, staggered, stuck
motionless in the heart
of a small boy's breast.

Machines, shuttles, and buildings
mock, laugh, and guffaw;
they insult his sentience,
and drag us all down.

Sleepy Little Post-Modern Celebration

Gregory W. Wheeler

When thoughts make time both objective, making boys furrow
Their brows, and an object of fixation, even affection, perhaps,
Someone can say, with sternness and honesty, lacking in austerity. though,
"We've broken our mirrors." We collapse.

Gaily-adorned analysts parade over rough city asphalt. painted
By the labors of stout men long dead. Technicians fill the squares,
And flower-boxes spill their products into view, the faint
But noticeable odor of hyacinths hovers in the homogeneous air.

Of course, some Hamm must lead this motley parade,
a procession of celebrity and scholar, alike in one regard
on, that being their meander through the sections of shade
chanced upon the way, mumbling confessions that the way will be hard

or at least "difficult," some will say. A word sinks
through natural filters like the formation of sedimentary formations
seeming geological. but the word .fossil. brings
with it too many archaeological, thus romantic, relations.

Ill, all I can do is sit and mumble .Cf, cf, cf . . . " and listen,
Placing an ear to my canon, (not "fixed gamst self-slaughter," another prince groans)
Mercury rev belle and sebastian big star velvet underground of
Montreal, I pause to cough, syd barrett my bloody valentine rolling stones.



Luci Wilson

The Overflow of Suicide Notes

Nicole Larose - Staff

Remembering what I read haunts me. It's not about plot anymore; sorry, Mrs. Marn but I didn't read those chapters filled with symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath* because that was never on the tests. I'm less of a slacker now. When some idea from a book grabs my attention, dangling me from a noose that can't. won't break my neck. I keep rereading it. Read and underline and reread-these regular, repeatable actions define my trips into the fictional wilderness of books. The possibility of encountering the unmanageable during the exploration petrifies me, yet I always go back, go further for more. I cannot sleep without my nightly mock devotional, reading the sentences Marin Amis writes about suicide notes: "Nearly everyone tries their hand at them some time, with or without the talent. We all write them in our heads." But now my head is full. Since I haven't earned the right to blame my lousy memory on age, I have to purge my soul. I'm frightened because the notes are leaving my mind for paper, for the world of finite reality. Does writing them down mean I am taking that next step on the suicide journey, losing the ownership of my neurotic tendencies and giving them to the world for harsh, dispassionate criticism? No. I have already slipped by claiming ownership of my thoughts, but I don't have the right because they exist, have always existed out there as a part of the universe.

The Instructions and Apologies: As with any suicide note, eventually someone will find these. Despite all attempts to rebel against conventions, a note by definition must have an addressee. Take them as they are. Don't worry. Don't stop. They are not cries for help or pathetic pleas for love, just odd psychoses from an otherwise thoughtful brain. I cannot date them as they have lived together in my head for an immeasurable

period of time; they have grown and changed as new versions joined the club. They are a whole, a study, a practice for living.

To Places, Origins and Environment:

Geography should not create our identity. With personality, language, culture and customs formed by the limitations of place, multiple homes annihilate the possibility of a cohesive self. Others label me the daughter, the student, the employee, or the American, but who wants any of these labels? Never can people realize the creative self of their imagination. When I would draw pictures of acid oceans with quicksand shores or the first female quarterback in the NFL, the teacher would snicker and squash my dreams. Draw butterflies; draw prom queens. Most people, blinded by a devotion to their homeland, happily exist within a commercialized microcosm that protects them from thinking about their banality and blind devotion to television and fast food. Look what places have done to us.

To Friends and Women:

Heterosexual women make horrible friends. "The Boys" never get mad if I don't call them every day, if I don't get them a well thought out birthday present. They are happy if I do; they take it as it goes. They enjoy laughter, esoteric philosophy, and beer, and never dwell on the problems with the friendship. Happy never mad, protective never destructive. The image of men as warriors, killers, destroyers is simply a stereotype. The real violence occurs when women look for mates. I must choose lazy friends because they never look far away. "The Boys" only steal my boyfriends for golf or guitar. Jaime stole one in the back of the school bus; Lauren succeeded on the well biked streets of our neighborhood; Sara hurt me under the bleachers during basketball practice; Liz did it right at prom; Rachel sobered me up on the dance floor; Kerry flashed the world by the fountain on campus. Good thing the world is no longer straight. Bisexual girls present a puzzling problem of

potential loss of all friends, irrespective of gender. Erin visited campus, bringing only a change of clothes and her rampant sexuality. At The Club she lured her high school friend and my college friends into a quasi-orgy on the upstairs couches. Making out with one girl as a boy massaged her chest, she captivated the whole gang. None of "The Boys" could act normal with those erections. With lesbians, the emotional aspects of a friendship can exist without the worry of them blowing your boyfriend and blowing the friendship to pieces. The blowjob as the root of all evil-the battleground, sporting match, chess game where women abandon all else for victory. If I had paid more attention in Physics or Calculus class. not doodled symbols (ex., I, γ , \Rightarrow) while watching the incredibly large Mrs. Sag calculate the area of figures created by rotating functions, which always formed into donuts, then I could test my theory with experiments. Women destroy each other with the force and effect of a nuclear mushroom cloud, only with an eternal half-life. The equation: entropy of women = ex.,

To The Future and My Future:

Vomit at the idea of worth based on achievement and goals. Hitler had an ultimate goal, eliminate the Jews, and was over 6 million murders on his way to achievement. So applying this ideal to Hitler gives him worth. Repulsive. I don't have a plan, don't want a plan, don't need a plan. Plans were invented by the same people who thought up ValentinesDay, gouging money out of gullible people who need to fit in. They have succeeded because the main definition of a future means having a plan. My rebellion against accepting a future based on these principles stems from a hatred for commodity, love for futility, and skepticism of reality. I despise myself for considering it laziness claiming the slacker label to make myself cool; nobody from the popular crowd liked me anyhow, except when they could copy off my test. If we may live in a giant's fantasy, an alien's anthill, or some artistic creation-the perfect painting or the truly

great American novel-what is the point of going through that hell?

To Variety and Language:

Nothing, no action or gift. is unselfish. Try to think of anything that does not benefit the giver. Pushing a stranger out of the way of a speeding vehicle saves someone's life and makes the sacrificed feel good. This is a rash generalization, but language forces it. We can say selfish or unselfish, but how can we vocalize the steps between? Take colors. Everybody has a favorite color because of perception and memory. Purple for me, possibly because of the carpet in the nursery where I perfected walking and talking without observance and scrutiny. But how can I say that what I think of as red is not what someone else thinks of as purple? Perhaps we all have the same favorite color and just call it something different-an example of the limitations of language at the foundation. How else can we explain red, but red? The book says: something red. I can say reddish or blood. Can't debate the facts, red falls at the extreme end of the visible spectrum, but the human eye and mind suggests inconsistencies. With other things variety and preference are more obvious. Fruity candy messes with my mind the most. I love anything with the word berry or the letters r-r-y at the end, and hate all things connected with citrus. Yes, a memory.nightmare from home. When I get a pack of fruity candy I have some problems. Examples: Lifesavers come in a repeating pattern, I will reach the red eventually; Skittles come in an equal distribution, or close, so it's only a matter of giving away or trashing the unwanted; Mentos taunt me, no consistency. The strawberry taste like pure pleasure, a drug induced hallucination in my mouth and through my limbs. One small, spherical moment of ecstasy. The hard outside just fights off the penetration of your teeth. You move it with your tongue towards, but not all the way, through the molars. Bite down firmly but easily. Then it's chewy and creamy on the inside-the great suck and chew combo. But sometimes there are most-

ly lemon and orange-the taunting of some factory worker who happily deprives others of this joy. Working at the 7-11. I pretended we were out of lids so I could laugh at the thought of those annoying customers spilling and raging in the car. Variety just keeps us wanting more, never fully satisfied. Why live for these moments? Somehow the world keeps the moments from becoming all-time, have them in real-time or at-this-time or on-company-time but never all-time with this place.

To Breakups and Male Logic:

A lack of logical thought plagues every guy I date. Intelligence and logic are not synonymous, a common mistake I must stop making. "The Entrail," Kerry the Whore, some Random, and I went to Mycroft's. We sat like the four dots on a die, Entrail next to me and across from Kerry, in the dim light of a darkly stained wooden booth built into the wall. As Entrail affectionately pet my hand and kissed my cheek, and Random commented on how cute a couple Entrail and I made, Kerry massaged his crotch with her freakishly long toes. After I territorially ran her off through naming calling, Entrail claimed innocence. Then he stopped calling me and developed a fetish for fingerlike toes. It's so easy to say which of you I have cried for more. Kerry the Whore, you did not follow those unwritten rules-that guy doesn't matter-you sacrifice me. our friendship, for this obviously worthless male. Fast forward: go on vacation with the entire posse for a week of excess on the Atlantic shore, go for a moonlit. beachfront walk for some private get-it-on time (not a joke). and get the speech: I can't pretend anymore. So smooth, aren't I lucky? Couldn't have been before the trip, or after, but right in the middle of the week. At least I had more of an excuse to stay fucked up for days. The recent one, a real relationship with plans for the next year ended by a piece of paper in a crowded bar with the scribble: How about we go back to being platonic? You say you are saving me from getting hurt later. Here is the faulty logic-hurt me in the present and then you

can't hurt me in the future. But I hurt the same. Why do I let people make me feel? I don't think I am cut out for social interaction.

To Obituaries:

What a way for the world to remember the dead. Mine: Robin M Weber, 22, of Huntington, previously of Not-Huntington, died Saturday in Cabell Huntington Hospital after a life-long illness. She was a student at Marshall University in Huntington. Surviving are her parents, Jim and Catherine Weber of Not-Huntington, and two younger brothers, Paul and Kevin. Local memorial service at Campus Christian Center, 5th Ave. Huntington, 7 p.m. today. I've read the paper lately just to study the obituaries. Nobody young ever dies here, so I had to make this up. Although I hate the Mass Media, it's less static than obits. Must make the news, but without taking anybody with me. How can serial killers and school shooters want the infamy of slaughtering the unaware? People who haven't discovered the futility of life should not receive the gift of death without this pain. If I can keep my end public, not need the hospital, then I move to the front page and might enlighten someone, or at least make Kerry the Whore feel bad. That's where I belong. Front page. The obituary can't say anything about suicide, depression, or reality. It aims for conformity in death. My story says all these things, contradicts normality, doesn't allow for the why, in who-what-why. It's beyond news; it's the only truth. Death is a goal, not a gift. The only achievement worth striving for.

To Mom and Dad:

You deserve more than this note, but the form eliminates individuality and freshness. The clue to why I want to die and the reassurance that it isn't your fault don't make for an interesting read. Mostly I have put this pressure on myself; I want to be the best, but you helped instill this drive at the foundation of my psyche and personality.

Thank you for helping cultivate my intelligence by reading me Dr. Seuss and taking me to museums, but it's a curse. I am sure you were wondering if this note would come eventually. Read them all, they exist together. Mom. I bet you scanned ahead looking for it. Go back, the others are much better. Did you show it to Dad? Dad. disappointed that I can't pay you back now? Where did you come up with the idea that I should pay you back for my upbringing, my life? Not much value there anyway since I refuse the common path-get a good job, make money. get married. buy a house, and have kids. Do it in that order, with those priorities. Problem. Don't want money. If I ever made money. by some unexplainable phenomenon. I would give it away, and not all to you Dad. This is not a philanthropic plight to save humanity. I am a misanthrope, hence no marriage or kids. How could I willfully bring more humans into this place, these problems? I blame you for never showing me emotions. I know you both love me, you told me, you showed me, but what about emotions. Mom, you cried only to cope, gain some sympathy, but never for the pain. I get the concept of love, but how can I deal with the complexity. Perhaps the emotional part of a person is innate, not taught or learned, and I am just defective. When I watched the Challenger explode with my second-grade class and saw the fireball, I felt something, but it didn't last. One time I saw fear in Dad because of a Vietnam flashback, but he wouldn't share his pain. Maybe my emotions are still dormant, but why didn't you show me how to wake them? The inspiration to live must come from these feelings. Do you love, even like each other anymore? Change your relationship before Kevin has this same realization. Either end the marriage or start it again.

To Addiction:

According to Alcoholics Anonymous I am one "yes" answer away from a disease. Of course I have missed school because of drinking. The decision between a night class on Puritan literature or a nice cold lager,

stout or ale doesn't seem indicative of a problem. I decide to stop drinking for a week and only last a couple of days because there is nothing else to do in this miniscule town. Watch porno with "The Boys," but only if I am drinking. Go to a movie downtown, but only if I am on some substance. drink mostly because the others are less consumer friendly. At a party I try to get "extra" drinks because the only way to deal with the stupidity and presence of others is to consume as much alcohol as my admission fee covers, which means as much alcohol as physically possible until it disappears. It's not a problem with alcohol, but a problem with people. I am addicted to isolation. to saving myself from the inevitable disgust, despair, depression, and discomfort evoked by interaction with my peers. AA tries to trick the young drinker by having two surveys, one just for teenagers obviously designed to label us with problems. Hell, it's always cool to be able to hold your liquor. Good thing I'm not still a teenager because according to that survey I have major problems; my three long years of adulthood save me from the label alcoholic.

To Democracy and Capitalism:

What's the difference? In theory much, but practice nothing. Why do I pledge allegiance to the flag? I did not decide to pronounce this faith; my school, my teacher, and the fear of mockery forced this devotion. Unfortunately, I could only beat up the little boys for a few years, and then size took over. This speech combines with other unexamined, ritualistic proclamations, all brainwashing by patriotism, to create the American-a dutiful proud citizen who never questions the origins of these sentiments, believes that America is the best place on Earth, the most powerful place on Earth, and disavows the possibility of any other form or concept of government. The anti-Communism embedded in this American ideal tells us not to like Marx. The bourgeoisie running our government (the ivy-league educated, white, supposedly Protestant males) have turned public service into a moneymaking business. Millions

required to enter, to play and to win. If the proletariat truly unite then the equality proclaimed in the pledge liberty and justice for all may begin. During the semester in England, my flatmate from behind the Berlin Wall told me: Sure we only had one type of shoes. It's better for me now, but before I didn't see people living on the streets. God Bless Capitalism for hurting the many and benefiting the few. We must inflict our ideals on the less fortunate, but call it Imperialism. Plato's Republic admits the stupidity of the masses and the need for the "Philosopher King" to keep them literally in the dark, the cave they spew from. How is this different from the republic called the USA?

To Grandma:

Stop eating dog food and try to remember me. You once bought me presents, played Scrabble, and complemented my stories. Now your only question: Who you? Mom cries, Dad screams, and I think. You lived a normal life, besides never learning to drive and reading the Bible yearly. Then it all disappeared. You stayed, but died. At least grandpa left normal, except for the unfathomable clutter he accumulated over those 76 years. Why did you let him save every twist-tie from every loaf of bread? I do remember you. It gets harder the more you pee on yourself and the floor, and eat the pages from the Bible you once loved. You must be fighting the deterioration inside, somewhat. Are you trapped within a worthless exterior? Do you see what has happened and hate it as much as me? Grandpa invented things (I know, he should have patented), so maybe he could have saved you, or at least found something. The doctors say this is genetic. That means Mom's brain next and then mine. How can you live without a mind? How can I?

To Marshall University:

Nowhere has individuality and originality been squashed as thoroughly as the University. I long to create, not replicate or regurgitate. Mass production of workforce

ready students who will earn and give back has sacrificed the intellectual endeavor. Mission statement: Don't learn, get ready for a job where you will make money. I write papers that use the same words, the same tired tricks, just in a different order, over and over. I should be happy. I have mastered this system, fooled you to think I am smart and successful, but as I don't apply that mold to my life something somewhere has failed. My thoughts lead me astray, make me doubt, look for some logical reason within this world of 101, informational tidbits, and well rounding. Most professors beg: Don't think, just listen and absorb. Are they protecting me from seeing the futility or are they still blind?

To Philosophy and The Universe:

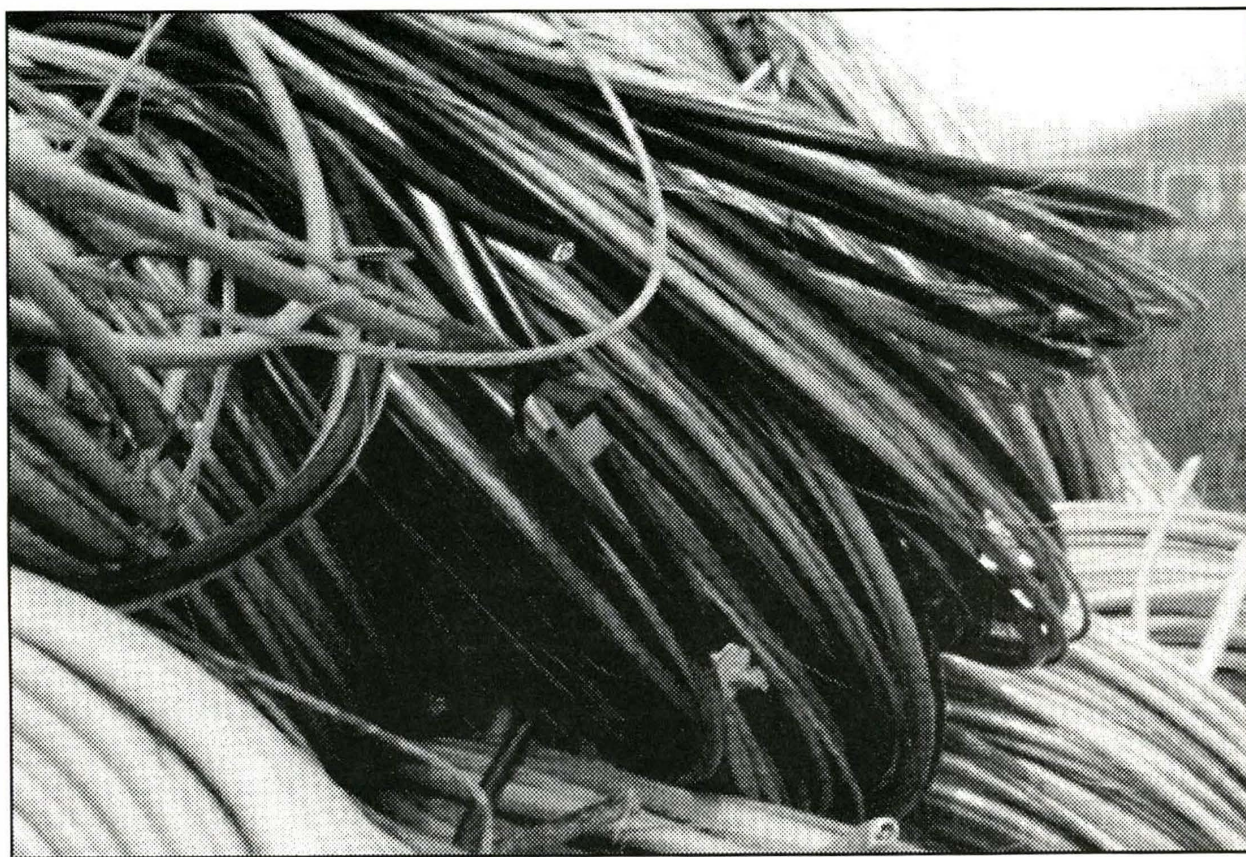
We live under what I call The Cosmic Joke. People think of themselves as important, worthwhile, driving humanity toward new frontiers. This egotism denies the extent of the unfathomable, infinite universe. People live in house, town, state, country, continent, planet, galaxy, universe. It's so beyond remarkable that "Supreme Being" must have created it. The common Western belief in Christianity serves as a good example. This religion establishes a moral code for assimilation and control of the people with the reward of an eternal afterlife. To reach an afterlife the Christian must follow the path, including spreading the message. The end comes when all have heard the truth. Humans have the responsibility of spreading the truth, the word to everybody, to all who can hear, but everybody extends beyond the remote African tribe to the other galaxies. "Supreme Being" must laugh at this attempt. I realize the Cosmic Joke and it brings me some joy. The only thing certain, true even, is death. Death is the goal. None of society's constructs about success matter because the only achievement is living through our incredibly unimportant, pointless world until death. Can't kill myself because then I willingly follow one of the modes of conformity that I despise. If I do it then I become the

angry. depressed young person who tragically ends it all. I become reason for others not to think, to follow the model. My rational acknowledgement of life's patterns, of futility, eliminates a suicidal escape. I must live with my burden, count every breath, mutter my unpopular thoughts, and write these notes unW I reach the conclusion.

To The End and Continuation:

Try to think of anything that ends. does not cyclically repeat. The concept of time, the torture inflicted by the wristwatch, forces continuity. Hours, days, weeks, months, seasons, and years all flow without much variation. Everything fails examination because nothing ends; even a straight

line has no beginning or end. Think of books. Clearly they have a beginning and an end, separated by however many pages physically sit between them. Reader begins and ends. But a repeated reading has the same changes as one Monday to the next. The world does not allow cute little structures like meaning and beginning-middle-end plot to prosper. When the words run out I just find more, or the same ones again. I have managed to destroy the respite of reading with my hyperactive thoughts. Joyce shows us, laughs at the circularity of reading in *Finnegans Wake* by having the last sentence find completion in the first words. If life repeats at a so-called new beginning that leads to another life with some variation, then how can I ever end?



Jamie Johnson

