

2001

Expressions 2001

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Lenore May Banm

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See next page for additional authors

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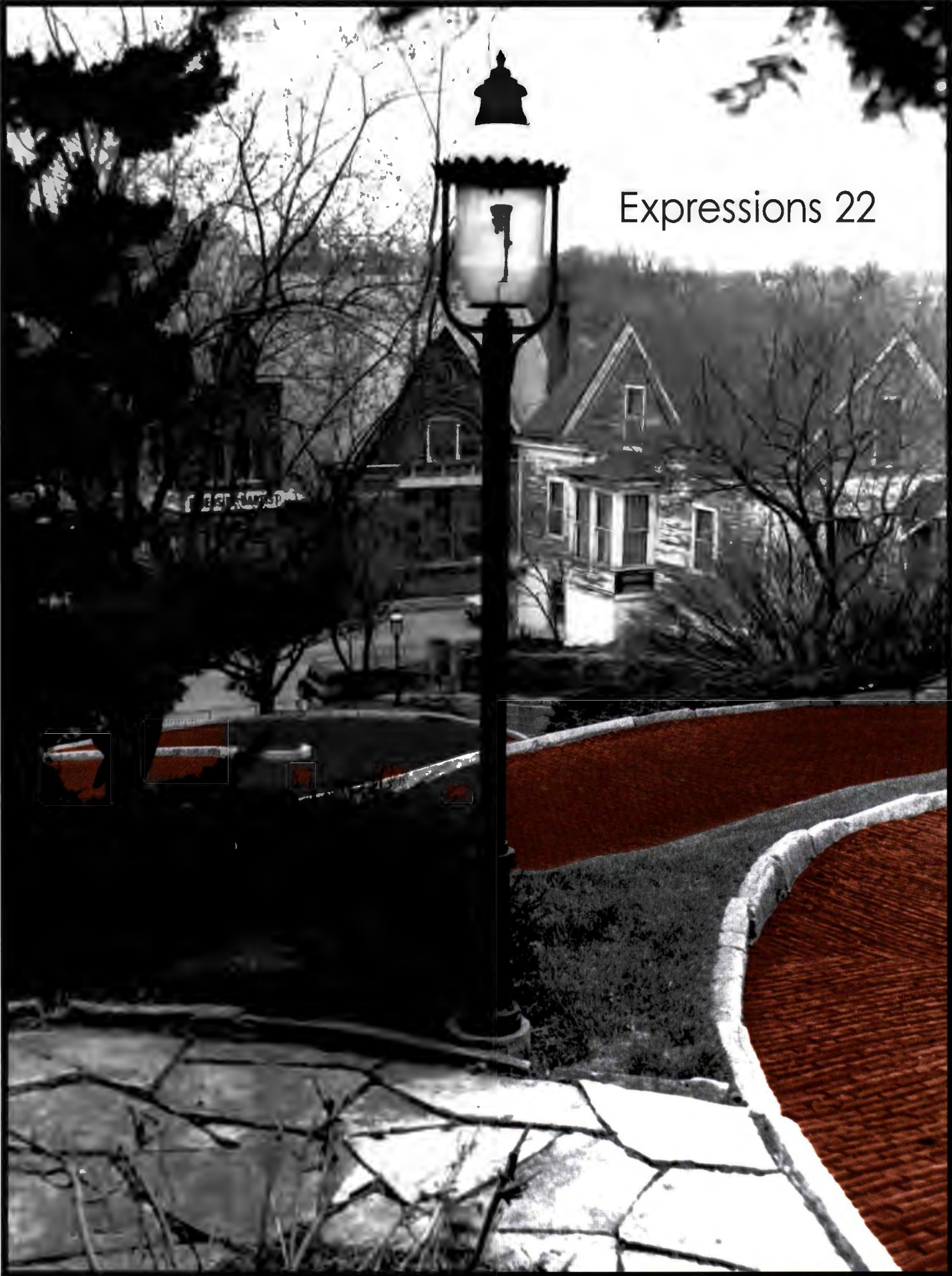
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Art Director/Editor's note:

I hope you enjoy this special edition of Expressions, which encompasses three years of Creative Writing Contest works.



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1998 - 1999

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Bozeman Pass

I have been driving a truck for about 18 years. During the winter of 1987, I drove team with my friend, Dave, who was a very good driver and had quite a bit more experience than I. The man we worked for had acquired a steady run hauling powdered milk to Seattle from Minnesota, and bringing apples back to Chicago. The runs had a pretty tight schedule, which is why we were driving as a team operation. On one of the runs west, during the dead of winter, we had a pretty good scare in the mountains as we were crossing Montana.

The route we had chosen was Interstate 90, the most direct route and by far the best maintained through that part of the country in the wintertime. The weather was good, although it was very cold. We had been listening to weather reports and had checked with other drivers to hopefully avoid any bad roads. Conditions can change rapidly, but as we were driving along that night, Dave and I were confident that all was well.

Billings had been our last stop for coffee and we were both tired. Dave had started driving when we left Billings. I was in the bunk, trying to get to sleep. It was very hard to sleep in one of those trucks when the truck was moving, no matter how much you trusted the other driver's abilities. Even though it was after midnight, I was still awake.

Dave had driven about one hundred miles and was climbing Bozeman Pass, which has an elevation of about 4800 feet above sea level. Our load was heavy. The gross weight of the vehicle and the load reached 79,900 pounds. The tractor had a 400 horsepower Cummins engine, I can't recall the rear-end gear ratio, but it had a thirteen speed transmission. It was a powerful truck, but Dave only topped the grade at ten miles an hour.

Bozeman Pass is not a real steep, curvy pass. It is a long straight gradual grade with a right curve at the bottom.

Dave started down the other side. We had gone perhaps half a mile when I felt the truck sway to the left. I felt a sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach and sat up to see what was going on. The truck was a double bunk conventional, and from where I was sitting behind Dave, I could look in the mirror on the driver's side. The tractor was in the right hand lane but the trailer was sliding into the left lane. When I looked at the back of Dave's head, he was staring into the mirror also.

Then Dave blurted an expletive and shouted, "Joel, I think we're going to jackknife, we're on black ice."

I replied, "Yeah, I see that. What are you going to do?"

Dave answered, "I'll try to pull it straight and hope I don't run out of gears before I get to the bottom."

I asked, "What about that curve at the bottom?"

Dave answered, "We'll have to worry about that when we get there."

Dave is a big man and a capable driver. I had seen him get into sticky situations many times but never get excited. This time, however, I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was scared. I was terrified and was praying to the good Lord to make Dave a better driver and get us down to the bottom in one piece.

*Joel Jameson
best story*

As we came down the mountain, Dave kept steady power on the throttle, shifting into a higher gear every time the engine revved out. By the time we neared the curve toward the bottom, I looked at the speedometer and it showed 80 miles an hour, which was about as fast as that truck would go. The engine was almost revved out, turning over about 2000 times per minute, screaming with a deep-throated guttural whine. It seemed as though the pistons might fly out through the hood. Dave had a death grip on the wheel and said something about hoping for a fast death, but I was too busy praying and didn't hear all he said. It had seemed as though hours had passed since we had started down the grade. The sky must have been overcast as it was very dark, and about all we could see were the white center line markers going by in a blur.

Just before we got to the curve, Dave hollered, "I think I can see some gravel on the right shoulder so that's where I'm going to take the curve at." He still had his foot down on the throttle and was pulling the trailer. He got over to the right of the road and off onto the shoulder with nine of the eighteen wheels on the gravel. The sound of the gravel grinding into the tires was somewhat reassuring. We went flying around the curve and the traction we got from the gravel kept us on the road. Right after that curve, the road leveled out so Dave could back out of the throttle and allow the truck to slow down.

Black ice is very hard to see at night and we weren't sure whether or not the road was still slick. Because we couldn't tell the condition of the road and because we were scared stiff, we slowed down to approximately 20 miles per hour. At that time, it occurred to us that there was no other traffic on the road, which should have been a good indication for us to have pulled over at the top of the hill and not have driven down. We discussed what we should do next and knowing that there was a big truck stop a few miles down the road at Belgrade, decided to quit for the night and let the sun come up.

After we got through the curve and slowed down, I breathed a sigh of relief and didn't think much more about it until we got to the truck stop. We didn't go in, we just sat in the cab and didn't say a word to each other for what seemed like hours. The more that I thought about what happened, the more nervous I got. I pictured the two of us lying at the bottom of a ravine somewhere back there in a twisted mangled wreck, dead, or worse, still alive and on fire, unable to get out. I got so nervous and shaky, I couldn't even smoke. It felt about 95 degrees in the cab, so I went for a walk to calm down. By now it was the middle of the night and there was not a soul to be found in the dimly lit parking lot, so I could walk around without running into anybody. After about an hour, I went back and talked to Dave for awhile, but I don't think I got any sleep that night. We realized how lucky we were and that perhaps we should remember this incident the next time we get in too big a rush, even though this had caught us by surprise. I remember thanking Dave for doing such a good job of driving.

Eleven years have gone by, and I don't see much of Dave anymore. As far as I know, he is still driving and does just fine. As for myself, I've always remembered that incident and have considered it when making a decision in the wintertime as to whether or not I should continue on my way or wait until morning. I have become much more cautious since that night.■

A Little Time Away



Shanie Lynn Wilson

Greetings from the Netherworld
Where they burn dogs
And Frankenstein lives
The air is thick
Inhabitants thicker
And childishly deranged

Hello from down under
Away from society's gaze
Here giants eat razors
A mental stagnation
Psychotic pretension
(The paranoid-self)

Salutations from Hell
The lambs are led
By sadistic shepherds
Morally superior
Physically overwhelming
Yet beaten by their minds

Goodbye from my soul
As the darkness comes
I want to go home

Jeff Sheppard
best overall writer

The Mirror



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There is a mirror of me
Living below me
Its reflection clean and clear
Too clear and reminds me
Of what I am
Bring back the carnival mirror
That distorted dissection
I've come to believe
The truth in a lie
A lie I love
Lies like a liquor
feeding my feeble ego
In truth there can be no ego
In truth there is no soul
Let me live my caricature
It's so much easier to be a lie
than to be a pathetic truth
The easy going anger
Surfaces like a whale
Swallows Jonah's and smiles
I have to break the mirror
Before it breaks me

*Jeff Sheppard
best overall writer*

A Nice Liar



Carrie Waller

After I graduated from the Faculty of Letters in Saigon City, in Vietnam, in 1970; I was appointed by the Ministry of Education to teach Vietnamese literature in a high school in the suburbs. I was very happy because a teaching career was my dream.

It was about twenty miles from my house to school. It took me about thirty minutes to go there by motorcycle. Before entering my school, I used to drink a cup of coffee at a coffee shop after I had breakfast at home.

The girl who served me coffee was very nice and beautiful. I fell in love with her at first sight. She had a round face with high cheekbones and a rather flat nose. She had wavy blonde hair and a fair complexion. Her eyes were large, and she had a pleasant smile. We often chatted with each other when there were no customers in the shop. I knew that she had graduated from high school two years before, and now she was taking a course of making clothes in a vocational school. She wanted to be a dressmaker.

After three months I realized that I really loved the girl, and she loved me, too. We loved each other, and we wanted to live together for life. One day she told me that she was born in the "Dog Year," and she asked me what animal year I was born in. I answered her immediately that I was born in the "Cock Year." In reality, I was born in the "Tiger Year."

I told the lie because I knew that if I had told the truth, she wouldn't have married me. The Vietnamese are very superstitious. They believe that those who were born in the "Dog Year" shouldn't marry those who were born in the "Tiger Year." If they do marry each other, misfortunes will happen in their marriage. On the contrary, if a woman born in the "Dog Year" marries a man born in the "Cock Year," the couple will have a happy marriage. Therefore, I had to tell the lie about my animal year to make sure that the girl I loved would agree to marry me.

The girl I mentioned above is my wife now. Whenever she asks me about that lie, I always answer as follows, "I had to tell you that lie because I loved you and wanted to marry you. Now, don't worry about it any longer. The 'dog' has been living happily with the really nice 'tiger', hasn't it?"

My wife usually smiles and replies, "What a nice liar you are!"

Hai Mai
runner-up, best overall writer

One Writer's Surrealism



DMACC Photo Department

I am here in this moment. I wait for nothing--no one lives but me. I run like the spring's breath through naked trees. I live in your chest--thrusting--screaming to be released like wild fire through the crowds of zombies. I live like free-verse poetry. Like cigarette smoke trailing through a dark, velvet coffee house. Like the solo-tenor sax piercing every man and woman's soul with each bellow, every sweet-sympathetic tone--screaming for some concrete identity.

I write like your watery memories of that hazy stranger. Of that one mind you couldn't crack. Of that one lifestyle you never understood but always felt drawn to.

I rest in the sky, sleep with the stars and shine like an opaque harvest moon. I'll cast light in on every corner of your denial, every pocket of pain. I sleep beside you, and you look like an angel.

I know how alone you are, and I know that emptiness; unrelenting and persecuting. I know how your mind creates chaos for your hands, and how broken every thought you have has become. This is why I write. This is why we live. This is why we kill ourselves a little bit more everyday. This is why we breed art--and no single expression could ever come close to encompassing such human diversity, such angst, such passion, such life.

Lenore May Baum
best poem

In a Dream



Scott Bower

I returned from work exhausted.
I stretched out on the couch to
listen to the international news.
Red Cross volunteers dumped
dead bodies in one mass grave.
They all died from a mud slide.
My mind saw the bodies as sardines.
My eyes slowly closed.
I am in a large factory room.
The room is decorated with
pink and blue ribbons.
Or is this a maternity ward?
I am helping mothers feed their babies.
They all have twin babies.
We are all happy but apprehensive.
We want the babies to nurse on demand.
They need to grow quickly.
We need to replenish the earth.
I wake up those mothers who are
neglecting their duty of nursing the
babies.
How dare they forget that the
earth needs to be replenished.
I order warm milk, eggs, toast,
and fresh fruits for them.
The mothers need to have plenty
of milk to nurse the babies.
Such a loss, we need to replenish the
earth.
I heard a loud ringing of a telephone.
I reached out to answer it.
I was still stretched out on the couch,
my heart pounding.
They had no warning!
They all died from a mud slide.

Musan Wakabong
runner-up, best poem

Aunt Jessie

Though I had been told of her disfigurement, my first glimpse of her was, nonetheless, startling. Skin covered her right eye, pulled together and sewn shut as if in a perpetual wink. Her left eye was wide open, bold, as if to compensate for having to do the work of two. She sat in a wheelchair, slumped slightly to the left, as if to tell the world that she wasn't ashamed of the right side of her body: It was what she was, take it or leave it, thank you very much. She was small of stature, not even five feet two inches tall, and couldn't have weighed one hundred pounds.

The voice that projected from that frail body shocked me. Loud, forceful and commanding, it didn't take long to realize that the mind of this diminutive woman was in no way impaired. "So, you are to be my great-niece-in-law," she said. "Thought Donald would never pick one who pleased him." As she looked me over, top to bottom, left to right, I thought that it would take much more to please her than it would her beloved great nephew, my fiancée, Donald.

"So this is Aunt Jessie," I said to myself. "Well, well, well. If a journey begins with a single step, I'd better begin walking on this road." I said aloud, "Hello, Jessie. I'm delighted to meet you." I bent to hug her, and placed a soft kiss on her leathery right cheek.

"Don't waste any effort on that side," she barked, "can't feel a damned thing since my operation!" I mentally chastised myself for being so insensitive, then leaned over and repeated my actions on her left side. "Good girl," she said. "Most young people wouldn't have bothered with an encore. Come, my dear, and help me outside. We'll chat while we sit in the garden."

Don had instructed me on the best way to assist Aunt Jessie: "Just extend your right arm and let her guide your actions," he said. "She has a certain way of clutching you that helps her to maintain her balance when she walks." Thanking him in my mind, I leaned toward her, extended my right arm, and stayed in that position while she shook her head and chuckled.

"I see that you have been coached," she said. "Bravo." She placed her left hand on my forearm, pulled herself to a standing position, then took a minute to arrange her clothing. We made our way, slowly and carefully, to the door, down the steps, and then to the chairs that were arranged facing each other in the shade of her garden. I returned to the house to pour two glasses of iced tea, then joined her again.

"Oh, my," she sighed, "I do love a brisk Spring day. I'm on the sunny side of 90 and, at my age, one never knows how many more days we will live to enjoy. So your senses are heightened, your appreciation for small things is enhanced, and you tell it like it is because you've grown tired of the banter and the games that people play with each other. Now, my dear, what would you like to know about me? Be honest, because my turn is next, and I certainly will be."

"Where does your strength come from? I know you've had two brain surgeries to remove tumors, and are in constant pain. Yet, you continue to manage two farm operations, provide a home for your husband, and serve as matriarch of your family. How do you do it?"

As I talked, her keen eye assessed me. "She doesn't miss much," I told myself. But my initial uneasiness was fading, and there was so much I wanted to know about this woman.

"I was born in a two room house, just a few miles west of here," she began. "My mother

*Joanne Davenport
runner-up, best story*

died when I was eight years old, leaving Dad with five kids to raise. My sister and I took care of the house while the boys joined Dad in the field every day. Donald's daddy was the youngest--just two years old when Mama died. He grew up standing behind Daddy on the tractor; his playpen was the field behind the house."

"When I was in junior high, I met my first husband. We married as soon as I graduated, then moved to Chicago to work as maid and butler for a rich family there. We saved every penny. Then, after five years we returned here and bought our farm. We worked side by side in the fields, but times were hard and we lost that farm."

"Where was your first farm located?" I asked.

"Right where it is today," she chuckled. "We returned to Chicago, worked for the same family again, and after only three years returned home and bought our farm back. But this time we were smarter. In addition to farming crops, we started a turkey farm that became the biggest and most profitable in the region. After a few more years had passed, we

bought our second farm, and I still have both of them today. Would you like to visit the first one, the one that owns a piece of my heart?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, already standing and preparing to assist her to the car. "Yes, I would."

We drove to her farm, and found that Donald was there with Jessie's husband, Roy. I have seen 'femme fatales' in my day, but never before in the guise of a ninety-plus year old woman. As Roy walked to the car to open her door, Aunt Jessie took on a different persona. Coy, flirty, and using that one good eye to its greatest advantage, she visibly made her husband feel like the most important person in her world.

After introducing us, she told me that she and Roy had been married for over fifty years to their first spouses, then each was widowed. They had known each other for years, were even distantly related, and decided to marry when they were seventy-three years



Jeff Hanson

Aunt Jessie

old. Being the same age, she said, each should know their own mind by then. Roy assisted her to the house, and my heart was warmed by the love and devotion I saw demonstrated by them.

I walked into the house behind them and was transported back to the 1950's. Everything in the house was as it was when Jessie lived there with her first husband. Her knickknacks lined the shelves in the kitchen. The avocado green shag carpet in the living room bore the weight of an overstuffed sofa and chair, and the rotary dial telephone rested on a 1950's era table. Roy left us to talk after kissing Jessie's hand and patting her shoulder.

"I come back here and remember," she told me. "I've never had children, but I think a mother must feel as I do when her children have grown and left home. You get on with your own life, but the years that were spent raising them will forever be in your heart. This farm is my child. I planted every flower and bush that you see. I nurtured the fruit trees as they grew, much as a mother nurtures her child. And I enjoyed the fruit that this land bore, still do to this day."

"See that circular drive in front of the brick building?" she asked as she pointed out the window. "That building housed the turkeys, and every morning my first husband would escort me to our car, which was parked in front of the house, and drive us to the turkey building. Now, I know it's only a short distance, and we could have easily walked it in those days, but this was our date. And every evening, when we'd finished our work for the day, he'd escort me back to the car and drive us home. Neither of us was sociable, and even if we were we'd have been too tired to mix company, so we made our own world."

As she talked about her life at this farm, and about her first husband, I began to understand her magic. She was able to take a mundane chore and turn it into an adventure. She was able to make a man feel like a provider and protector. She was able to work side by side on the most difficult tasks while remaining feminine and even fragile-appearing. A man would want to protect her, I thought to myself, but I knew this woman could provide her own protection.

"My dizzy spells started not long after I married Roy," she continued. "Here I was, seventy-three years old and a new bride, facing one of the greatest trials of my life. The first surgery wasn't entirely successful, because they couldn't remove all of the tumor. That's the one that took my right side of life. A few years later, they attempted a second surgery, but by then I'd learned to make do with my disfigurement. Roy never seemed to mind, bless his heart. Bear in mind, though," she said with a wink, "that he's as old as I am and his sight isn't what it used to be."

"So, here in my special place, I become that young girl again. The one I still am in my mind. Aging is a blessing and a curse. But if you can strike a balance between who you are inside and what your body portrays on the outside, you will find the key to happiness. That, my dear, is how it is done."

Tears glistened in my eyes as Aunt Jessie finished her story. Sitting in her house, with the cadence of her voice lulling me, I was enveloped by the warmth of the past. I received a gift that day, a wonderful gift of history, and promise, and hope. A gift that I would carry in my heart always.■

1999 - 2000

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Jody Richardson

Cain



Ryan Witt

I am gazing at a lonely old tree
Split up the middle.
One half
Yearns towards the setting sun,
Branches outstretched,
supplication,
Seeking the orchard of its
heritage,
Unwillingly bound to his
Other half
Who grasps at the wind
Of the flat boundless East,
Embracing the encroaching
gloom.

I fear this tree must be
Forever petrified in indecision,
It's only living remnant
A forgotten scarlet blossom,
Taking after its mother,
Borne away on a breeze
That carries it no closer
To home.

*Dean Kronch
best overall writer*

Dream Of A Dream



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In a dream of a dream,
The dead walk again,
And God has a face,
Stairs spiral forever,
Spun from glass, smoke, and lace.
Truth becomes an unstoppable
force,
While all evil can be stilled,
Yet foul deeds can thrive therein,
Dark intentions be fulfilled.
In a dream lies all hope
That things will stay the same
But all things change in time,
Which only slumber can tame.
Nothing is certain
Though events are preordained;
Dreamers have the answers,
To omnipotence are they chained.
Bound to find the stories
That in mist and tears still gleam,
To witness deaths and glories
In a dream of a dream.

*Dean Kronch
best overall writer*

The Spike Tree



Ryan Witt

Where the Sidewalk Ends

*There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight
To cool in the peppermint wind.*

*Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black
And the dark street winds and bends,
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
To the place where the sidewalk ends.*

*Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.*

Shel Silverstein

In June of 1963 we moved to North Windom Street. We moved from an old house to a new house. My mom loved our new house more than anything. She said our new house would be a fresh clean start. It was really just a house.

There were five new houses on our block in Suburbia; houses of young parents with young children. Four of the five families were similar. The moms stayed home to raise the children. They cooked and cleaned, they washed and ironed clothes. The dads went to work and returned home to spend their leisure time eating and drinking with the neighbors. That was the way it was in 1963.

Our new house was next to the old railroad tracks. There was a creek running along the north side of the tracks. In 1963, the railroad was gone; the tracks were all that remained. Once in a while a bum would wander down the tracks heading for town. Our house had a walkout basement. My mom was afraid of the bums. She kept the basement door locked and chained all the time.

Our backyard was bordered by corn fields. There were acres and acres of field corn and field mice. All those rows of corn are gone today, replaced by rows and rows of new houses. I miss the field corn we picked to eat; I don't miss the mice or the bums.

*Jacquelyn M. Runyan
best story*

We called the old railroad tracks "the tracks." In the late 1970s the city was given some money to clean the tracks up. They put asphalt over the cinder path, cut down the weeds and brush, planted some new shrubs and flowers, built a bridge over the trestle and set some benches in concrete. They put up a big wooden sign welcoming visitors to THE SCENIC TRAIL. It was really only the tracks.

Next door to our house was the Earl house. Jan Earl had the cleanest house on the block. I never saw a dirty dish in her sink, I never saw a crumb of food on her floor. I never saw a window that did not sparkle nor anything that did not shine. Dirt was not allowed in Jan Earl's house. Jan may have had taste that was less than impeccable, but she remodeled her living room and no one was allowed to sit in it. She redid the basement and it, too, became off-limits. She moved the family to the garage. That was where they lived.

Jim Earl was funny. He told stories all the time, he played practical jokes on everyone. He convinced every child in the neighborhood, even the older ones, he kept a 50 foot snake in his basement. He was a big man with black hair and heavy black glasses. He spent all his free time drinking or working in his yard. Jan kept the inside of the house meticulous and Jim kept the outside equally so.

In 1963, the Earls had two children, Kevin and Lisa. Cindy was born shortly after we moved in. Cindy spent her days and nights shut in a bedroom crying. At Christmastime, Kevin, Lisa, and Cindy got many more presents than any of the kids on the block. Every spring, Jan had a garage sale and sold all their new toys.

Even with all their little quirks, I liked Jim and Jan Earl.

The next house was the Scott family. Ann Scott looked mean. She was short with very black hair. Her eyes were hidden behind black pointed "cat's-eye" style glasses. Her voice was shrill; she did not smile. When she yelled, everyone jumped. She was 24 years old but seemed much older. We called her "old lady Scott." Her house was clean but not nearly as clean as the Earl house.

Russ Scott was gross. He burped, he farted, he spoke vulgarity in a matter-of-fact way. He had a loud and demanding voice. He was very tall and thin with a big nose. He slicked back his light blonde hair. He tried to be funny and thought he was. He wasn't.

The Scott family consisted of 3 children: Dennis, Dianne, and Dana. They were required to be perfect, the best at everything they did. And they were.

Every Sunday at 1 p.m., Russ and Ann went inside to their bedroom. Everyone in the neighborhood knew what they were doing. My dad, Jim Earl, and Cliff Wuhl used to throw rocks at the side of the house or set fireworks off under their bedroom window to distract them. It never did. They continued to go to the bedroom every Sunday and returned to sit with the rest of the neighborhood 30 minutes later.

I did not like Russ or Ann Scott.

The next house was the Wuhl family. Cliff and Marie Wuhl had the messiest house on the block. Their life, as well as their house, was in shambles. Marie was a waitress at the most exclusive restaurant in the city. She was pretty. She was neat and tidy, prim and proper. No one saw Marie without her hair done or in full makeup. She sometimes wore a back brace because of some kind of genetic back condition. Marie knew her prolonged hours meant one day she would be in a wheelchair. She kept working long hours on her feet.

The Spike Tree

Cliff Wuhl was a traveling salesman. He fancied himself a "ladies man." He bragged he had a girlfriend in every town. We all knew about his girlfriends. He drank lots of hard liquor. The only thing he did more than brag and drink was say "fuck." Cliff had a terrible temper. One time he got mad and yanked the telephone out of the wall. He was a disgusting man.

There were three boys, Bruce, Joel and Todd, in the family. With their father and mother never at home much, the Wuhl boys wildly ran the neighborhood.

Marie Wuhl was one of my favorite people in the world. Cliff Wuhl gave me the creeps.

At the top of the hill was the Mills family. Glen and Nora Mills did not live like the rest of the families. They were the "regular family" on North Windom Street.

Nora was gruff-looking and kept a spotless house. She was stern and most of the kids were scared of her. She was the only mom on the block who had her hair done in the beauty shop every Friday. Her hair looks the same today as in 1963. Glen owned an auto repair shop. He worked hard and came home sober every night. I never saw Glen drink.

They had three daughters: Nancy, Carla, and Shelli. They had more rules than the rest of the kids on North Windom. They had to be home at a certain time for supper every night and had to be inside when it got dark.

Glen and Nora Mills are the only ones still living on North Windom today. I liked them both.

We lived at the bottom of the hill. My mom cleaned our house all the time and wished it was as nice as Jan Earl's house. She thought Jan Earl had everything in the world. My dad drank as much as the other dads on the block. I don't remember who he worked for when we moved to North Windom Street. He had several jobs in the five years we lived there.

When we moved to the house there were three children in our family; me, Greg and Gary. Grant was born about a year later.

I had never met a boy like Bruce Wuhl. He had light blonde hair and dancing blue eyes. He wore big black glasses, the frames too hard and cold for the sensitivity of his face. His ever-present smile was as genuine as it was contagious, and his high pitched laughter seemed to almost echo. Bruce was loud and outspoken. He said "fuck" almost as much as his dad. With his dad gone most of the time and his mom working nights, Bruce was the parent in the house. At 13, he wasn't a very good parent. Bruce smoked; Bruce cussed. He wasn't a good role model. He did the best he could. No one ever let Bruce be a kid. Maybe none of us ever really were kids.

During the day, Bruce's mom slept. In the summertime the Wuhl boys went anywhere they pleased. They would trek the four blocks down to Conroy's Store, a little general store on the highway. Surrounding the store were dumpy rundown trailer houses, Conroy's Trailer Park.

The proprietors of Conroy's Store and Conroy's Trailer Park were a couple named Edna and Earl Conroy. Bruce, and most of the other kids from North Windom, referred to them as "Old lady and Old man Conroy."

The floors of their store were sawdust. The shelves, the floor, any vacant spot was crammed with stuff. Practically anything you wanted or needed could be found at Conroy's store. The smell was a combination of fresh cut meat and blood, sawdust, stale tobacco and bubble gum.

Inside the door, to your left, was a pop machine. If you stuck your hand in to retrieve your bottle of pop at the wrong time you could get a nasty cut.

Old man Conroy was a bony little man who looked 80 years old. He stood behind the meat counter at the rear of the store. He wore worn out white v-necked T-shirts streaked and stained with fresh as well as old blood. He grunted with every response. His fingers were stained dark brownish yellow with nicotine, his fingernails had dirt under and around them. An ever-present cigarette hung out of his mouth.

Old lady Conroy stood in front of the grimy nicotine-covered front window. Dirty, dusty items littered the grease paper covered walls on either side of the big window. Old lady Conroy was a large lady with a black moustache and straggling hairs growing out of her chin. She wore dirty flowered house dresses and house slippers. Her voice was deep and gravelly. She regularly made odd and funny sounding noises. She, like old man Conroy, had a constant cigarette hanging from her mouth. The burnt ashes were as long as the part of the cigarette left to burn. Old lady Conroy could talk, yell, and even laugh and the ashes never fell. Conroy's Store was seldom busy.

The Wuhl boys would explode into Conroy's Store. The bell tied inside the door would clang, banging back against the door as they slammed it hard. Old lady Conroy would belt out a yelp and then scream, "What do you no-goods want? I don't want to have to catch me no thieves today!"

Joel would saunter to the counter and begin a conversation. Old lady Conroy liked Joel. While Joel distracted old lady Conroy, Todd would quickly stuff his pockets with candy and gum. Bruce would steal cigarettes. It didn't matter what brand, the Wuhl boys would smoke anything.

When satisfied with their haul, Bruce would look at Joel and yell, "We came for bologna, get back there and get it. We got stuff to do!" With that, Joel would walk back to the meat counter. Bruce and Todd swiftly scooted out the door leaving Joel to pay. I went with them to Conroy's store many times but never stole anything. I was too afraid to steal. The Wuhl boys had it down to a system, it worked every time.

Afterwards Todd went home with candy and gum, Joel with the bologna and Bruce went, with the stolen cigarettes, to the fourth hole down the tracks.

On the north side of the cinder path in the center of the tracks were openings that led to the shallow but fairly wide creek. Some of the openings were inaccessible from one side or the other. Bruce called these openings 'holes'. The first and second holes could only be approached from the side near our yard. There was a branch hanging across the first hole. Bruce would swing back and forth on it. I never tried, I was afraid of falling in. Bruce wasn't afraid of anything. There were lots of prickly bushes at the second hole. We rarely went there. The third hole was steep and ended at the edge of the creek. You couldn't get to it from either side.

The fourth hole was a rather steep but easy climb or slide down to a nice level dirt area bordering the creek. There weren't many bushes and weeds at the fourth hole. There was a moderately tall tree with the roots exposed in the creek water. There was a mulberry tree and a wild raspberry bush growing along the steep embankment. You could get to the fourth hole from the tracks side or through the corn fields. The mosquitoes bit randomly, the gnats swarmed continually, there was a constant buzz in the air. The birds chirped, the frogs and

The Spike Tree

locusts sang, the dirt smelled almost fresh and the creek bubbled continuously as it flowed to who knows where.

I wasn't supposed to go down the tracks. I did anyway. The world felt very alive at the fourth hole. On the side where the corn fields stood, the creek area was bordered by a barbed-wire fence. Bruce cut an opening along the bottom of the barbed wire. He built a fort on that side of the creek. He kept a coffee can full of stolen cigarettes buried at the fourth hole. He always knew exactly how many cigarettes were in the coffee can and when it was time to make a run to Conroy's store for more.

I don't know when exactly the railroad quit coming through this part of town. All that was left were steel tracks, railroad spikes, railroad ties and probably a lot of memories. Years later people scavenged the tracks collecting the railroad ties to landscape their yards. In the summer of 1963, Bruce searched for something else left behind. He collected the spikes and stored them at the fourth hole. He said he was going to make something that would last for years to come. Day after day he searched for spikes. After a little while we were all helping him. In early July, he began his solo creation.

Bruce pounded the spikes, one at a time, into the tree next to the creek at the fourth hole. Day in and day out, you could hear him pounding away. The resonating sound a definite ping, ping, ping. Every now and again, off in the distance, you would hear, "Fuck! My finger!" Sun up to sun down, rain or shine, Bruce was mesmerized by his work. It became his mission, his sole purpose. He said for all time everyone would know, he, Bruce Wuhl, made the famous spike tree.

I would go to the fourth hole and sit, watching him for hours. As he worked, he talked. Bruce talked all the time. He talked about his life and what he was going to be. He said he was going to college, he was going to be an engineer. He talked about girls. It was free and easy conversation, neither of us felt embarrassed. He talked about all his friends although I never saw any of them. He talked about school and teachers. He had funny names for most of the teachers and imitated the most eccentric ones. He talked incessantly. And Bruce laughed, his absurd, hyena-sounding laugh made me laugh at the sound of it. He never talked about his home.

Every hour or so, Bruce would say, "Time for a smoke." He would climb down the tree and dig out the coffee can. He kept an old silver Zippo lighter and some books of matches in the coffee can. He'd flip open the Zippo and light the cigarette. As the air filled with the smell of cigarette smoke and lighter fluid, he'd sit back and inhale deeply. After a couple of drags, he'd blow smoke rings in the air. They would be fat and perfectly round only to become thinly oblong as they floated away in the breeze.

He didn't talk while he smoked. The look on his face would become somber, almost speculative. He seemed to drift away to a place I could not go. At 13 years old, Bruce and I spent countless hours down the fourth hole. We didn't know we shouldn't be comfortable with each other; we didn't know we weren't supposed to be all alone. We didn't understand why my mom got so mad at me for going down the fourth hole. I don't think we were friends. I think it was something far different.

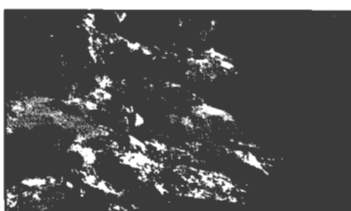
In the early evening, I would walk to Bruce's house. I sat at the kitchen table and watched him fix dinner for his brothers. Their usual menu was bologna and ketchup sandwiches, except when they ran out of bologna, then it was ketchup sandwiches. Joel and Todd never complained. We would sit around the kitchen table, Bruce would smoke a little, mostly talk and laugh some more.

Bruce laughed as much as he talked. The conversation would go from school to boys to girls to anatomy.

We both had questions and nowhere to get the answers. We talked about kissing; we never kissed. We talked about touching; we never touched. We talked about feelings. I suspect we both felt the same feelings. And I suppose neither one of us knew what to do with the feelings, so we did nothing.



He said for all time everyone would know, he, Bruce Wuhl, made the famous spike tree.



One night my brother Greg had a Little League game. The Earls and Scotts were at the ball park, too. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a fierce storm exploded. It blew the tops off the dugouts. We raced to our car and headed for home. After the storm was over, everyone was outside assessing the damage. My dad and Jim Earl found the Wuhl boys huddled in their backyard. All alone and not knowing what to do, Bruce thought it was safest outside. My dad and Jim Earl cursed Cliff and Marie's absence. My mom said they could come to our house, but Bruce said they should stay home. My dad was never real great but on that night, at least he was home.

As the years progressed, Bruce would talk about his home more and more. Bruce used to say, "the worse the old man acts, the cleaner the old lady gets." In 1974, Marie's house was the cleanest on North Windom. It was cleaner than Jan Earl's ever thought of being.

Marie always wanted a daughter. She kept Barbie dolls for the little girls in the neighborhood to play with. She was very generous and sweet. She was a wonderful friend. She wasn't a very good mom. I don't know, but perhaps she didn't know how to be or she was too busy struggling to stay alive.

Cliff loved to shock Marie. He collected strange and seedy friends. One day he brought a lesbian friend home with him. She and her partner had a fight, she needed a place to stay. Cliff told his lesbian friend Marie would not mind and besides, she was very open-minded. The next morning he went back on the road and left his lesbian friend. Instead of telling this lady to leave, Marie

bought a lock for her bedroom door. She could not be mean to anyone. Cliff did lots of nasty things like that to Marie. In 1974, Cliff finally pushed Marie to her limit. She committed suicide. She loved him. Nobody else thought Cliff was worth dying for.

The carefree days of summer 1963 passed. Bruce continued to pound the spikes into the tree. He climbed higher and higher, he seemed to be miles in the air. One day he told me he could see the roof of his grade school at the top of the hill on North Windom, a few days later he said he could see the top of the city water tower. The next week he could see people clear across town at the swimming pool. In mid-August, he said he could see all the way to Chicago. I knew he couldn't. It didn't matter. I pretended to believe him. It seemed important.

Every Saturday night the couples of North Windom, except Glen and Nora, went out. The dads wore suits, the moms, dresses and heels. They drove off to eat, drink, dance, and fight. Each week a different couple fought, each week, a different mom came home without the dad. It was a ritual on North Windom.

On those nights, I baby-sat at my house, Bruce baby-sat at the Earl house and Nancy Mills baby-sat at the Scott house. The Wuhl boys did not need a baby-sitter. Bruce and Nancy got paid to baby-sit, mine was free.

The Spike Tree

Late in the evening, usually around eleven, the three of us would congregate on the sidewalk in front of the Earl house. We would sit on the still-warm concrete and talk. Bruce told us jokes. Nancy and I laughed even when we didn't understand the jokes or they weren't funny. We would bet on who would be the first to come home mad and alone. Bruce told us more about boys and we told him about girls. Bruce laughed and we laughed. Sometimes we would lay back on the sidewalk and look at the stars. Bruce taught us how to turn off all the street lights on North Windom. We would take turns running to the top of the hill and flipping the switch. If we forgot to flip it back, the lights stayed off permanently. The police would come to check, we hid and giggled as they tried to reason why, once again, the street lights were off. In the summer of 1963, the days were hot and lazy and the nights were warm and sweet.

On Sunday mornings all the families stayed in bed, except the Wuhls. They went to the Lutheran Church. Cliff was an elder. They were a highly respectable family at the church. Cliff was a devoted and loving father at the church. No one in their church knew the Wuhl family North Windom knew. None of them would have believed it. Sunday afternoons we had barbecues. The families gathered in the Earls' backyard. They had a patio and a built-in gas grill. It was a potluck. There was an abundance of beer.

No one went inside the Earl house. Jan Earl would open the window above her sink and hand things through to the patio. At 1 o'clock, Russ and Ann left without saying anything. At 1:30 they would come back outside and drink more beer. My mom, Marie Wuhl and Jan Earl drank coffee. They did not drink beer. Ann Scott was the only mom who did. The Mills family rarely came to the barbecues.

The Scott family was Catholic. Russ Scott said time and time again, "I married the first virgin Catholic girl I met." I didn't know what a virgin or a Catholic was, but I didn't like Ann Scott so I didn't want to be either. They went to church on Saturday nights. I didn't know anyone who went to church on Saturday night. They were very strict. I did not like to go to their house. One time I baby-sat for them, Ann told my mom I stole a half dollar and she would never have me baby-sit again. I did not steal the half dollar. They liked Nancy as their baby-sitter. That was fine with me. I was in their basement once, it looked like a warehouse for Budweiser. Russ was always afraid he would one day run out of beer. I don't think he ever did.

At the end of August in 1963, Bruce and I walked down the tracks to the fourth hole. We walked in silence but with each step the cinders crunched under our shoes. We slid down the entrance to the fourth hole. I watched as Bruce slowly climbed the spike tree. Respecting each step he took, the tree swayed back and forth with Bruce's weight. He was so high up in the air. Finally reaching the top, he looked down and shouted to me, "It is finished." I don't know if he ever climbed it again.

A few years ago lightning struck the spike tree. It caught fire and burned. The shell that remained fell into the creek. Over the years many legends have been told about the beginnings of the spike tree. I know the real beginning. I know the real story. It was a dream. It was a vision. It was a way out. Or maybe it was just a tree full of old railroad spikes.

Sometimes, in the quietness of a hot, muggy summer night, amidst the frogs croaking and the crickets chirping, in the distance I hear a faraway ping, ping, ping. I hear echoes of a voice so familiar saying, "Fuck! My finger!" or "Time for a smoke." And in the stillness, I hear his laugh. Life was oh so bittersweet in the summer of 1963.■

The Spike Tree



DMACC Photo Department

The Rest Area

"Can't you hurry?" Water trails down my arms as I shake my dripping hands before the dryer impatient to get back on the road with my daughter. "These things never run long enough," I mutter. As I reactivate the blower, my attention is again drawn to the letters scratched onto the dryer cover.

Frantically hitting the button on the electric hand dryer one more time, she continued to scratch the initials into the pristine paint of the cover. Seconds before, she had scanned the room for an alternate escape. There was none. The hand-dryer beside her rattled unnaturally as it warmed the room. In her hand, a hairpin curled in distress around her finger as it fought her attempts to shift it to get a sharper line on the etched message.

She should have realized she'd been followed. It was only after she noticed no one had left the van that followed her into the interstate rest area, that she became uneasy. From the shadows it waited, its parking lights gleaming like eyes watching her. A wind gust sucked the door outwards pulling Agent Elise Kent's breath with it. She listened. The only sound was a metallic banging of an empty chain as it slammed against the aluminum flag-pole outside. Bang! Bang! you're-dead! It seemed to slap in rhythm.

She worked the dull metal faster against the paint pushing back her rising panic. Her mother had warned her she might end up this way. It had been a mistake to follow up on the lead without her partner. Now she was alone, and in trouble. She would disappear like all the others who had gotten this close. Her only hope would be if her partner, Chase, found her message and her coded file. It was a pencil thin hope at best. Even though she'd hinted she often stopped at this place. She'd been unwilling to trust him with anything more.

She eased against the door. It opened slightly. By now the rain was pelting down in sheets as ice coated the lobby's front window and fogged the interior. If the black van was still out there, it was lost behind the heavy haze. Though the foyer appeared quite empty, she was unable to get a good view without exposing herself in the brightly lit area.

Instead, she paced the length of the rest room again. Except for the painter's cloths draped over the wall of the last stall, everything was in place. Against the window, sleet hit in soft splats and tings almost rhythmic to the slapping chain. When had the constant drone of the interstate disappeared? Its absence left her feeling even more isolated. She couldn't stay. She had to leave. Now!

Drawing her weapon, she pushed open the door. Coins tumble into the pay phone's return. She hesitated. Immediately, the door was pushed from behind knocking the gun from her hand sending it skidding out across the damp floor before the door was slammed shut, shoving her back into the room. No one followed. Why were they waiting? She returned to the unfinished letters. The blunt end made it harder to scratch the finish. It was harder to hear with the driving sleet pelting against the glass. It was harder to breathe with the knife's razor edge biting into the flesh of her neck.

"It's so nice you wrote it down for us, Elise." His voice whispered roughly against her cheek. He pushed her towards the stall where the painter sheets were thrown over the commode. "Move!"

"He must have been here all this time," she thought as she fought to keep her balance. The knife knicked her neck as he maneuvered them into position. Ordering her to pull the canvas along, he pushed her ahead. "Spread it out."

Susan Hloffert
best detective story



Bo Belinsley

Awkwardly she kicked at the drop cloth. His hold loosened, and she faked a trip before catching him with a jab fighting desperately to overpower him. He chuckled as he subdued her attempts. Then the knife turned, becoming a pinprick in the soft cavity beneath her chin forcing her to comply.

"Nice try, sweetheart," he said kissing her cheek swiftly. A solitary tear rolled over the place where his lips had touched. "When they sent me, I never planned on getting as close as we did. Though, it was nice, wasn't it darlin." The tip of his tongue reached out to capture her lone tear with a soft flick. His familiar gesture made her shudder.

"And I had worried that Chase wouldn't find my message," she thought sardonically. Now, more than ever, she regretted the fact that she had gotten involved with her partner. He was attractive, and she was inexperienced looking to him for advice, and for more. She thought of how their late nights had gradually worked into breakfast at her place. "How could she be so stupid to not include him in her suspect list?"

"These won't mean anything to anyone else, honey. Tell me how it ends!" He waited with extreme patience unperturbed by her non-compliance.

"You closed the exit, didn't you?" She responded, though she knew his answer.

"Yeah, darlin. It's just you and me now. Tell me what you know, honey," he whispered. She remembered the many times that Chase had urged her to share the details of her investigation. She'd been assigned the rookie-chump case to put to rest a series of unsolved, seemingly outdated and unrelated motel murders. Except for a bothersome detail, she

The Rest Area

would have neatly closed the case. Instead she had followed a hunch that had led her to a huge cover-up involving her own people with the mob.

Earlier that evening she'd discovered the one witness, which might have shed some light on the identity of the leader of the operation, dead from an overdose in his apartment. The fragmented details of the case that had troubled her now fell into place. The blade redirected her attention to him.

"You know sweetheart, we might just use you in one of our movies before we take you out of the picture." He chuckled at the cleverness of his play on words. "Though I must say, beneath that stiff suit is a lot more than I ever imagined, darlin'."

She stiffened at his insinuation and at his confirmation of her theory. Before this, it had only been a hunch that the dead women had been used as unwilling participants in snuff movies. Their death had been part of the morbid show. She would not allow herself to be used in such a way.

"You could do for the camera what you used to do for me." Slowly his fingers caressed the edges of her lips before gripping her chin. "The code, Elise. I'll make it easy for you."

He was fast losing interest in cajoling her. She was thankful no mirror would force her to see her death in his eyes. She cursed herself for ignoring her instincts not to trust this man to whom she'd been assigned.

She'd never give him the remaining clue. They'd probably search her car before torching it, but her carefully concealed disk would not melt along with her identity. Thankfully, she had resisted the urge to mail a back-up disk to Chase. Instead, she'd addressed it to a friend in her last department. He would see they were caught. The knife again impatiently whittled against her tender skin.

"Never!" she said as she readied herself for one last fight.

"Close your eyes and say good night, baby. I'll make it clean," he promised. The knife dipped from the slight folds of her lower neck. As his lips touched her cheek in a soft kiss, he surprised her. Instead of the knife, she felt the sudden prick of a hypodermic entering her opposite shoulder. He laughed at her astonishment as well as her desperate attempts to escape him before she succumbed to the tranquilizer. It wasn't over for her yet.

Elise's hand clutched out in a useless movement that only succeeded in restarting the dryer. Though it held the secret of her hope, the mechanism could only scream its testimony while it warned the crew cleaning up the evidence before they too disappeared into the icy night.

"Hurry up!" I called punching the button once again. Finally she joined me. While she played with the electronic faucet, I copied the letters onto the back of an empty checkbook. AGENTTELISE KANE DTERIMEM... The letters SCS were barely readable.

"Mom!" she hissed. "People are staring!" Appalled that I should continue writing, she wormed her way past, hitting the button as we left leaving the blower to rattle and scream to the empty room.

"Why'd ya do that, mom?" she asked.

"You never know, it might just make a good story someday." I smiled as I drove the interstate home.■

Cottonwoods



DMACC Photo Department

I know a floodplain
where Cottonwoods
stood on that
moist lip of land
trapped a hundred years
between the
sharp-toothed river
and sky.

Where foliage swam
like schools of fish, loose
in the ocean blue.

While below roots stretched
and wiggled joyfully in
puddles of slow, cool death.

Their great hulking bodies
drowned now
rising up out of Earth's hand
knuckle white.

A community of ghosts,
glaring in the afternoon sun.

Julie Hancock
best poem

A Legacy



Jen Davis

\$32.50, solid oak, Sears catalog mail-order.

A dream come true for my
newlywed great-grandmother,

Her rosebud teapot centered on its highest shelf,

Waiting there for special occasions.

Like when the pastor came to say

Her second son wouldn't be
coming home from France,
and when the girls closed the
curtains and learned the Lindy.

When Granny got her diploma

And hauled the cupboard to the
mission school in North Dakota,
her sister took the teapot to Chicago.

Twenty years of primers and readers, spellers,

White history, Protestant hymnals,
practical science passed
across the shelves.

Twenty more years in Dad's garage,

A handy place for coffee cans
of screws and nails,
plastic jugs of Weed-B-Gone,
bone meal, paint thinner.

Three packages of steel wool later

A Windows 98 manual is in
the rosebud teapot place and
my PC says I've got mail.

*Iry Bertman
runner-up, best poem*

Rain on Changan Avenue



Gary Trapp

It is early morning when the raindrops hit the flattened fender of a bicycle and the burned out carcass of an automobile as if to soothe the tissue above a wound.

In one stroke the world is gray from sky to buildings to streets to the soul of the old woman picking through fallout from the day before. She is bent at the waist with hands into and out of wreckage, her face slowly washing away.

You were not the first; right here, and there on the square where you were, others stood, the man sitting on a broken blockade seems to say though he's silently smoking a cigarette. His old eyes, inscribed by dreams adrift, lift to his bicycle which waits intact.

Below the bridge a couple huddles in the shadows and the woman smiles though she doesn't know why and tells the man that things will be better, their time will come again. But the man misses hearing the end as the beginning sounds of an engine from a tank on the bridge crowd concrete walls.

It is early morning when the rain hits the bloodstained bricks and the broken remains of bodies without breath, and nothing washes away.

A young man on a bicycle rides past me and says, "I think if you look you'll see that the sky here is always red," and I look up as water begins to pound Beijing.

In memoriam: June 4, 1989

*Matt Malbyon
runner-up, best overall writer*

Eye Bank

The woman squeezes out her eye
- I wanted a purple one
'cause it was my favorite color-
and shows it to the boy,
his own eyes widening as she does.

He shifts shaking feet unaware
- Where's your
real eye-
as she tells him it was cut
out when she was just a little girl.

Like a peeled egg in her palm
- Mom said no more patch
and got this for me when dad died-
it rests, and looks up at the sky
to see only a star-stitched darkness.

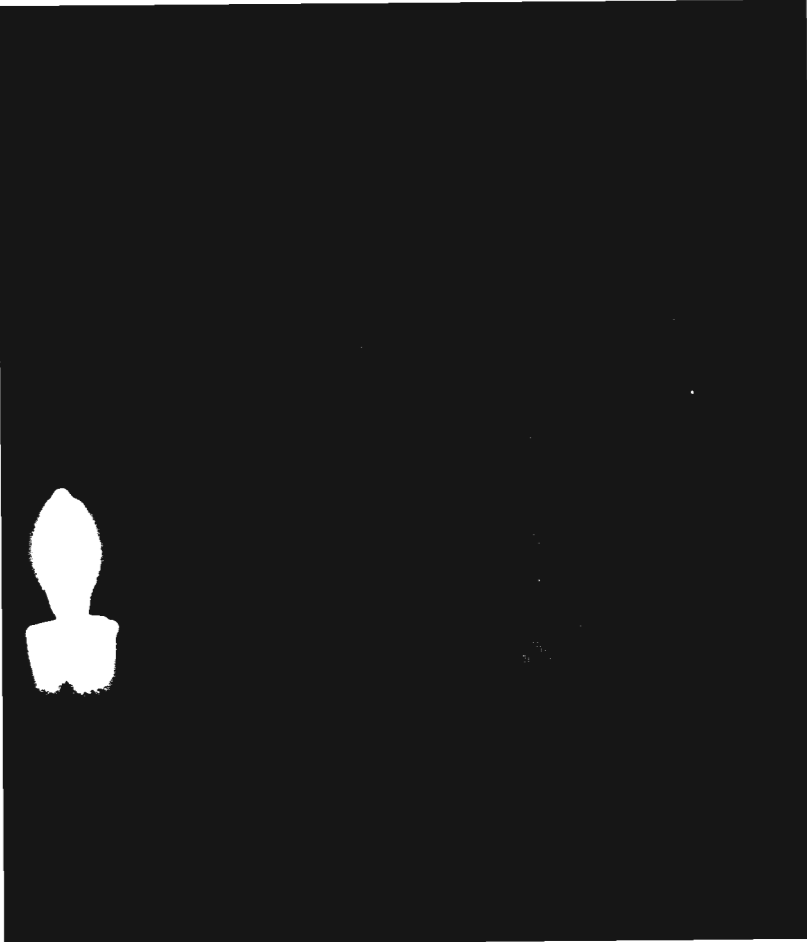
I didn't know that then, she whispers
- Mister preacher says people
with two colored eyes is the devil-
after he tells her that she's
lucky for not having gotten her wish.

Hesitantly agreed, he lifts it slow
- No more than usual. You
done it real gentle-
and pushes, with her,
the egg back into its shell.

She speaks of them in childhood
- Would you come into
my arms-
as she strokes his hair and
stares at the wall of woods
across the lake.

Boys and girls she says at
- That's all we are, Lord, if you're
out there at all-
silence and pauses,
and softly says forgive us.

*after Eye of God by Tim Blake Nelson
lines 27-28, 37-38; near quotes*



Shelley Dague

*Matt Malyon
runner-up, best overall writer*

Dreamless

I

we saw ourselves outside ourselves, looking to

see the cool exuded, to see what remained once adorned with the needed image, the needed stance, the needed pose, the needed dance of knowing who we were and who we were not; we got what we needed in celluloid and television and music-television, and who knew better than these? we saw ourselves without a cause and moved into holding high the banner of without-cause, of doing nothing with everything we'd been given, of which we knew little and felt no responsibility towards; we saw ourselves outside ourselves in third person once removed, in third person we lived our lives, our lies told to ourselves that nothing mattered much, that nothing mattered but the matter of acting as if things did, acting as cool as we could be: in cars booming sound, with windows rolled down, with images in mind and backbone bending beat defining what we saw ourselves as.

we saw ourselves from the outside, we looked in upon girls and boys fed lines on how life would be and how to use it, what freedom was meant for and how to abuse it; we saw ourselves accountable to no one, without cause to move forward, without cause to move at all. we saw ourselves from the outside as if we were not us, as if we could be other, as if we could leave everything to others, as if without sisters, without brothers, without kin.

II

across the plain came marching money, enticing us away from night-visions and dreams, from

the caffeine-streets of yesterday, from the ocean-words of tomorrow, from ideas that could fuel us for years and years to come; and we should cry but cannot, for there is nothing to pierce the nothing that we feel, the knot of nothing we're becoming; shackled up with glossy-pictured-fiction as all we know. what is a silence? what is solitude? go from soil to cement cement cement is all we need; leaching greed propels us to the desk of insignificance to get the job done, to get the job done with a grin, to get the job, to be the job, to be done in by the job, to be done in. where is the grass going, where is the grass going, where are all the trees? did the breeze leave us, too? where have the oceans gone, where are all the human beings so good at being, so good at loving, so good at caring, so good at knowing right from wrong? and who are we? who are we? the song of who we are:

dull-eyed generation, oh dreamless ones, who sleep at night to wake to go to trade positions to go to desks to go dreamless into concrete and steel, danceless into concrete and steel, danceless bones which cannot feel, for everything's been felt so long ago, everything's been done and redone and done once more, everything's been seen and shown and used for pleasure; all is watered down, taken in like hoped-for-medicine without effect, yet affects are all there are, our affects of happiness on us like breath, like limbs, like blood, like death.

Matt Malyon
runner-up, best overall writer

III

from the streets of Portland to Chicago to Fullerton to

the south of South Korea to Des Moines, I have seen the dreamless men, the less dreaming men, the men who have given up all hope of difference, for what does difference matter: we have no war, no tyranny, no tyrant, nothing to rage against, no signs to hold high. where is the revolution? where have the revolutionaries gone? forgive us for such stillness, such lack of passion, such lack of lack.

is this our revolution,

to sit in square boxes side by side, tiny boxes all the same with aluminum siding, to sit in gated turn-a-bouts watching out the window to see if evil approaches, to work for money and money alone, to work forty years to pour our bones into Florida and Arizona, to sit analyzing through exegesis the barrenness of our lives, to philosophize that we are without aim, to be chained to desires, to have our desires controlled, to desire desire?

is this our revolution,

to be aimless, to be drowning in sitcom-hell, to be burning in fashion ads, to be sinking in the bestseller strip mall nights and shopping malls and casino lights, to be needing nothing, to be lacking nothing, to be seeing nothing but the mirror, to be cruising and dancing the night away in buildings crumbling, in bodies crumbling, in souls crumbled long ago, to be satisfied with nothing, to be searching everywhere for something which we know not by name, to be searching for something that isn't there when who Is remains forgotten.

is this our revolution,

to be unable to cope, to be doped up on depression, to be addicted to the pills, to be categorized by dime-store philosophers who patronize our ills, to be boxed into slogans and cliches and holes, to be wasted in the garbage of pop culture, pop culture, pop vultures eating away our souls, all of us, eating away until there is nothing left for us to think, until there is nothing left, until we no longer think, until there's nothing left of us, until there is no us, until there is no I.

is this our revolution,

to be told what to wear, what to think, to be told how to act and what to say, to be told what to drink on the conveyor-belt-life spewing forth statues by the millions, to be simply stock statistics, to be without voice, without being, without name? is this us? are we name brands, are we mere reflections, mirror inflections, are we only desire expiring desire in ignorant bliss?

IV

disclaimer: nothing's shocking anymore, and

I saw the best minds of my generation

disintegrating in undecision, and
love dies
 this is how the world ends.

V

language is losing language, language using
loss is language, language is communicating
in quotations and news clippings and scripted facsimiles
of things we've seen and heard, and heard someone
else say who was saying what someone else said, and
they got it somewhere else, too; who is
saying anything that hasn't been said, everything is dead
before it's born, and no one's busy
being born, so we're busy dying (and that's been said as well).

language means little, certainly
not what is said; truth is merely an alias, nearly dead,
truth is relative . . .
maybe.

VII

the longed for city existed, high on a hill, but still
we saw ourselves outside ourselves from far away, as
if by chance, as if in happen-stance, as
if it were not true; we saw ourselves outside ourselves, somewhere far
from where we were, far from whom
we were, from anything sure and solid and lasting;
we saw ourselves outside ourselves in dreamless beds, with heads
gone visionless, with deadness leading us like
light away from light and into darkness, into days without passion, into
nights without answers, into days, days, days,
endless days forever endless.

Dreamless



Dixie Newlon

Detachment

The peacefulness of space finally calmed his nerves. Clint had been up for nearly three days, worrying, wondering. Space had never bothered him before. Being an astronaut wasn't exactly the career he had always pictured himself in, but from the Air Force came a job at NASA. After that, things just took off. Finally, here he was, at the prime of his life, hundreds of miles away from anyone important to him.

Clint was sure space travel was not the cause of his anxiety. He tried to convince himself he didn't know what could be the trouble, but in the deepest realms of his inner self, he knew: Rachel and Jeremy. He felt guilty even considering what he thought they could be doing.

Clint had known Rachel since the academy. The only female pilot in his squadron, he had plenty of competition. Clint didn't see it that way. He realized early there was nothing to gain from joining the competition. Actually, he didn't even care. His focus was on his work. After much convincing of himself, he began to believe it.

Rachel was nearly always in the back of his mind during that time though, he just wouldn't accept it. But how could he not? She was a "ten." She had everything just where it belonged, and there was just something about how she fended off her snarling half-witted counterparts every time they approached her for a date. She was never on the defensive, always took a stand. She could really dish it out.

Clint knew better than to try anything. He couldn't see himself getting shot down like the rest of them, nor did he want to. He was content being a prime pilot, first class. He knew there would be plenty of chances to find someone when he finished serving. So a small smile or innocent glance was all the attention he ever paid to her, and a return glance was all she ever paid to him. "That's the way it should be," he'd convince himself.

Throughout, Clint was showing incredible self-control. But the night she came looking for him, he found himself hopelessly weak. It was the night before Clint was to complete his service. He was done. While the rest of his squadron partied the night away, Clint packed. He had been to the party for a couple of hours, but felt a little depressed. He knew he'd be leaving many friends behind, and didn't want to put up with goodbyes knowing his last visions of his friends would be as a group of slobbering drunks.

As he placed his last pair of trousers in his leather suitcase, he heard a light patter on the door, and it slowly crept open. Standing half in the doorway, half in the swelling darkness outside was Rachel. Clint had never spoken to her. She had never spoken to him. Clint was overwhelmed with confusion, anxiety, anticipation, and hopes.

Rachel slowly entered and glided within breathing space of Clint. Clint was in awe. He had no idea what to expect, what to do. He had seen steamy scenes like this in plenty of movies but figured that's what they were, just movies. What was he going to do? Had she treated all of the airmen this way? Was she particularly interested in him? Would they get caught? Was this even the reason she was here?

As she eyed him, an expression that showed she was on a mission broke into a smile. She took Clint's hand and began to scold him, half motherly, half seductively.

"You know," she began, "the guys tell me you bailed out early this evening. They really want you to come back, now."

Clint was intrigued. What on earth was going on? "They said that?"

*Jay Cue
runner-up, best story*

"Yes," Rachel replied convincingly, before giving a little chuckle. "I told them if you didn't have to go, neither did I." She laughed.

Clint forced a chuckle, half-disappointed at her reason for showing up, half-relieved.

Together, Clint and Rachel went back to the get-together. They had fun. It was that night that a spark between them ignited. By the time the party ended the next morning, it had engulfed the both of them.

The two had left the crowd and had been talking for nearly four hours. The sun was peeking its bright eyes over the horizon, and both knew their little rendezvous would soon end. Clint was on his way home, but Rachel's service was not yet over.

The two shared breakfast and spent the remainder of the morning as if they had been a couple for years. Each was comfortable with each other and neither wanted it to end. The two decided to keep in touch in hopes that they'd meet up again soon. As the sun crept further and further from the east, Clint returned for his stuff, and Rachel escorted him to the plane. A long kiss goodbye added a small amount of closure to their night, but opened the path for what was to become.

Time seemed to pass slowly in space. Although Clint's mission was only to orbit for seven days, the week seemed to creep by. He was now on day four, and the uneasiness would not go away. He just kept picturing what Rachel and Jeremy might be up to. Rachel had repeatedly assured him that the mission would be over in no time, and that there was nothing to worry about.

The mission seemed easy enough. Clint was on a one-man aircraft just outside the Earth's atmosphere. This part was no problem, Clint had been in space a few times before. The problem existed back on Earth. NASA was testing a new form of satellite communication laser that could be sent through one mile of the Earth's crust and through the atmosphere into the craft. It was a design that would supposedly travel through any element, unscathed.

The station that shot the satellite wave was placed underground where the two scientists in charge of the laser were to remain in solitude until the project was complete. The two scientists were Rachel and Jeremy. The only link anyone had to them was the laser that sent visual pictures to a monitor in Clint's craft. Clint had not seen the monitor transmit any pictures since he left.

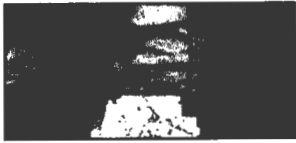
He was sure it was a technical problem, maybe positioning or laser strength. But he wished so much to hear from his wife and friend. He was lonely. Though there were other tests to be completed on the spacecraft, there was too much time to think. Thinking led to worries, which led to anticipation. Why isn't that monitor on? What's keeping them? Please hurry.

Clint tried to calm his uneasiness by shuffling through some memories. He remembered the first time he met Jeremy. Jeremy was Rachel's friend before Clint met him. It had been three months since Clint had left the service, and he hadn't seen Rachel since their little rendezvous. They had kept in touch via e-mail, phone calls and even letters, but no physical contact.

It was mid-July. Rachel had a few days off, but not enough to travel home. Clint thought he'd take this opportunity to make a surprise visit to the base. He had a few weeks before his next NASA training session, so he packed his bags, hopped on the train and traveled to see her.

He hoped she'd still be available. Rachel had not mentioned a boyfriend, though she did mention that she was still constantly in pursuit by a number of the fly boys. It was a thought that made Clint cringe with jealousy a little, but what could he do?

When Clint arrived at the base, he was informed that Rachel had gone to the beach to swim with a number of the other pilots. Clint threw on a pair of trunks and strode down the big hill towards the ocean. The whole way down he tried to spot Rachel, but it wasn't until he saw a group gawking that he found her. It was obvious the men were admiring Rachel's superb figure. Why not? Clint rather liked it himself.



“One hundred bucks says I get a kiss from her, then we go back to my place.”



He approached the group who ignored him completely, too entranced by the prize before them. Clint stood and listened to some of their comments; some crude, others humorous. Regardless, the comments were all directed right at Rachel. Clint wasn't too fond of this.

“Whoa,” he blurted out, joining the hoots and howls. “Look at that. Damn! You don't find a creature like that just anywhere.”

“Yeah man,” one of the men replied, still fixed on the body, “she is primo.”

“That's for sure,” another added. “But don't get any ideas. She's turned every guy in this regiment down. Claims she's got some stud boyfriend who lives a hundred miles away.”

“Yeah, but none of us has ever seen him though,” a third man interrupted. “I figure if he can stand to be so far away from that, he deserves a little competition.”

“I hear ya,” Clint replied. He could see he was going to have fun with this. “You say she's turned everyone down?”

“Man, everyone,” the first man replied. Clint was amazed at how long the group had been staring at her. She was sunbathing, hadn't moved a muscle since he arrived. “I don't even know if she's with it. She's probably a lezbo or something,” the man continued.

“Man,” another added, “if that's the case, what a crying shame.”

“I don't know,” Clint said with a puzzled expression. “I think she looks mighty tasty, and I'm not leaving until she decides to come with me.”

“Who do you think you are,” one of the men interrupted. “Didn't you hear? If she turned us down, why in the hell would she go for you?”

Clint gave the group a smirk only James Dean could emulate. With smooth, cool motions, he pulled a wad of twenty-dollar bills from a small pouch in the bag he had brought with him. He counted out five, one for every man in the group. “One hundred bucks says I get a kiss from her, then we go back to my place.”

The group roared with laughter. Between cackles of insults and disbelief, the five willingly accepted the bet. Clint gave the pile of cash to a nearby soldier to watch over, and proceeded towards Rachel. As he came closer, she opened her eyes. She did a double take, and before letting out a burst of excitement, Clint put his finger to his lips, signaling for silence.

"Listen up," he muttered. "I bet your fan club over there that I could get a kiss from the most beautiful woman on the beach. What do you say we earn enough to have one hell of a night?"

Rachel's eyes were glowing with excitement. Clint could see she wanted to burst, but with great composure, she got up from the towel she had been lying on, eyed the group of men, strode over to Clint and plastered him with a long passionate kiss. She then glanced at five jaws lingering just slightly over the sand. Clint and Rachel shared a laugh and approached the group, still in awe.

"Thanks guys," Clint said picking up his bag and retrieving his winnings from the soldier who had been safeguarding the cash. "We're just going to get her stuff and head to my motel room. You guys take care." Rachel laughed loudly and excitedly as the two left the beach, a hundred dollars richer.

That evening, the two decided to throw on the formals and really have a night on the town. Rachel suggested a quaint but exclusive Italian restaurant where a friend of hers waited tables to earn some extra cash. The friend was Jeremy.

Jeremy was a grad student at the area college. He had already become a licensed astronaut, but wanted to get some more schooling before becoming a full-time NASA scientist. Waiting tables was a way for him to pay for his living expenses; NASA picked up the college tab.

When Clint and Rachel were seated, Jeremy approached to greet his friend and meet her date.

"Hey Rach," he said, eyeing Clint. "Who's your friend, here?"

"Jeremy, this is Clint. He completed his service a few months ago and came back to say hi. Clint, this is my good friend Jeremy. We've known each other for..."

"Forever," Jeremy interrupted. "How do you do, Clint?" Jeremy reached out a hand and Clint shook it. After taking the orders, Jeremy left the two while he continued to work.

The couple had a very pleasant meal, discussing what they've been doing for the past few months, what their plans were, and the people they'd met. It was apparent each had strong feelings for the other, and Clint began to wonder where this relationship would end. Would there be enough time in his life for her? Would she make time for him? How could they possibly make this long distance relationship work? Clint had no idea, but was determined to find a way. Rachel was worth it.

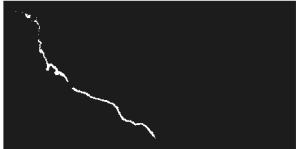
When the meal was over, Rachel motioned to Jeremy. When he approached the table, Rachel and Clint asked if he'd like to join them at the bar when he got off work. He accepted the invitation, and at eleven o'clock, the three met for a nightcap.

Jeremy and Clint hit it off extremely well. When they found that they shared the same interests and worked for the same organization, the conversation flourished. It almost seemed as if Rachel wasn't there at times. She didn't mind though, seeing her man and her friend hit it off so well made her quite content. It had been a while since she had engaged in a real conversation, even if she was doing all of the listening.

By the end of the night, Jeremy and Clint had become quite good acquaintances. Clint offered to help Jeremy get a position on the project he was training for as a

communications technician. Rachel had only four months of service left, and agreed to move to the NASA base as well in order to be with her two favorite guys.

The weekend seemed to fly. The three had an incredible time, and the bond that formed between them was one that could surely be lifelong. They talked mostly; discussing their pasts, their aspirations, dreams and wants. Rachel and Clint also joked about what would happen when they all settled at the NASA base. Rachel contemplated getting a communications job, but she said she'd have to find herself a good husband to make her want to come home every night. Clint jokingly offered to propose if it would make Rachel's life easier. Jeremy just watched in playful disgust.



“What do you say we all get dressed up and really enjoy our last night here?”

“You kids are so cute, it makes me wanna puke. What do you say we all get dressed up and really enjoy our last night here? Clint, you can come dress in my bunk. Rach, we'll meet you back here in an hour.”

Rachel and Clint agreed to the idea, and off they went to get ready. On the way to the bunk, Jeremy took the liberty of having a man-to-man talk with Clint, this being the first time the two had been alone all weekend.

Jeremy told Clint about the past he had shared with Rachel, about how he thought they were perfect for each other, and how they eventually broke up.

“Rachel just seemed so withdrawn,” Jeremy explained. “I loved her, still do, as a sister. I wanted to get a piece as much as any other man, but as I got to know her, I respected her and honored her wishes.”



“Whoa,” Clint interrupted, “you mean to tell me Rachel wouldn't let you? Has she ever...”

“Nope,” Jeremy replied, “she's pure. Her mother taught her to be. You know, the whole wait until you're married thing. It's respectable. I just wish all those other cadets agreed. It really bugs her, the whistles and comments. I tell you, I've been in many fights over that woman. But they were all worth it. She's quite a person. You're a lucky man, she really has a thing for you. I'm happy for her, you're a good guy.”

Clint was in deep thought. It was a little disturbing to him that Rachel and Jeremy had been a thing. Not unbelievable, just weird. Jeremy had a solid 20 pounds over Clint, and could bench press a small Volkswagon. But Clint trusted him, or so he thought.

Though space has no morning or night, Clint figured it must be in the A.M. He had fallen asleep and awoke to find his arm hadn't awakened yet. He shook it violently, trying to get the tingle out. It was the first time he had slept well all trip. Only two more days and he would be back on Earth with his wife. He missed her. He stared at the monitor, still blank. He wondered if he'd ever see a picture. If not, they may ask him to stay in space longer until the problem was fixed.

He had a radio to call mission control, but those people weren't Rachel. He needed her. He couldn't stand that he didn't get to see her but Jeremy did. He hated Jeremy. That bastard was with his wife and there was nothing Clint could do about it. They were one mile underground, away from anyone. He could do anything to her with no interference, no one to tell him not to.

Clint slammed his fist against the wall in anger. The pain splintered through his arm and into his elbow, not a smart move. He cradled the sore appendage and began to feel guilty

for thinking of Jeremy that way. Jeremy was his friend. They had known each other for over a year now, he trusted his friend.

Clint just needed sleep. He had only slept for about five hours. It was midnight Central time, so he had another seven hours before he had to do more experiments. He wondered what Rachel was doing. Was she in her bunk sleeping? Was she in Jeremy's? No, none of that. Clint needed sleep. He promised himself not to think about it anymore. He only had two more days.

Clint trailed off easily. His body was so worn out that he absorbed the sleep like a sponge, his body yearned for it. He was suddenly awakened, however, by voices. He forced his eyes open and found his beautiful Rachel on the monitor. She was smiling and greeting Clint, asking for him to respond. Clint bolted to the camera he had in his spacecraft, flipped the switch, turned on the microphone, and begged for Rachel to respond. She did. The two exchanged sentiments of love, and told of how each missed each other. Clint wanted to cry, he wanted to scream out with joy.

There was Rachel. Her face, her voice telling him how much she wanted him to return, how sorry she was that it took so long to make contact. He wanted to wrap his arms around the screen. He wanted to go home and see his love in person.

As the conversation bore on, a figure crept behind Rachel, and with one massive blow, it struck her in the back of the head with a forearm. Rachel's head snapped to the side as she tumbled to the floor. The figure was Jeremy. He dug the heel of his shoe deep into Rachel's ribs, pressing so hard the veins in his neck were bulging. Clint leaped up in awe and outrage. His instinct was to attack, but how? He could no longer see Rachel; she was on the floor with Jeremy's heel still embedded into her.

Jeremy conveyed a smile Clint had never seen the equal of. The smile was of domination, power and hate. Clint began to shout at the screen, begging for Jeremy to let go, threatening him if he didn't. Jeremy laughed. He had the upper hand. He had the power. Hundreds of miles away, there was nothing Clint could do but watch.

Jeremy then picked up Rachel and struck her repeatedly, blood spurting from her mouth, her ears, and her nose. She was no longer conscious, but the rising and falling of her chest told Clint she was alive. Jeremy laid her upon the table where the camera had plain view of her. He laughed a wicked, horrible laugh. Clint's ears swelled with his laugh. His teeth wore from rage. He screamed and begged, throwing equipment through the gravity-less air. He was shaking violently.

Jeremy grabbed Rachel's white overcoat, the collar now blood soaked and tore it open. He slid his hands to her pants and did the same. Rachel came to just as Jeremy was about to remove her clothing. Clint shuddered in fear and rage, Rachel screamed. Jeremy struck Rachel once more, sending a spurt of blood splattering on the camera lens. Clint no longer had a clear picture. All he could hear were the screams from Rachel and the hideous laughing of his once-great friend.

Clint bawled and screamed in rage, he pleaded for Jeremy to stop. In a drastic effort, he even offered to take his own life if it would correct whatever Jeremy was after, but none of it worked. Clint was helpless, beaten down by a force hundreds of miles away. He could hear his love being violated, but he could not protect her. Jeremy turned off the camera. The screen was blank. Clint put his face in his hands and cried.

The next thing he knew, he had awakened. He was in bed with the covers pulled over him. He looked around startled. Everything was strewn about as it had been before. He hopped up to the monitor and looked. The screen was blank. Had it all been a dream? No, it was too real, but what if it was? Could his dearest be okay? Clint's mind dashed beyond confusion. He began to break into a cold sweat. Had he gone into hysteria, or had his poor wife been violated? He didn't know.

Clint checked his watch. The time said 6:43. Maybe it was a dream. Clint contacted mission control, but they told him Jeremy had reported no problems, and that everything was going as planned.

"Did you hear from Rachel?" Clint pleaded.

"No sir," was the reply.

Mission control informed Clint that Jeremy had been doing all of the communicating, and that they hadn't heard from his wife. Clint was worried. He was beyond worried. He was terrified. What happened the night before? It was so real, but things didn't seem to fit.

Clint began to cry in hysteria. What was going on? Clint shook violently in his anti-gravity spacecraft. He was helpless and ignorant. He was alone with no one, but he had everyone he could ever want back on Earth. What if they weren't there? What if something had happened to them? Clint could not comprehend. He began hallucinating, seeing Jeremy. He tried to throw punches, but they connected with nothing. His mind was no longer his, it was part of space, distant and untamable.

Soon his hysteria took control of his body. He needed Rachel. He needed to go home. He needed to get out. Clint looked frantically for the door. He had to leave the confusion. He couldn't take the hurt and the unknown. Where was his wife? How was his wife? Why hasn't he heard from his wife? He needed his wife.

The final day had passed. The mission was over. Mission control had been trying to contact Clint for the past 64 hours to no avail. The spacecraft still hovered above the Earth's atmosphere. There was no response and no one able to return it to Earth. No one knew what had happened to Clint. Was he sick or delusional? Could he have suffered medical problems and died? Could something have gone wrong with the craft?

The only one who knew Clint's condition was Clint. He kept confined and afraid in a small corner of the spacecraft. He continued to hear mission control's pleas for an answer to their repeated calling. But Clint did not answer. He just stared at the speaker and the dark monitor with bloodshot eyes that had been open for nearly three days. He wept often, too afraid to answer the call, too afraid of what he'd find out. If his wife was not well, he couldn't bear to go home.

But was his wife well? Was his wife okay? Clint didn't know. So he continued to exist motionless and infected, not by a virus or crippling illness, but by an inhumane and incurable form of detachment. ■

2000 - 2001



Bobby Harkin

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The Masterpiece

She bent over the wheel and was at once lost in the depth of her work. Her hands were gloves made of the earth, the clay as natural on her elbows. Her hair was pulled back in a rubber band, small ringlets escaping to frame her face. Finding them bothersome, she would periodically raise her wrist and swipe it across her forehead, leaving behind small smudges of dry clay. She kept the wheel at a quick pace while she worked to center the clay, gently pressing down against it with the pad of her palm. Firmly pushing both palms against the mound, fingertips overlapping in the back, she raised the clay to a volcanic shape, and once again applied pressure to the top and the clay became a round clump upon the wheel.

He watched her from the doorway, smiling at the image he had come home to so many times. Her brows were furrowed in concentration; her dark eyes squinted in focus as her small sturdy hands began the creation of yet another masterpiece. A slow grin tugged at his lips as he wondered if the gallery would receive this one. The sunlight slipping through the window caught her hair and made it glow like fire against her pale skin. He knew she was unaware of him, of any of her surroundings at the moment. He watched as she started to slow the wheel, crossing his ankles as he prepared to wait.

She wiped her fingers against the rim to rid her hands of excess clay, and then rubbed her palms over the thighs of her worn jeans. She placed the thumb of her right hand into the top of the mound and curved her fingers along the outside, guiding the shape with her left hand. She wasn't thinking, it was a different state that enveloped her. Emotions were guiding her hands, she no longer made the decisions of what would be created, and yet she already knew what the outcome would be. Cursing under her breath she pushed out her bottom lip and blew air up to her forehead in an effort to move the ringlets that were falling into her eyes, but succeeded only in having the curls fall into a different place on her forehead. She lightly squeezed the clay between her thumb and fingers and the shape was changed into a short cylinder with a shallow center.

He remembered the first time he'd seen her there. Confused and frustrated about his feelings, he'd stormed into the studio, and when he saw her bent over the wheel, fingers seemingly one with the clay, he had stopped and marveled at the love he felt for her at that moment. He ran a hand through his dark hair and thought of how many times he'd fallen in love again, with this same woman, standing in this same spot.

Lifting the sponge, she dipped it into the bucket, and squeezed it over her hand, watched the water trickle down over the crevices of her fingers and run into the bottom of the piece, squeezing up any excess that remained in a puddle at the center. She bent further over the wheel and put her left hand down inside the shallow hole she'd created. Slowly she pushed the wall out against the center, resisting the pressure from the outside steady and controlled. She worked on the top edge, light fingertips slowly thinning the clay to define the rim. This was the one place she could let emotions rule out her thoughts; break the shell that was covering her heart. She didn't know how much longer she could wake up in the morning and fight the urge to stay asleep forever; she couldn't stand another day of missing him like she missed him now. She placed the flat of her thumb at the base of the center and defined the inside curve. Picking up the sponge she thinned the inside one last time, giving the clay its final shape.

He knew she was almost finished, and suddenly had to fight the urge to throw more clay on the wheel head, to continue watching her create forever, to never have to approach the moment that he inevitably had to face.

She dipped her hand in a bucket of water and splashed the wheelhead. Slowing the wheel down once more, she twisted the cutting wire in her hands, eased her thumbs down onto the wheel, and in one swift pull released her work from the wheel head. She placed the wheel head onto the flat palm of her right hand and set the piece onto a dry bat. Taking a step back, she studied her work and realized she'd been making it for him all along. It was an exquisite bowl, thick walls, and a deep wide base. She could picture it, the color of the ocean before a storm, the color of his eyes. She switched the wheel off and put her hand in the small of her back as she stretched. Thoughts of him filled her head and she grabbed

Leslie Sivadge
best overall writer

her bucket of water, tossed the tools in, and walked over to the sink.

He ached for her. He hated himself for every ounce of pain he saw in her eyes, knowing he was responsible for her sadness. He watched her stand over the sink, wearing one of his old shirts, her feet bare against the cool concrete, he wanted nothing more than to walk up behind her, wrap his arms around her waist and brush her hair behind her ears. He wanted to take her upstairs, lay her head on the pillow and run his hands through her fiery hair, tell her how much he missed her. More than anything, though, he wanted to turn back time.

It was suddenly vitally important for each tool to be immaculately clean. She grabbed at her sponge and squeezed it until every ounce of liquid clay was drained from its fibers. She scrubbed at her turning tool, the steel kidney, and when she finished running her fingers along the wire she grasped for something, anything else to clean. When she found nothing she turned the water off, dried her hands, closed her eyes, and fought the oncoming tears, the despair that was clogging her throat. She wanted desperately to be angry with him, to blame him for everything. She wanted to scream at him for leaving her this way, scared, alone and so completely empty. She wanted to curl up into a little ball and hide from everything and everyone she knew. Instead she slowly lifted her head and prepared to leave her studio, her haven, and caught her breath when she saw him standing in the doorway.

"Jack? How? What are you doing here?" She didn't fight his movements; they were so familiar, so comfortable that she didn't even think of it. She could smell him and she longed to bury her face in his shirt, to smell nothing but the familiar scent of soap and spice. She reached to put a hand over the one that covered her cheek. Could he be real? No. She had to be dreaming, she just had to be. Jack was gone, wasn't he?

"I've come to say goodbye. I can't tell you how much this hurts, to stand here and watch you, touch you, and know that it's the last time. If I could, I would never do this." He traced her lips with his thumb and followed the line of her jawbone. "I was so stupid. I just want you to be happy again. I want to see that smile again so badly I can't catch my breath sometimes."

"Maddie you know I wouldn't have gone had I imagined anything like this. If only I had listened to you, but I didn't. I thought I could make it, and I missed you so badly I convinced myself it was only a small storm. Do you think it doesn't torture me to see you in bed alone at night? To watch you toss and turn and cry in your dreams?" They both stood staring into the other's eyes, tears rolling over the edge, standing between past and future. "You have to let me go Maddie. And somehow, I have to let you go, too."

"I don't know if I can." Her head fell and he crossed over to her once more.

"I know you can. You're dying now too Maddie, and if you don't let me go we're both just going to be stuck in desperation for one another. I'll see you again, love. And until then, I'll watch over you every minute, and I'll wait for you every hour, cross my heart." He kissed her lips and she threw her arms around his neck, hated how real he was at that moment, knowing how empty she would be the next.

She reached inside for some deep strength she wasn't sure she had, but looking in his eyes she knew, for both of them, she had to find it. "I'll see you again. Cross my heart. Goodbye Jack." She kissed his cheek and watched as he smiled her favorite smile, and suddenly she was standing alone.

She ran her fingertips over the bowl that lay on her nightstand next to the bed. The glaze had been a difficult mix, but the result had been her desire. She reached to turn the light out and laid her head down on the pillow, and running her hand over the empty pillow beside her, she whispered into the dark, "Goodnight, Jack." ■

Free



Marjean Tryon

I am Beauty-

With hips too large for society
Hips that sway when I dream
of dancing

I am Beauty-

With curly hair the color
of dark chocolate
Wayward hair that does
what it wants

I am Beauty-

With small breasts that once
swelled full with milk
Small breasts that have
fed three children

I am Beauty-

With almond eyes
and olive skin
Skin etched with lines that
measure my memory

I am Beauty-

With narrow palms and long,
graceful fingers
Fingers that refuse to wipe
away one more tear

I am Beauty-

With a two-inch scar that
runs over my shoulder
Immeasurable scars that lay
under my skin

I am Beauty-

With a pale line circling
my left ring finger
A voice so strong it left
my ring finger bare

I am Beauty-

Strong and determined, wild
and free
Free from all Burdens you once
put on me

Leslie Sivadge
best overall writer

Hide and Seek



DMACC Photo Department

She came to wake me
with butterfly kisses, only
she knows that makes

me smile. I follow her
laughter and chase her bare
feet,
leaving a path through emerald

grass and bluebells. Around
her head rests a ring of white
clovers, the sun catches auburn

in her hair. She wears
a pink slip, so thin it
chases her in the soft

afternoon wind. I follow
her until suddenly she
stops, turns and stares

back at me. I know
these eyes of sapphire
well; the dimples that

no longer come easily. But
she turns again, and
escapes me, hiding behind

a tree. I run to the
trunk and walk a slow
circle and looking up find

her laughing down
at me. Dark curls and
tiny toes dangling over a

branch. I smile and
reach up to hold her
hand and she reaches

down to mine. One more inch,
my eyes flash open I
desperately wish I could reach

the little girl who
lives inside me and play
hide-and-seek again.

Leslie Sivadge
best overall writer

The Goddess



DMACC Photo Department

I am the beginning,

And I am the End.

I am the womb,

And I am the tomb.

I am in your mind,

Your heart,

I am in your soul.

Search for me,

Find me,

And learn to fly.

I am the Goddess.

*Jacki Anderson
runner-up, best overall writer*

Phases



Ray Thompson

We are the waxing moon.

We are the beginning of all.

We are the spring.

We are the little princesses,

We are the scruffy tomboys.

We are the Maiden, the innocence.

We are the full moon.

We are the creators of all.

We are the summer.

We are the artists,

We are the caregivers.

We are the Mother, the source.

We are the waning moon.

We are the end of all.

We are the winter.

We are the teachers,

We are the guides.

We are the Crone, the wisdom.

Jacki Anderson
runner-up, best overall writer

From the shadows of the candle light steps a short, round woman, white-haired and wrinkled. The sleeves of her silvery white robe fall back as her callused hands reach for the chalice of wine. Her journey across the veil has left her throat parched and she downs half the wine in one swallow. Licking her lips she turns to her left and hands the chalice to another woman stepping from the shadows.

This woman is an opposite of the first. She is tall and thin, long faced and small of breast. She looks down upon the world with a judging eye and holds her pointed chin up high. The chalice is emptied when placed to her thin cracked lips and her white robe swirls as she takes a piece of bread from my altar.

These two women are my great-grandmothers, dead for several years. On this night of traveling souls I am once again in their presence, and once again a small child upon their laps. Silently, they reach for my hands and take a single step forward into the North. My living room dissolves, giving way to a wooded hill. The trees sway with the chill of the wind, dropping dead leaves with every movement. The clouds cover a starless night leaving only the light of the moon to my being as I swell with the power of the land and the power of my great-grandmothers, dead for several years.

The sound of nine upon nine horses reaches my ears, growing steadier until all is drowned out but their beat. The hands of my great-grandmothers turn me to face the racing herd of glimmering horses. Each white horse holds a wild, white-robed woman. One woman is old and hunched with silver hair and thin, wrinkled skin. Another has bright red hair lined with white, stubby hands and rounded hips. Another is tall and thin, with slender long fingers gripping the reins. Each woman is different, but each is the same. And leading them all is another of my deceased great-grandmothers, bringing my ancestors to my side.

They gather round me in a circle, their robes reflecting the light of the moon and I look upon their faces. I see the face and life of my great-grandmother's mother, understanding was born and I watch as these women give strength to my grandmother when she labors to bring my mother into the world. Their power fills me and I know then that they have always been with me, that they have always been a part of me. Not only has their blood given me hazel eyes, thin lips, and round hips, but it has also given me my stubbornness, my pessimism, my love of nature, and my sense of honor. These women are of my line and they are the shapers of my life. Each lesson they have learned has been passed down from one woman to the next. Each trial they have faced has created the woman now standing in the center of the circle. From the wisdom of their eyes, I learn that one day I, too, will be riding a white horse through a wooded hill to give my lessons to the daughters of my daughter and that my life will shape the lives to come.

As the light of the moon fades with the rising sun, the women nod their heads in parting and turn their horses from the circle. They leave with the knowledge that one of their children has taken another step in her life and will take strength and comfort in their presence. As the rhythm of the hooves fade my great-grandmothers slip their fingers from mine, kiss me on each cheek, and follow the women of my blood across the boundary of the realms.■

The Feminist's Daughter

Rachel Jenkins' earliest memory was attending a protest rally with her mother. Charlotte "Charlie" Jenkins was a feminist, had been since her days at Berkeley in the early '70s. A loudly radical feminist, Charlie had inherited a big sprawling house, along with a big sprawling fortune, when her parents died in a car accident in 1971. Instead of working, her days were filled with planning these rallies, and executing them with noise, style and precision.

The protest rally Rachel dimly recalled had been outside a waste treatment plant in their hometown of Riverton, NY. It was known around town that the men that worked there held all the cushy management and supervisory positions, while the women were always reduced to packaging, bottling and other menial, low paying jobs. Rachel had only been four at the time, and really only remembered the screaming and chanting, the big pieces of poster board with bold, black lettering, and her mother whipping the women into a frenzy with her loud, booming voice.

In all actuality, Rachel had been quite frightened at the time, but her childhood thus far had been full of bizarre incidents, usually led by Charlie's booming voice. In the years to come, she would become accustomed to being the odd one out in any group. She had no memories of family gatherings, birthday parties or Easter egg hunts. She had no "traditional" memories of Mom and Dad during holidays. According to Charlie, "Dad" had left immediately upon hearing that Charlie was expecting his child, and Rachel only heard Charlie mutter that the man was a "no good bum" when she once falteringly asked her mother about him. Her mother had her meetings, her rallies, and her pamphlets to tend to; more to the point, holidays were not on her priority list. So no puppies springing out of stockings, no milk and cookies left by the fireplace, no father smiling benignly as his daughter opens her gifts, just Rachel and Charlie and Charlie's weird friends. Due to the immense wealth of the estate of Charles and Linda Jenkins, Rachel's mother didn't have to work to feed and clothe herself and Rachel. Their home was a retreat of sorts, full of women who came to commiserate and help further the "movement."

"Any women, whose life has inevitably been ruined by a man," Charlie had decreed, "will always have a place with us."

"A den of freaks and lesbians," Rachel had once overheard a woman at the supermarket whisper to her friend when she and Charlie had walked by. But Rachel always privately referred to their guests as "The Handout Club."

The Handout Club, at any given time, did have a few lesbians and some women who could only be thought of as freaks, but it generally consisted of a group of women who ranted and raved about the lot in life they had been dealt at the destructive hands of men. So they stayed in Charlie's house, ate Charlie's food, watched Charlie's television, and made all the various paraphernalia that Charlie's next rally or demonstration required.

Rachel had always wondered what Charlie would have done if she had been born a boy, but she lacked the nerve to ask. Growing up in the hands of such an opinionated, passionate woman, Rachel's nature was a polar opposite. Timid and shy, she rarely engaged in conversation with any of the Handout Club, and she only spoke to her mother when she had to. However, Rachel did have a spark of anger inside her, stemming from being cheated out of any semblance of the normal life she saw her classmates at school enjoying. She felt condemned to a life of being different, that weird kid of the weird lady.

Charlie was tall, blade-thin and attractive, with smooth honey-blond hair and gray eyes. Her

*Heather S. Wargo
runner-up, best story*

features were plain and unexciting, but she would never be considered ugly. If Rachel knew the exact way to describe her, she'd call her a handsome woman. Rachel, on the other hand, grew up to look so different from her mother and the pictures she had seen of her maternal side of the family that no doubt her petite, darkly beautiful features were from No Good Bum.

Her hair was black, glossy, and curly, with an extremely prominent widow's peak accenting her heart shaped face. Her dark blue eyes were in direct contrast to Charlie's light gray eyes. Her looks had consequently damned her to be the recipient of the countless lectures of the evil of men, and what a man thinks when he sees a pretty girl. Rachel really didn't understand the lectures, and Charlie, in her zeal, never realized she had sheltered Rachel from men to the point of Rachel having absolutely no reference point to be able to understand Charlie's tirades.

Rachel knew from Charlie that men, upon seeing a pretty girl, thought only of One Thing, but she didn't know what that one thing was. The One Thing was evil, and Could Get A Girl In Trouble, but Rachel had no idea what trouble it was. In any case, Rachel felt perversely pleased that whenever her mother looked at her, Charlie would be reminded that a man had been in her life, if only to produce Rachel. Never, at any time, had there been a man around. The only men Rachel saw were strangers at the market, or some teachers at school.

Rachel harbored the secret belief that No Good Bum had fled out of self-preservation, not irresponsibility, but she (of course) never voiced that thought to Charlie. The shyness and timidity she felt was a reflex action to contrast her mother's radical crusade and booming voice. Rachel had a few friendships here and there, but Charlie always managed to offend the friend's parents, and then the child would be forbidden to play with Rachel anymore. There was a girl named Suzy who had once been Rachel's best friend when the girls were in third grade. She was, that is, until Charlie, during a sleepover, expounded on the legal slavery of housewives and encouraged Suzy to never fall into the trap. Furthermore, she suggested that Suzy's mother should free her own self from the slavery and join the movement.

The sleepover ended Rachel and Suzy's friendship with a bang, though Rachel did have the guilty pleasure of hearing Suzy's mother tell Charlie what she thought of the movement. "Brainwashed," sniffed Charlie. "She'll change her mind one day, you'll see."

So on it went, throughout Rachel's childhood and teen years, through the sexual harassment explosion in the 80's, through many rallies, pamphlets and members of the Handout Club. The teen years proved to be the toughest for Rachel, largely due to Charlie's increasing intervention into any situation she perceived as offensive. Charlie had (admittedly unknowingly) caused the demise of at least twelve potential friendships by the time Rachel began junior high school. Since then, Rachel abandoned any attempts at friend making, being a shy girl anyway, and focused on her academics. She longed for the day that she could go to a college far away from Charlie, the Handout Club and the movement.

If Rachel had to single out the most spectacularly embarrassing incident she had dealt with, it would be an episode that occurred in eighth grade. It began when Charlie discovered Rachel's journal.

The slim volume had been a weekly assignment for the first grading period in Rachel's

English class, but she had enjoyed it so much she wrote in it daily, even after the grading period was over. Rachel, who had realized long ago that Charlie could perceive any innocent remark or situation as at least "potentially" offensive, had hidden it between the mattress and box spring of her bed, thinking it was safe since she was the only one who cleaned her room and made her bed.

For some reason, Charlie had experienced a pang of guilt for her dismissive attitude toward Rachel (if she wasn't lecturing the girl, she pretty much ignored her, too busy with her own life). This had happened before, and in fact it was almost a yearly ritual for Charlie. Last year she had bought Rachel a horse (Rachel was terrified of horses, but how could Charlie know?), and the year before she had redone Rachel's private bathroom (which Rachel had loved—a huge bathtub with separate shower, floor and wall tiles with daisies painted on them, it was beautiful). So Charlie decided this year to buy Rachel a new bedroom suite and matching accessories like curtains, bedding etc.

The bed she chose for her daughter was an elegantly carved (somewhat imposing) mahogany four-poster she found at an auction. She bought an antique armoire that came close to matching it, along with rose chintz curtains, sheets and bedspread. In the process of moving the old out and the new in, Charlie found the journal. Which, being Charlie, she immediately read. Among the observations of school life, who was "in love" with whom, (Charlie noted with a huge sigh of relief Rachel had no loves of her own written down), she found an unpleasant incident where Rachel thought she'd begun her period, but wasn't allowed to leave the class to go to the bathroom. Rachel went on to say that she discovered in between classes that it was a false alarm, thank God. She would've died of embarrassment, she added.

But what Rachel hadn't written was that the class she attempted to be excused from was a class so boring that many students had left on bathroom passes, never to return. The teacher finally wised up and didn't allow anyone to leave unless it was an emergency. Rachel, being shy, never took the teacher aside to explain.

Immediately upon reading this entry, Charlie was filled with the movement. She stalked out of Rachel's room and tromped downstairs swearing and shouting. Ten minutes later, accompanied by the Handout Club, she descended on Rachel's school. Leaving her cronies outside to form a hasty protest crowd, she strode through the main entrance and into the principal's office. The secretary was startled by the appearance of this tall, red faced, agitated woman, and even more so when Charlie began to speak.

"I demand a meeting with Principal Murphy right now!" Charlie hissed to the secretary. The poor woman's name was Louise, and it was her second week on the job, having gotten the position after her predecessor retired. She jumped up with a look of alarm on her chubby face. Louise was in her 30s, divorced, and about 75 pounds overweight. Her appearance was not helped by her tight, cotton floral dress and bad perm. She applied her makeup with a heavy hand, and her red lipstick was caked in the wrinkles around her mouth. Her dark roots were showing along her scalp, contrasting with the rest of her orangey-blond hair. She had no idea who Charlie was or how to handle this intrusion, and her self esteem



"I demand a meeting with Principal Murphy right now!"



simply wasn't up to dealing with someone as assured as Charlie seemed to be.

"Wha...what i-is this in regard to?" stammered Louise. Charlie's face was red and her eyes were fierce. With her height and voice, she was quite intimidating.

"This is in REGARD to my daughter being a victim of discrimination in this school!" Charlie thundered.

By this time Mr. Murphy, the principal, had seen the small knot of women outside and heard Charlie's proclamation to Louise. He warily ventured into the outer office and nervously looked Charlie over.

"Hello, Mrs. Jenkins. How can I help you?" Murphy asked with a sickly smile.

"Ms. Jenkins, " said Charlie scathingly. She glared at Murphy. Pointing her finger an inch from his face, she added, "You can help me by wiping that stupid grin off your face and explaining to me why a girl who thinks her period started is forced to sit through an entire class before she's allowed to use the bathroom! Forced into an embarrassing situation that could seriously damage her self esteem!"

Murphy cringed. He knew exactly who Charlie was, and he felt a trickle of sweat slide down his back. He was a slight man, about 5'7" with receding, mousy brown hair and myopic brown eyes. Charlie towered over him, and he knew that he would lose strategic points if he let her continue towering over him. He also knew that strategy or no, Charlie would exact her pound of flesh from him, regardless. He had read all about her exploits for women's rights and the hot sweat began to freeze, being replaced by an icy finger dragging itself down his spine. He ordered himself to get it together.

"Follow me please, Ms. Jenkins?" he asked, gesturing to his open office door. Charlie stomped into the office and he followed her inside, closing the door.

A thoroughly bewildered Louise sat down again at her desk. A couple of minutes passed and Murphy buzzed her.

"Please find Rachel Jenkins, she's in eighth grade, and send her down," he implored nervously.

Louise looked up the Jenkins girl's chart and saw she was in her fourth period history class. Fascinated by the drama, she personally went down and got an embarrassed Rachel (she had spotted the Handout Club outside) out of class and brought her to the office.

Rachel felt so humiliated. She had no idea what her mother was doing here. Coming into the office, she heard Charlie speaking in her crusade voice and knew it must be something bad. She closed her eyes and wished fleetingly that she could be magically delivered to No Good Bum. Nothing could be worse than this. Louise showed Rachel to the door and then scurried back to the safety of her desk.

Rachel entered while Murphy was babbling, "...It certainly is not permitted and had I been alerted when the incident occurred, I surely would have investigated it..." He stopped mid-babble and looked pathetically grateful for Rachel's presence.

"Ah, here she is! Maybe she can straighten this matter out?" Murphy said hopefully.



"This is in REGARD to my daughter being a victim of discrimination in this school!"



Rachel sat down beside her mother and said, "Mom, what are you doing here?" Charlie flashed Murphy a look of triumph.

"I am here because of this!" She shoved the open journal into Rachel's lap. "How could you not tell me about this awful incident?"

Rachel looked down at her words and suddenly felt light-headed. Look at yourself, look outside she thought. That's why! She crammed her anger down deep and adopted a careless air. Shrugging she said, "Mom, it wasn't that big of a deal. In fact, I'd forgotten it."

Murphy visibly relaxed.

Charlie flushed a very deep red. "Forgotten it!" she boomed. "Probably blocked it, not forgotten it, how could you forget such a demeaning occurrence? I want that man FIRED!" she declared.

Rachel began to feel panicky. "No, Mom! Just...no, okay? He doesn't let people out of his class because it's so boring," she glanced apologetically at Murphy, "and nobody will come back from their bathroom pass. It's not a big deal...Mom...please...just don't, okay?" Rachel pleaded, hating Charlie for doing this, knowing that she indeed had forgotten the bathroom thing, but would never forget this! She'd get ragged on about this for weeks by her classmates. By now everyone knew that the nutcase mother of Rachel Jenkins was in the office, and they had seen the Handout Club outside.

"But this is discrimination, Rachel! How can you be so blasé about it?" Charlie spoke to Rachel as though she were a very stupid person.

"Mr. Egan didn't know, Mom!!!" Rachel wailed. "It was a false alarm anyway, I am not traumatized...can we just go home??"

It went back and forth for 45 minutes until Charlie was grudgingly aware that Rachel had no inner scars regarding the "trauma". She stood up to leave, grumbling about looking into a lawsuit. Murphy graciously gave Rachel the rest of the day free to go home with her mother. Rachel eagerly accepted, knowing that she wasn't able to face anyone or finish the day, even though part of her wanted to stay at school and never go home. She reluctantly trailed her mother out of the school, burning with humiliation and anger.

Why does she frighten me so? Rachel thought resentfully. Why can't I rip into her? Rachel tried to imagine life without her mother. A dart of excited fear shot through her stomach. It seemed like heaven. No more controlling every move I make, every person I see...but Charlie would never allow her to go. She had no money or diploma yet. How would she eat? Where would she go? She had no one to turn to. She couldn't just run away without a plan, either. For the first time, Rachel truly contemplated leaving Charlie and the Handout Club behind, and it really wasn't that scary a thought. However, the logistics were not there. Not yet. Squaring her shoulders resignedly, feeling relieved and disgusted with herself at the same time for talking herself out of liberation, Rachel lagged behind her mother in the parking lot. She slowly climbed aboard the converted minibus Charlie and company arrived in and went home.■



Max Shore

Standing Up

Johnny Grant lay in bed on a beautiful summer night in August. There was a thin sheet covering him, and his courage sat hard and silent on the floor below. He thought about the object; thought about the whole day that had brought much and started as fresh as rain. The day started with love. It ended with the object on the floor, the one he didn't really need at all, and the moon beaming down on his family's newly rented house. It ended with stars of promise shining bright and steady.

Johnny began the day falling in love at the front desk of the Merton Public Library on the twentieth of August, 1985. He was 13, what he considered to be an unlucky year of life for anyone. There was the numerology of it, of course - the bad luck - but there was also the fact that he was new to this dusty Iowa town.

It had been the year of the move. It was the year his mother and father filed bankruptcy in Los Angeles and decided to make a clean start. Johnny's father, Harold Grant, had also stood up to his mother on the idea of pulling up stakes. It was a year of firsts.

The move was his father's idea. That surprised Johnny, because he believed that his father had closed shut. To his mother, his father had been a wet sponge that had been left outside on a hot summer day. The sun would rain down, and the sponge would shrivel until there was nothing left but a little crust-ball. His mother's temper had always provided the heat, and his father had closed up to her. To him, he had always been open, and it was one of the many reasons Johnny loved him so much. It was also the reason Johnny felt sorry for him.

Johnny thought the idea must have shocked his mother, too, because Sara Grant didn't protest at all. She didn't get angry. She didn't yell and scream. She just agreed. It was the first and last issue he could remember his parents agreeing on. They decided, and they moved.

One month later, in July, Harold, Sara, and Johnny stood among overstuffed cardboard boxes in an old Merton Victorian house painted gunmetal gray with tired powder-blue trim. Johnny's mother told him that they had to cash in his savings bonds to pay the rent deposit, and his father would have to work a lot of odd jobs for a while to make ends meet. Johnny was too busy trying to fit in his new surroundings to think about any of that.

The following month, on this day in a year of firsts, Johnny fell. Love struck at the library looking up from a copy of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, by Scott O'Dell. It was a kiddie book; he knew that, and he made sure to wedge a few grown-up books in with it. On the very bottom of his check-out stack was a Hemingway. Added to that was a book by a guy named Jack Kerouac. He had never heard of Jack before, and he hoped by the last name that the guy wasn't a commie. The cold war was thawing, but Mr. Gorbachev hadn't torn down that wall yet. Johnny definitely didn't want to read any commie books. Maybe he's Chinese, Johnny thought. China was communist, but they were a higher class of commies. Of course, they named their children Ling or Tin-pia, not Jack.

No matter the author's nationality, the title of the book appealed to him. The title said everything he felt since coming to Iowa: on the road. He was a traveler here, after all. He was a stranger, and he hoped Mr. Kerouac would sympathize with that.

Richard Shea
best story

These books were also rather thin, and that was good. He liked thick books, but it took him too long to read most of them and he sometimes lost interest. He stood at the front desk with his trio of selections, and gazed into the bluest eyes he had ever seen. To him they were the color of the sea.

"Did you find everything you were looking for?" the voice from just below those eyes asked him. He just stared in silence, locked in a sort of hypnotic state. The woman waited for a second and then frowned in a way that was not unpleasant to Johnny at all. She squinted a bit, and her little nose wrinkled up. It was the most adorable thing he had ever witnessed in his short life.

"Young man?" she inquired. "Have you found the books you were looking for?"

He looked up at the beautiful face, and saw the woman with the dusty blonde hair cascading over the shoulders of her light green blouse smiling a little at him, mysterious and almost playful.

"Yes ma'am," Johnny stammered. He felt stupid and nervous looking up at this woman that could be twice his age. He also felt small, like an ant that expected to draw the attention of an over-flying airplane.

"Do you have your library card with you?"

Did he ever. He had gotten that within the first week of his arrival. He had marched downtown with his mother and had gotten a card from Mrs. Engarten, the old hag librarian with the bullet-proof gray hair pulled into a bun and disdainful look of contempt on her face. This new, heavenly librarian was nothing of the sort, and he slapped his card on the desk. He hoped his promptness would impress her, if nothing else.

"Well," she said with what he hoped wasn't false admiration as she inspected his books and looked at the name printed on his library card. "These are some very mature titles you have here. Have you ever read a Hemingway book before, Jonathan?"

She, an adult, had referred to him as Jonathan, and he was now completely smitten. He could picture in his mind their entire future together. He could see her waiting as he withstood the pangs of puberty to emerge as the man of her dreams; him being 18 or 20 and she on the gentler side of 30. He could see their children playing in the backyard and him coming home to a nice meatloaf dinner. His brain was progressing to their grandchildren when she interrupted.

"Jonathan? Have you?"

"Yes," he lied. "I've read lots of Hemingway. I like Hemingway a great deal. I've read all types of Hemingway." Please don't ask me about Hemingway, he prayed. She glanced at him and stamped the inside cover.

"Well then, Jonathan, please return those books on September 10th." She gave him that little smile again, the kind that he was quite sure Helen of Troy gave to the Greek navy, and he nodded back. She then returned to her sorting from a black metal cart to the side, and Johnny stood stock still with a dopey grin enveloping half his face.



He could see their children playing in the backyard and him coming home to a nice meatloaf dinner.



She sorted books for a minute before she looked up again. "Is there anything else I can help you with?"

Will you marry me, he thought. "No ma'am," he said. He could feel his cheeks burning again. "Sorry, ma'am. Thank you." With that, he turned around quickly and walked toward the door. Let me find a boulder to hide beneath, he thought.

"Jonathan," she called out after him. He stopped in mid-stride and spun around like a ballet dancer on speed. "Calling me ma'am is very polite, but it just won't do. I'm not that old yet, you see, and I never will be. You can call me Angie if you want."

"All right," he said, and the corners of his mouth turned up. "All right...Angie, and you can call me..." You can call me what, he wondered. Jonathan was nice to hear out of her mouth, but it wasn't him. On the other hand, Johnny was a little boy name. His mother had called him John boy occasionally, and that he detested. "You can call me John."

"Well John, tell me what you thought of *The Old Man and the Sea* when you finish it. I'm a little too busy to read as much as I want, and I sometimes like to be filled in on the ones I miss."

You're a little too busy doing what, he wanted to ask her, but she returned to her sorting and he thought it best to leave on a high note. He walked out with the books under his arms and a smile to light up the sky.

Johnny hadn't walked two blocks before his smile fell like a fifty-pound sack of flour. He lost his cheer when he rounded the corner from Main Street, on to Maple, and walked right into the Flannery twins.

His mind was shrouded in a euphoric fog, and he literally stumbled into Billy Flannery. At least, he was pretty sure it was Billy. Billy was the one with the scar. Brian was the one with the missing front tooth.

In all other respects, the Flannerys were identical, with matching mops of red hair and little black ball-bearing eyes. They were both juniors at Merton High School, and were the punk scourges of town. They both hated Johnny, and neither was bashful about it.

"Hey faggot," Billy said. He spit when he talked, and a small drop of saliva splattered against Johnny's forehead. "Better watch where the fuck you're going. We ain't like them pussies out in L.A. You bump into us, you bump into an ass-kicking."

"Sorry," Johnny muttered, and kept his head lowered. He tried to look remorseful while his eye darted around for a sign of help. Maybe some kindly townsman would stroll over and break this up or the Flannery's mother would drive by and call off her mangy pups. Maybe his father would drive by. This was part of his delivery route, after all. Instead, Maple Street was empty.

"You bet your ass you're sorry," Brian Flannery piped in. He also spat when he talked, and the gaping hole in his teeth acted as a sort of spout.

"I'll pay closer attention next time," Johnny said. All he wanted to do was get by before they decided to have a go at him. The twins had beat up the majority of the children in Merton, and they hated outsiders even more than their own. "You better pray there is a next time," Brian said, his saliva fountain gushing out. "We might just have to teach you how to pay attention." He nudged his brother and they both laughed. They sounded like hyenas barking, and a small drop of spittle ran down Brian's chin.

Johnny's imagination, which usually served him so well, became a cerebral Benedict Arnold. He saw the brothers laughing, both wearing identical white t-shirts, and the image of Baby Huey and Baby Dewey popped into his mind. They looked like the drooling, plump siblings, sans diapers and duckbills, and Johnny let out a little laugh. It wasn't a big laugh, no guffaw, but it was enough. Johnny went to put his hand over his mouth, trying to muffle himself, but Brian's fist beat him to it. In a blur, Johnny felt a crack against the left side of his jaw, and he dropped to the ground. There was no immediate pain, just a sort of shock. Johnny instinctively brought up his arms, and they blocked the kick from Billy. His books fell to the concrete, and he saw the picture on the cover of *The Old Man and the Sea* gazing back at him. The old man on the cover looked battered, Johnny thought, and then felt another strike at his face. Then, the jaw did hurt. He let out a little cry, and tried to get up.

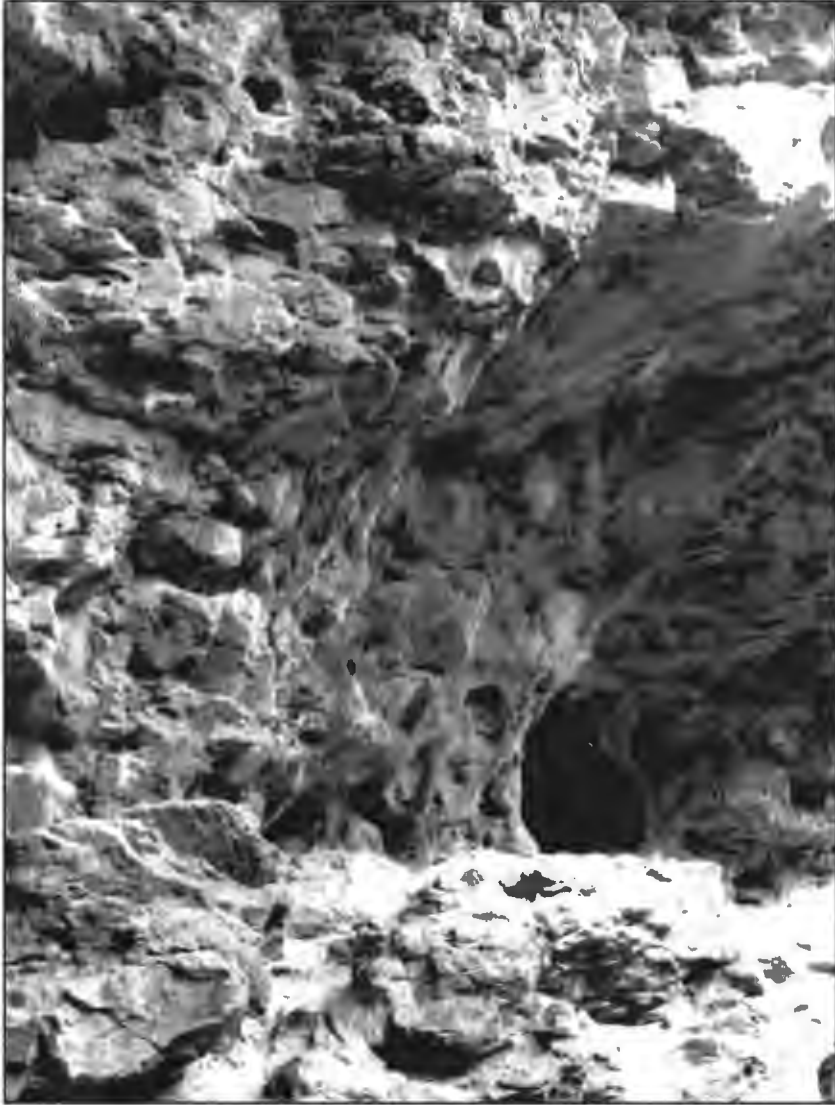
"Think we're joking, you big-city pussy?" Billy spit out the words between swings of his feet. Johnny stayed covered up, absorbing the blows and trying to regain his feet. Then he heard one of the brothers scream. Johnny looked up and saw his father with his massive hands wrapped around Billy Flannery's throat. Beyond that he could see the family sedan along side the curb, still running, and the driver's-side door hanging wide open.

He had never seen his father angry, and the shock of that hit him harder than any kick or blow. His father, in fact, was beyond angry. Veins stood up on his neck as he squeezed, and he had his teeth bared like some wild animal. "How is it?" Harold growled. Billy just gave out a strained scream, and Brian stood motionless watching his brother being choked. "If you ever touch my son again, I will never stop squeezing. Never." With that said he let go.

Billy coughed, and the two brothers scampered across the street. When they had gotten a safe distance away from Harold, who was staring at them and clenching his fists, they slowed and turned around. "Faggots," Brian yelled back. Johnny could see the spit leave his mouth. "You'll pay for this," Harold took a step towards them, and they darted around the corner and out of sight. "Good riddance," he said. Then, he turned to Johnny, who was now standing up and staring back at him.

"Are you all right, son?" ■

Sunshine



Molly Miller

I am called to the heavy old door
That covers the gaping wound in the ground
I've been told to go there when the storm
comes
And the storm always comes.
I wonder what's down there
Left to fend for itself.
I've been told
Don't poke around in there
Imagination fills the space with
unspeakable darkness.
Demons fondling children's dreams--
memories, hostage in the damp.
I peek between the weathered cracks
Deep darkness swimming.
Smelling the molding
forgetfulness
I bravely swing the door wide--
Staring into the open scar.
Don't go down there--The adult voice whis-
pers
Inside my head, I think--
I imagine a child's whimper
From below
I slam the door shut and run to the safety of
The stormy sunshine.

Teah Phillips
best poem

Arctic Mockery



DMACC Photo Department

Fog of my own breath
Falls into my hands
And drops onto the snow as diamonds.

Cloaked in polar skin
My veins of glacier ice
Shift downward to the Bearing.

Voices calling me
Melt in icy echoes
Falling from the sky of memory.

A painless way to live,
I never thaw to freeze
Or die to live and die again.

No friends to hold on to
An empty glass without a lid
And nothing left to lose.

My breath becomes the wind
The North Star is my moon
And I wear a crown of silence.

The force which bends the poles
The queen who never dies
I'll wave the Arctic's wand forever.

*Suzanna Funk
runner-up, best poem*



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