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The Vehicle, Fall 2002

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Archives

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*The
Vehicle*

Fall 2002

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Caterpillar Dreams

by Aubrey Bonanno

I was deep in caterpillar dreams.
Floating in the sea,
No other sensation
Except for that which a leaf feels
On a lake.

I look out across the expanse of water,
Moonlit ripples,
Soft caresses over my shoulders.
Looked so far,
I forgot about near.

A herd of elephants swam past.
So close,
As though they knew
I was part of the herd.
Reaching out,
I could finally feel.

Wet leathery skin,
Soft where I thought it would be
rough,
But still tough, thick.
My fingers slip across their backs.
I was left behind with fear.

Suddenly, I was wading.
Others had gathered,
Too distant to be friends,
They were strangers.
Looking down at their feet,
Instead of up at me.

Something glides past my ankle.
The water is crowded with serpents
and eels,
I am frozen.

I look up for an answer,
But everyone is still looking down,
Shrieking, squirming,
My chest tightens, hands wide open,
Stiff.

Then I saw a stranger.
He had beautiful wings
And tattoos on his fingertips.
I went to him,

He wove himself to me,
Laces his hands with mind,
And held me underwater
Until I could breathe again.

Grandmother

by Natalie Esposito

So there's this woman
with coke bottle glasses
and a brown coat
at the Laundromat
her face
blends into the smells
of fabric softener and fast food
but the glasses,
so familiar

This woman, my grandmother
with coke bottle glasses

went on a trip
and died in the desert
2,000 miles from home.
we got the news over sandwiches,
I heard it in my grandfather's voice

This woman, my grandmother
his Snow White
didn't want anyone to watch her sleep
so she chose ashes instead of the box,
afraid of the way she looked
with her eyes closed.

Photograph

by Natalie Esposito

Little girl with pig tails
red rubber bands and curled ends
looking away from the camera
away from you
a little soldier in pink overalls

My childhood,
fine
as long as I "used my brain,"
didn't disrupt your life.
you, my father, the printer,
a man of hockey, beer.

Even in pictures
of a 4 year old,
you shine through.
On plates that always
had to be finished,
and rules that didn't allow
nail polish on little fingers.

A world where mothers had to work
so little ones could not be protected.

Daddy
straighten out
boxed in
smothered
a little girl with order
Gave a handful of God,
control
and nothing to hold on to.

Left alone to cry in bedrooms
with tiny rosary beads,
hail marys:
your idea of strength.

For My Sister

by Ann Hudson

This week she told me
Words that cut me, and
I wanted to smash my head against
the walls
To make the pain stop.

She told me of her father, yes, the
Same one who took a part of me,
Without caring or asking,
He just took, and he allowed
Another man to take from her
Her innocence, her trust.
She was only eleven.

Just like me,
She had no one to turn to,

Buckeye

by Caleb Judy

Go inside a buckeye
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a flower
Or fly with falcon's wings.
I am happy to be a buckeye.

From the outside the buckeye is a
mystery:
The curious cut it open with a knife,
Or throw it against a wall
To see what's inside.
No one knows why it's lucky.
But I do.

Inside lives an old man —
A grandpa looking to yank ears,
Or rustle a little boy's hair.

No one to tell,
No one to help her,
So she buried the pain inside herself.
But now that she has told me,
She has someone who will listen.

I feel disgust and outrage.
My sister, only eleven.

The night after she told me,
She called me and said
She loves me, and that no one
Had ever understood.

The buckeye is a pair of rusted
spectacles
He looks through to find
Someone that needs a hug.
I've seen kids fighting
Over his affection right after
It falls from the tree.

A Moment's Glow

by Melissa Knoblock

The firefly lights up only for a moment
Just a flicker,
But enough to keep you wanting more
That light becomes your only guide in the dark
A chase that creates longing inside you
You too want to share their light
In selfishness they shut you off
Waiting, wondering, where they'll be next
Slowing down, their wings drawing you in
Finally caught – and they don't stay still
Quickly they scatter across your hand
Tickling your palm in a teasing manner
Before that leap off your finger –
a pause,
a look,
giving you a moment to think they'll stay
A false hope, when you see that last
flicker giving just a moment's glow
only to fly out of sight
Again, gone, out of reach
But only to you
Many other palms to tickle
Many other palms it can't commit to
She has many other hearts to tease

April 8, 1994

by Andy Koch

A gray morning -

From the misty redwoods,
The Emerald City rises
over the lands of perpetual rain.

Somewhere,
someone is playing an acoustic guitar.

When he bends his head low,
he looks like a painting by Picasso;
The Old Guitarist at the age of twenty seven.

*The second coming came in last and out of the closet,
At the end of the rainbow and your rope.*

Blood on a wall
Like a phoenix
With his pinions spread wide.

My brother Eric's birthday would never feel the same again.

Beneath the Snow

by Andy Koch

beneath the snow
a quiet place
of muffled sound
and muted blue-gray
everything is still
and all is calm
inside this frozen world
where a child plays forever
and darkness never comes

Koch Funerals

by Andy Koch

Our family gathers at Renner's,
where we talk and eat and laugh and mourn
and embrace seldom-seen relatives.

With head bowed, I walk to the casket
and pause to give my final farewells.
When I leave, I take a Holy Card.

The hearse bears the pall to Saint Peter's,
where we pray for Our Faithful Departed
as the censer is shaken three times.

We drive in procession to Green Mount,
where my elders are laid to rest,
where it seems like winter never ends.

Grandpa Koch's Sense of Humor

by Andy Koch

We two are sitting together watching television in my Grandparents' living room and my Grandpa Koch has come across *The Bohemian Girl*, an old Laurel and Hardy film.

As he stares at the black and white images on the screen, I can tell, even at my own young age of ten, that his mind is looking back,
to his younger and better days,
to a man I never knew,
before the alcohol,
before the cancer,
before

Grandpa Koch turns to look at me from his old armchair and begins to speak, ready to tell his thoughts to me. "Y'know," he says in his Old Saint Louis accent, "Stanley Laurel 'n Oliver Hardy were really the best around. They were so funny. Still are. There's nothin' really like 'em anymore."

"What about Abbott and Costello?" I ask him. "Did you like them, too?"

"Bah!" he says, laughing, but with that face of his that made him look like he was sucking a lemon. "They're no good. Not very funny, either. Besides, Laurel and Hardy came first, anyway. *They* were the originals."

"Did you like *The Three Stooges*?" I ask him, suddenly thinking of late nights watching the old serials with my Dad, Grandpa's second son and the one that shares his name.

"Yeah, they're pretty good," he replies. "They're pretty good. Y'know, Moe Howard actually visited us back durin' *The War*."

"Really?" I ask, amazed at the idea.

"Yep," Grandpa Koch says to me. "Now, hush up, look at the god-damn TV, and watch some guys that are *really* funny."

Departures

by Dave Moutray

I am today
a poetry of departures
vacant from notion
distant from thought
my exposure is absence

my town of growth
now grows without me
twice the size I left
borders expanded
commerce exponential

men from Chicago, Springfield
calculate land gains
mall development, tax breaks

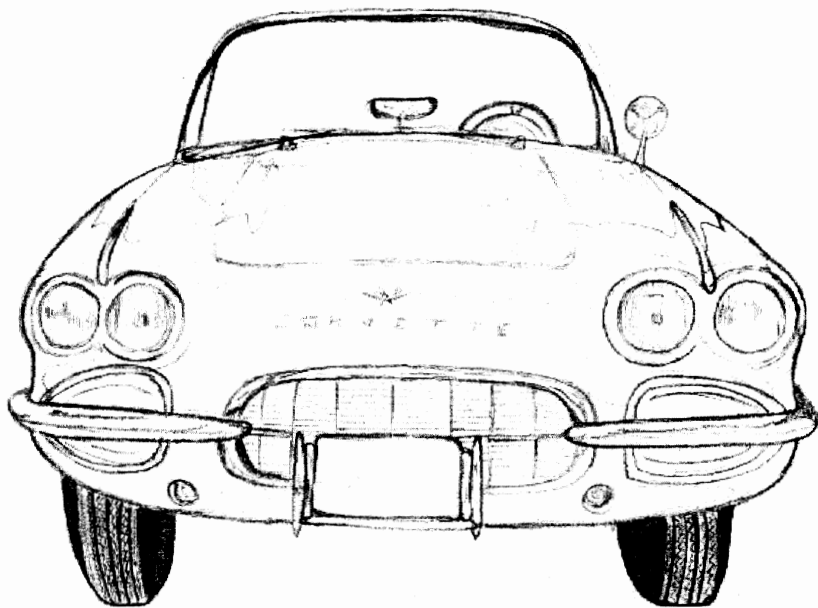
1958 Vette

by Alex Nicol

and a school proximity
much too close

my school now remains
only in yearbooks,
a new one,
illustrious, grand,
stands in its place

Pepsi machines, condom dispensers,
resident sex advisors,
fill halls of aged innocence
where guilt was a night away
and morning brought a new day



Homeland

by Dave Moutray

beyond pastures
and knots of fields
in white churches
where we replaced
innocence with faith
and sin with guilt
my childhood grew

narrow, broken streets
narrow, dreamless minds
filling this small town
resolute in conformity, virtue, and
value
parading down Main Street once a
year
celebrating broom factories and beer
making them forget
long days, slow hours

the mayor,
big in stature,
small on ideas
begins town meetings in churches
and ends them in bars
his son, groomed to fill his shoes,
followed, eyes wide, ears open

but I never really listened
train whistles, bus calls
filled my background instead
I find comfort
in the mystery of faces
under umbrellas,
by street signs,
and in tall buildings
where I am just as much
a stranger
as they are

The Traveler

by Dave Moutray

familiar, anonymous
I stand behind you
in train stations, at airports
I am the traveler
without destination

my worldly pursuits
surprise even me
lands beyond myself,
grand, foreign, distantly familiar
bring a new sense of home

and the faces I meet,
through glass, in aisles,

jealously carry my purpose
in handbags, overnights,
and photographs of faces
expected at the end of journeys

but disappointment
is stronger than expectation
I will collect coins
from Barbados, Liverpool,
and empty my pockets in rooms
prepared for one

Grandpa

by Jennifer Probst

Walking into the kitchen
the loud thump of dirty boots
on a freshly cleaned tile floor,
the smell of summertime trailing him.

His bibs hold him like a turtle shell;
brass buttons dingy and untarnished
with forty years wear.
He sits thrown back and the chair screeches,
as if it's in pain.

Boisterous conversation invades the room
and the incessant droning of sales past,
of a deal taking place (in 1974).

Never once were they discussed;
your marriage or fond memories of your sons.
Nor the death of her
or the drowning that stole your son's life all too soon.

A Purple Heart awarded to you
while serving your country in its aching need
fell deaf on my young ears.

The history I never knew.
The person who was a stranger in my home,
now gone and I've no chance to learn.

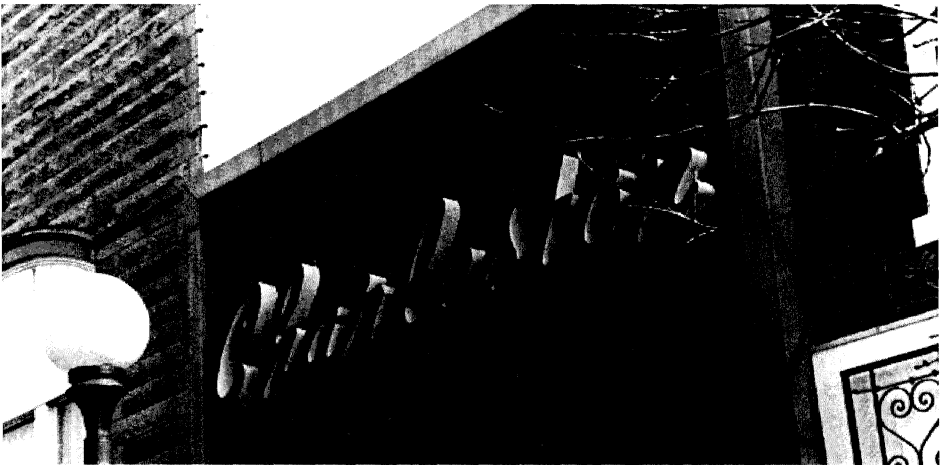
Confusion upon Learning

by Jodi Sanchez

so what am I to do when I can't find my way into your box
you show me THIS SIDE UP
and as I crawl to the top, bearing my all,
you turn the box over
the mission begins again
i draw nearer and nearer
your sporadic encouragement pushes me to try again
a taste of victory,
a boost of self confidence
then the box's opening seals again,
and I'm left to wonder what just happened
trying to maintain the privacy of your soul,
yet secretly wanting it to be found
i'll just give it my best shot
and see if I can find my way
into your
mysterious
and
wonderful
box

Chucktown Pride

by Mike Scales



I Might be Wrong

by Dallas Shumacher

This is an excerpt from a novel-in-progress, Spinning Plates. In this scene the narrator, Patrick Fitzpatrick, recalls a trip his father took him on when he was twelve years old.

Somewhere near Quebec I'm getting hungry and I spot a sign for a restaurant called *Mama's Place* but Dad says, "No, keep looking. Never eat at a place called *Mama's*." The speed limit sign says 140 but Dad tells me they mean kilometers, not miles. We stop for gas and it's measured in liters.

He asks me if we learned the metric system in school yet and I tell him yes.

"When I was a boy," Dad says, "they tried to teach us all about the metric system. They told us it was the way of the future. What grade are you in? Fifth grade?"

"Seventh grade, Dad. When school starts again."

"Well, just so you know, most of what you learn in school is a load of bullshit."

This is before the mental hospital, before my swan-dive from the water tower. This was years before my messed-up life went into a tail-spin. This is years before all that shit and already I know there is something very wrong here.

Dad takes another sip from his thermos — coffee and vodka, a

mix he calls Caffeine Thunder. He let me have some back in Toronto, after I got sick in the Canadian National Tower. He said I should have my first drink with my family, or at least with my old man. "While we're at it," Dad says, "never buy fresh fish from the trunk of a car."

Dad is full of great advice like this.

Here and now I'm twelve years old, riding with my father in his rambling Chevy towards Quebec. Scattered around the seat are soda cans and Chinese food cartons left over from our breakfast in Ontario. There is no such thing as Canadian cuisine.

It was the second week of summer vacation when Dad showed up at Mom's house again. Wallace and I came back from playing in the woods and my parents were both having coffee in the kitchen. They looked tired. Dad seemed glad to see me. Mom suggested I go outside and play some more. No explanations, no particular reason why they got back together again — these things happen. Most nights I would go down to my room in the basement. I would play with Linda or listen to my music so I wouldn't hear their arguing or, sometimes, the bedsprings creaking. Some nights I would sneak out and ride my bike to Wallace's house and we would raid the fridge and play Nintendo all night on a sugar high.

I Might be Wrong

again."

Wallace said, "So what else is new?"

Wallace's parents were unemployed junkies but they were still married and that fact never ceases to amaze everyone. Wallace doesn't understand divorce.

Back on the road to Quebec, Dad is telling me, "If you ever get a girlfriend, save yourself a lot of trouble and dump her before the holidays. Dump her before she ever mentions words like *children* or *commitment*. Be sure to dump her before she asks you to meet her parents. Either dump her or get married, that's your choice."

Dad turns on the radio and turns the dial past country stations, the radio news, a religious sermon, some guy speaking in French, and more country stations. I remember crossing the big bridge into Canada, thinking this is the first time I've ever been in a foreign country. I'm not impressed. Dad says, "French Canadians are all fags." He laughs and sort of punches my shoulder. I'm carefully studying road-signs in two languages. During the long stretches, I look at my shoes.

After a few days Mom and Dad start fighting again. It was inevitable — these things happen. Sometimes a door would slam and a truck would rip out of the driveway and Mom would pound down the stairs to my room and tell me all about what a rotten filthy drunken carousing worthless good-for-nothing

bastard my father is. I would go yeah, yeah, I know, and sometimes Mom would say that I'm growing up just like him and I'd be quiet until she left.

I told Wallace about it. He was smoking a blunt he stole from his parents. He had written a poem, he said. He showed it to me.

*God is dead, your life is a lie.
Things fall apart and nobody
knows why.
Life sucks and then you die.
So fuck it all, let's go get high.*

"My work is displayed in bathroom stalls across the state," Wallace said.

Dad came back late one morning. His eyes were red and he smelled bad. He smiled at me and rubbed my head. He said, "Women, huh?" We went inside and he told me to look for some aspirin while he got something from the fruit bin.

Back in the truck Dad is saying, "To fight off a hangover, try eating a lemon." He sips some more Caffeine Thunder. "Vicodin and Bacardi works, too."

That morning I rode into town with Dad in his rambling Chevy. To get supplies, he said. He bought boards, nails, and a six-pack. He took his time — everywhere we went, people recognized my dad and they would talk.

Someone would say, "Fitzpatrick, you're back again?"

Dad would go, "Yeah, larger

I Might be Wrong

than life and twice as ugly."

People would ask me if I was the little man, tell me I looked just like him, and I would blush or look at my feet. Dad laughed a lot. He smelled like sweat and beer and motor oil. He had big white teeth and a dark face. That morning he had showed me how to shave. Then he showed me how to stop the bleeding with little bits of toilet paper.

We got back home and Dad said we were going to make a tree house. Just him and me working together, we could do it.

Wallace and I already have a tree house, I told him. We made it behind his house. And I'm twelve years old, almost full-grown already.

Dad just said, "Boy like yourself needs a tree house. A regular home away from home, right? It'll be like your own place. Girls love a guy with his own place, right, Paddy-boy?" He rubbed his knuckles into my hair.

I couldn't look at his face. Every time he came he had a new name for me. Sport. Kid. Pat. Tiger. Boy-o. Now I'm Paddy-boy.

And I'm like, Dad, I'm twelve years old. I'm almost full-grown.

Our house is out in the country, near the woods. We got a ladder and went out there in search of the perfect tree for my fortress of solitude. Dad picked the second tree he looked at. Dad started pounding in the first nail and he smashed his thumb. Dad had an impressive vocabulary. When

he calmed down he told me to fetch him a beer.

We worked on the tree, and Dad talked. He told me every boy needs to have a role model. We all need somebody to look up to.

My dad's dad went crazy in World War Two. He sat around and drank himself to death on State Aid. My granddad's dad killed his wife and then turned the gun on himself when he lost a lot of money in the oil business. This is what you'd call a family legacy.

Growing up, Dad never knew what he was doing. He was just winging it. Dad turned eighteen and got a job and he figured that meant he was an adult now. Many years and two kids later, Dad still can't shake the feeling that he's just improvising.

Back in Canada, riding in the truck, Dad says, "To wash vomit out of your shirt, use Clorox and vinegar. This also works for old sweat socks when they get really rank. You can make a paste out of cornstarch and water and use that to clean up blood stains."

Dad says, "And never, ever leave the house without a knife."

A few hours later we're at a rest-stop. Dad buys me a cheap pocketknife from a gift store while I'm looking at maps, looking for ways to get back home.

Wallace and I watched Dad work on the tree house. Dad pounded nails, pulled them out, straightened them, pounded in more nails, and

I Might be Wrong

tried to pull out the crooked ones. I fetched beer. Dad banged his thumb again. He showed off his vocabulary again and Wallace took a few steps back, eyebrows raised.

When the tree house was finished, Dad hunkered down between Wallace and me with his heavy arms over our shoulders. He said, "There it is. Your home away from home."

My fortress of solitude was crooked and drafty and leaned to one side. My home away from home had gaps in the walls and rusty bent nails and a rotten scrap of particleboard for a floor. After Dad was gone Wallace said, "Dude, there is no way I'm suicidal enough to get up in that thing."

That night Dad slept in the tree house after another fight with Mom.

On the other side of Quebec we stop for dinner at a fast-food joint. I'm twelve years old and I'm already wondering what the help does when they get bored. Dad wolfs down a burger and mustard drips on his shirt. I'm removing the pickles from my sandwich. Dad says, "If you get a girlfriend and she's, you know, *interested*, make damn sure she's on the pill." He takes a flask out of his pocket and swigs. "Condoms don't work," he says. "Believe me, I know."

This is so totally more than I needed to know.

One day before Dad showed up again I was at Jaime's house. We played *Mortal Kombat* and she won every time. She showed me how to

make a birdhouse out of a milk carton — a home away from home for traveling sparrows. Jaime lifted a pack of her mom's cigarettes and gave me one. She did not laugh when I coughed. Her parents weren't home. Jaime was thirteen, a year older than me, and she enjoyed having boys around. I was bored. She said, "I know another game we can play?" She said it like that, like a question.

Fast-forward to Dad saying, "Women are trouble. Just remember that, Paddy-boy, and you'll be okay."

Flashback to Jaime pulling her pants up — she never took off her shirt. She told me not to tell anybody else. I said, "Okay. Yeah, I know."

One hour later I told Wallace all about it. He said, "Dude, you're shitting me." He listened with more attention than most people ever give me. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Patrick has officially lost his cherry."

I'm not so sure, but Wallace is usually right about these things.

Fast-forward and we're just outside of Quebec. Dad checks us into a motel with cigar Indians out front. He tells me to clean out the truck while he gets some ice. I get a bag and scoop up soda cans and fast food wrappers and empty bottles and some time during this I get a wad of gum stuck in my hair. These things happen.

Up in our room Dad tells me he'll be right back and he returns with a jar of peanut butter. He says, "Hold on, don't pick at it. We'll try this."

I Might be Wrong

After my hair is a brown sticky mess Dad says, "Wait, I got a better idea." He tries canola oil, lemon juice, whiskey, WD-40, gasoline, hair spray, and later Dad's calling the office downstairs and telling them that one dinky little bottle of shampoo just isn't enough. Then he tells me to hold real still and asks me where I put my pocketknife. Minutes later he shows me a fistful of my hair held together by a wad of gum.

He gives me the knife back and says, "See? Never leave home without it."

When Dad showed up at Mom's house again, I thought maybe it was some sort of punishment. Typical thinking for a twelve-year-old Catholic — God knows about me and Jaime and He is pissed. Mom always said I was a quick learner, and I knew that when things go wrong, I'm usually the one to blame.

One evening Mom and Dad were fighting again. From my room, the crash of thrown china and the stamping of feet and my parents' yelling sounded like the clash of the Titans. I read a book — Stephen King, horrifying stuff, better than real life.

Late that night I was sleeping — dreaming of earthquakes and thunderstorms and this strange sensation that I'm falling. More dreams, involving Jaime and a running river.

Later that night Dad was shaking me, trying to get me to wake up, shining a flashlight in my eyes. I woke up and squinted at him —

"What time is it?"

He shined the light in his own scruffy face, ghoulish-looking and wild-eyed. He was on the bed and leaning over me and his breath smelled like beer and cigarettes.

He said, "You want to go on a trip?"

Mom won't like it. She'll call it a kidnapping.

He said, "We could go to Canada, see Niagra Falls."

Mom will probably call the cops. We'll be in deep shit.

He said, "Come on, just you and me, us guys on a road trip."

Far from home with my mad-man father — this is such a bad idea.

He said, "Besides, wouldn't you like to get away from your mom for awhile?"

I said, "Let's roll."

Half an hour later Dad's truck vaults over the curb and swings around a corner, sideswiping a trash-can as Dad screams over the rattling engine, "*Where is the interstate on-ramp? Is this the freeway?*"

He throws a beer can out the window and shouts, "*You ready for an adventure?*"

This is Dad's attempt at father-son bonding. His last chance to be a role-model.

As usual, God has other plans.

We're hundreds of miles from home and Dad's sitting on the stiff motel bed, drinking and watching game shows. We're going back soon

I Might be Wrong

— this trip, this escape attempt, it didn't fix anything and Dad knows it. No matter how far you run, you still have the same shitty life to return to.

Back in the motel room, Dad is napping and I'm on the phone trying to figure out how to dial an outside line. I'm trying to remember my own phone number, but I've never used it before. It takes three tries to get it right and then Mom picks up.

She says, "Hello?"

I don't speak.

She says, "I know who this is, you little shit."

I can't speak.

She says, "You have stepped in it now, you dickless asshole. This is felony kidnapping and my lawyer will eat your lunch."

Can't speak / won't speak / don't speak.

She says, "You are never coming back here again, bastard. This is the last time you fuck with me. So fucking typical. You never changed. You said you loved me, I got pregnant, bang, you were gone. You came back again and stupid me, I took you in. Along comes Linda and off you go. I'm on the pill now, you happy?"

You're not going to leave me here with your goddamn children again. If I see you again —"

And I hang up.

Dad is half-asleep on the bed with a bottle of vodka and a carton of orange juice. He shows me how to make a screwdriver. The television is on but we're not watching, just listening to the canned laughter and routine announcements of disaster. Dad tells me to always wear boxers on a date. Always carry a spare key. I should own a truck, or at least know somebody who owns one. Learn to cook. Go to college. Learn a trade. Don't smoke or drink. Dad takes another swig of his screwdriver.

"I might be wrong," Dad says.

Don't do that, don't be like this.

"But you have to make your own decisions," Dad says.

On the TV, the laugh track plays.

Definition of a father — a man who wants his son to be better than himself.

Dad says, "Whatever you do, don't be like me."

Untitled

by Alex Nicol



Late Night

by Rachel Sefton

The smoke in swirls
A spilled bowl of ashes on the pillow
Stained sheets
The clock's red glowing face
Next to the dim lamp.
The click-click-click of a lighter;
A woman in skin
Eyes closed
Inhaling deeply
With her head tilted to the ceiling
Her hair tickling the curves of her back
Breasts heaving with every breath she savors

His chocolate eyes soak her in

Stillness, solitude, togetherness
Perfectly satisfied silence

Her head sinks into the pillow
Her body enveloped in feathers
White clouds carrying her to dreams

Old Dreams

by Rachel Sefton

Out the balcony windows
And through the bars
I see a light on across the way
A woman in a long ruffled nightgown
Thick glasses under the frizzy gray curls
Cut close to her head.
Frail, sagging skin,
Sitting straight in a rocking chair
Hands folded in her lap
Both slippered feet flat on the floor
A pink knitted afghan covering her legs.

A tacky lamp stands in the corner
Behind her head,
The only illumination
On plain white walls.
An elegant white couch
With perfectly plumped and straightened cushions,
Empty,
Placed next to her rocking chair
On the clean white carpet.

She stares into nothingness,
Looking at the world through
A box in her living room,
Escaping her silence
With its piercing tales of the life outside,
Avoiding the loneliness
That fills her apartment...
Convincing herself
that she has a good life.

Two-Minded Thoughts

by Rachel Sefton & Jodi Sanchez

How the course of the world changes in a year

How you become your opposite so easily...

Isn't it funny what you see in a second...

The hundreds of revelations that pass through your mind

In a single moment, and how your life can change

In that second...

Who will you reach for at the night's end?

And is it truly who you thought it was?

Or do we all live behind a mask, hiding from ourselves

And each other...

Two faceless lovers reaching for what they can't find...

I don't want this world.

Leave with the fear of what I know.

Turn it into something beautiful.

Life forever in my perfect place,

With the knowledge of my experience

But without the pain of remembrance...

Strange Graffiti

by Mike Scales



Why Must We Write Poetry?

by Nick Slicer

I cannot stand
 that imagery
Which paints a poem as
The early morning,
When the sun rises over a sleeping land,
Where the radiant green grass
 still is wet.

I hate it when they use that metaphor,
A truth that must be told
Between the lines
Of a disappearing ink.

I can never understand
 why a poet
Must distort and
 skew
The structure
 of
 a poem
To achieve meaning
 in
 this
 twisted
world.

I find an overwhelming irritation,
When several lines
Combine to form
One sentence,
With only
One period at the end.

I do not like that alluring alliteration,
Or the buzzing annoyance of onomatopoeia
Or the amazing coincidence of finding assonance
Or the simple chime
Of end rhyme.

Why Must We Write Poetry?

So I ask,
Why must we write poetry?

Sometimes Things Just Happen That Way

by Thomas Webb

"The last thing my previous lover said to me was 'I don't love you. I don't know if I have ever loved you.' And all I could do was laugh. O, I know that she was trying to goad me into something, maybe into feeling terrible about myself. So terrible that the memory of her would eat away at my soul until I couldn't stand it and would have to end everything with a bullet. But it didn't work. All I can do, still, is laugh."

John Hitch, her boyfriend of just over two years, was brutally breaking up with her, trying, as he forced their relationship into the ground, to make her feel as bad as he could. That was the way with men. Of course, deep down she knew that this was coming. He had been inattentive for a couple of months now and none of the games she tried to play on his mind, such as deploying jealousy or apathy, had conjured up any new flames of passion. She also pretended that it wasn't her, but other factors that were affecting the mood between them. It had after all, been a long cold fall, with more snow forecasted for Christmas. Perhaps that was what was keeping him in a funk. Weather had

been scientifically documented as rendering many people hapless, even the most stout-minded. Really though, she knew better. She was smarter than that, not like some of those dizzy girls she called friends, who thought their whole world revolved around their men and keeping their men happy. But she had ignored those feelings of imminent departure simply because she had her routine. And routine was what her life was all about.

"Do you know why I laughed?" he asked, with a hint of a sparkle in his eye, the first real show of emotion from him in some months. No, she admitted, she didn't. Did she want to know? Only if he wanted to tell her.

"I told her, how could you love me? You don't even know me."

Sara didn't know what to say to that, so she kept still, knowing that John hated the silence and would eventually start up again. She might learn more about him here than she really bothered to since they first started dating.

"Sara, don't you think it's weird that everyone falls in love with you as soon as they see you and that

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everyone falls in love with me after they get to know me? It's not because I am a wonderful person..."

"Obviously."

"...and it's not because you are a striking beauty. It's because we adapt ourselves to be whatever it is that others want us to be. Sometimes I am the sensitive, caring boyfriend. Sometimes I treat the ladies like shit, and they love it; they don't understand why, but they love it. But I have never been myself, my true self, with anyone I have been with. Not you, not the girl before. Or even the one before that."

She thought maybe he was talking about the fact that men were always coming up to her and asking her out on dates or for her phone number at least. It had always bothered him, but that's probably not the reason he brought it up now. He was trying to make her an accomplice to the breakup. He was saying that she was no better than him because she had allowed others to flirt with her, and had arbitrarily flirted back. She wasn't innocent, it was true. She had broken hearts. John always said that she let her body do the talking; let her looks get her into the door. And he often suggested that it was her beauty that got her the job downtown. He had unrelentingly supposed that there might be other people out there that were more qualified.

"I don't feel too bad about not

giving myself to you. I don't believe that you have ever been your true self with me either. I don't think you ever felt comfortable with me or our surroundings. I'm tired of playing this game with you. I want to find someone more exciting. There are a couple of girls I have met and have lined up. But to be honest, maybe for the first time ever, I never stopped dating, even when we were together. I needed that sense of danger. I wanted my own life to be something mysterious. I wanted to know that girls would fight over me. But you wouldn't. You were too busy with your own life to notice anyway. You were too self absorbed."

Sara was trying to have complete control of her emotions. She knew that this was coming and had already determined that it would not get the best of her. She could feel herself shaking, both inwardly and outwardly, and tried to put her hands out of view so that he wouldn't see them quiver - a trick she had learned in a grade school drama performance. It was a trick that had come in handy while poker-facing it in this big, cold city. The base of her spine had gone numb and she felt like she was choking back vomit, but she would not let this man see her breakdown. There was more than a chance that she would breakdown eventually; she would probably cry her eyes out. That's what her body was telling her and it was impossible to believe that

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the end to this relationship, no matter how meaningless in the long run, would leave her unscathed. She had simply decide this would not be the place where it happened. Not letting this man, or this break up, get the best of her didn't mean she was not going to let emotion run its course. Emotion, she had learned a long time ago, had to go somewhere. If not, it was likely to get the better of reason in a situation. That's why she thought too many women were considered nutty or "overemotional" by men - because they tried too hard not to be. Women tried too hard to be empowered these days. To show men that they could be as hardhearted as any, only to go crazy from insensitivity. Being sensitive was the one thing that connected females to the world.

But she was guilty of believing in female empowerment too. She was determined not to get caught by the stereotypical glass ceiling, so she had come to the city, parachuting through the roof of her current employer. She came from the top down, not bothering to work her way up. A fact which had left many of her co-workers with a tainted view of her. Many speculated that she had slept her way into the position at the office, but she hadn't. Truth is, that very few people want women to be really strong or really independent, even most women. No one wants an uppity bitch working for them. So Sara had

developed a routine as a means to be callous; as a means to protect herself against what others might think of her.

She got up at 5:55 every morning. She showered and dressed. She switched between watching the 24 hour news channels and the morning talk shows to see what was going on with the world. She had her newspaper, from a more liberal press, downloaded into her computer, which she opened and read once at work. She drank her coffee, which brewed while she put on her makeup. She dressed well everyday; fancy but not too flashy. She didn't want to alienate the other workers who didn't put as much of their paycheck into their wardrobe as she did. She went to the train station, where she caught a commuter and rode it three stops uptown. She waited for the train on one end of the platform, not because she was icy, but because she couldn't stand being around the morning smokers. Cigarettes had always caused her asthma to flair up. Once uptown she stopped at her favorite coffee shop, not a Starbucks, but an independently owned shop, where service took longer but the taste was better. Then, with her coffee, she walked half a block to where she worked. That is where she would spend the rest of her day until it was time to go home at 6:00.

She often thought of her job,

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pecially these last few weeks. Since the economic times were hard, there were layoffs occurring throughout the office, and some people were told not to expect to come back after the Christmas holiday. Of course, she was high enough on the rung that she didn't fear being let go, but had spent these last weeks considering what course of action to take. Should she find another job, which better suited her talents? Because she had to face it, there was nothing glorious about her job. Basically she felt like she was a glorified secretary. For example, it was expected that she would be the one who got the coffee at all the board meetings. She was the one who filed papers during the lunch hour, while the other management went to neighborhood restaurants. She often wondered if her job had more to do with appearances, thanks to affirmative action, than anything else. It was her friend J Watts, the staple black employee who had "made it." No, how could anyone say that the office was discriminatory? Didn't they notice that there were women and minorities in the upper management positions?

She felt like her job was really nothing more than a mother-figure for those around her office. Back home her own mother worked the desk of the study hall in the small community high school. Her job was to walk around to make sure that everyone was doing their work; that no one was

talking or up to any kind of mischief. Sara's job was to walk around, rattling sabers, making sure that everyone was up to task and meeting deadlines. Here and there she would file paperwork. Or work on a presentation. There was no real difference between the two women's roles. She had become her mother after all, which wasn't necessarily bad. She had a very loving relationship with her mother. They had become friends after she was old enough to do that. There is a certain age where you can wake up and realize that your parents are your friends. There is a point where there is no more they can teach you or threaten you with. There is a moment where you wake up and realize you are an adult.

John seemed to be finished with his speech, which she had only really heard or understood parts of. It was apparent that he was getting ready to go. She had been so lost in her own thoughts - trying to control her breathing, thinking about the past, and a world of other things - that she hadn't exactly paid attention to everything he was saying. But even the parts she did listen to didn't always make sense. It seemed like he was dumping years worth of pent up lies and hidden feelings onto her now. Anyway, she could tell that he was feeling better about himself almost immediately, as the color flushed back into his cheeks. He began to fumble

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around in his coat pocket, which he hadn't bothered to take off since his entrance was less than an hour ago. It was obvious that he had finally worked up the nerve to tell her, he wanted to get it done right away and then be gone as soon as possible, leaving her to pick up the pieces. From his coat he pulled out a pack of cigarettes, partially crumpled, indicating this was neither a new nor a full pack. And then he lit one, which was something she had never seen him do, and deeply inhaled while he caught her eye for the very first time.

As he went to the door, he offered one last word, to complete his own recovery, no doubt. "I am sorry. If there is anything I can do, please let me know."

She knew that he didn't mean if there was anything he could do about their current predicament, the breakup. No, he meant something much more practical. He meant if there was anything he could do to speed up her departure from his apartment, along with her furniture, clothes, pictures, and a variety of other keepsakes, to let him know and he would be happy to call a moving company and split the cost with her. As he had said, he never divulged himself to her, was never emotionally present, so why would he bother something deep now? He had left to give her the space and quiet fortitude it would take to come up with what happened next.

He obviously had a place, with another woman waiting, to go and lay low for a few days, by which time he knew Sara would be gone.

* * *

Sara had had a professor named Wren Hubbard, who had essentially changed her life with an end-of-class conversation, which although somewhat trivial at the time, had stayed in her mind. At the time the gathering had been more of an annoyance that anything else, yet it had changed the very core of her outlook on relationships. Hubbard, a crass old lady who didn't mince words, would look at the ever present revolution of making the world unisex, and call it bullshit, even though she had more masculine qualities than many of the male professors at the same university. She had a doctorate in Literature, with a focus of Modern (1950 to the present) American Studies. And taught this type of class every semester, where it met in the dank of a basement room for two and a half hours every Monday and Wednesday. After class there always seemed to be a convening of minds, when the students would sit and chat with their beloved Prof., mostly made up of lonely English majors. And almost always made up of girls. Hubbard was a cool enough old lady.

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She had even convinced Sara to get a tattoo. Why should such freedoms of expression be delegated to men only?

The tattoo that Sara got was of a phoenix, in all its flamed glory, rising from the ash. She knew instantly when she saw the picture on the wall of the back room parlor that it was the one she wanted. It represented her. It represented the condition of the female and how no one could hold them down forever. And it hurt like hell. She put it right on her bicep, just like a man might. She was proud that she got it and still looked at it as a reminder of who she had been all those years back. Those weeks right after, she would tell anyone who might listen, "I am like a phoenix, rising up every time something tries to get me down. No matter what terrible situation occurs, I will come back stronger and more beautiful." Most of the other girls in her class didn't understand the statement, still too busy applying eye liner and lip gloss in-between lectures. And most of the boys didn't understand either, calling her such names as Dyke behind her back. She didn't feel too bad about what others thought. She knew that her line of thinking would eventually catch up with society and level everything in its path. And still, she thought about what Hubbard had said that late afternoon, that women were more important than they might ever realize.

"We know that there is a journey - which is an analogy of life itself - where we, thirsting for a new kind of knowledge go on a quest to find our other self. Our true self. We see it in works by Hesse, Kerouac, Elliot and others. And we know the conclusion. Of course! We realize that the self we want to be is the self we knew all along. The person we want is the person that was at the start of the journey. The journey is circular and we learn that the finish line and the starting point are one and the same. But we never know that without going on the journey, just like we could never know the pleasure of Eden without being first cast out of the garden. We must suffer. We, therefore, can conclude that what we all want, desperately want, is to go home. What is very interesting to me is that the woman, even with all her years of being put into second place, is the manifestation of the idea of home. The woman is home. I want to shout that out! Where do we live from the moment of conception? The womb. Where do we try desperately to get back to until our last fleeting moments of breath? The womb. The mother is the first home. The woman is the mother to be. The woman is empowered without having to ever feel like she has anything to prove. A woman doesn't need to forego all things feminine. She doesn't have to stop liking the idea of raising a family or caring for the house simply because

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it seems to plant the notion that the woman is inferior. It doesn't. The woman should embrace the idea that she holds the key in her belly to what everyone is looking for. She is home."

"What about men? What do they get," one especially wide-eyed sophomore had asked, biting her bottom lip in anticipation of the answer. It was as if the response was going to enlighten everyone to the inner workings of men.

"They get to suffer in life forever, going from one woman to the next looking for the idea of home. They will never be happy or satisfied." And to this, they all laughed dutifully, even though most of them were not sure they understood.

Sara, for one, had never understood men and probably never would. But she knew all about the dualistic nature of dogs. So, in her mind, they were one and the same. Dogs, on one hand, were loyal and loving. Sit with them and you might have a friend for life. But only for as long as you were focused on them, petting them, or giving them food. They have very short attention spans and what little they have is spent seeking pleasures. When you stop playing with them, they'll simply go find something else to occupy themselves. They'll scratch themselves or find some new territory to sniff out. When she was just seven years old, she watched unemotionally as her

father put down their first dog, interested in the direct effects of going bad, as her dad had put it. "The dog went bad and has to be put down so that he can feel better. Sometimes things just happen that way, baby." She remembered that he stroked her hair and looked her in the eye, something he rarely took the time to do. She knew she was supposed to feel bad about the dog's death but really she was just curious. John's departure didn't feel any different then watching her dad walk over to the dog pen with his shotgun. She wasn't especially sad, although the dramatic shift in routine was upsetting, she just wanted to know what would come next.

She realized as he was talking that John meant nothing to her routine. She had him because she felt like she had to have a man. There was a certain amount of her that hadn't given up the misconceptions of the dizzy girlfriends. There was a part of her that thought she wasn't complete unless she had a man attached to her, almost like some bizarre twist on the idea of a trophy wife. He was good looking, like an accessory and could be charming when he had to be. He was a delight at the office parties. And most importantly, he stayed out of her way. Of course she should have known that it meant that he was running around on her, but she hadn't even cared. Just so long as he wasn't annoying or pesky. Just as long as he

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could find a way to amuse himself, whether it was sniffing himself, or searching for new smells in the yard. It was only then, that she realized how sad and lonely such a life was.

So what would come next?

There were so many options. She could go home and face the possibility of being called a failure. After all, she had taunted all her classmates with the notion that she was going off to the big city to make it. And wouldn't they be sorry? She doubted if anyone would really care one way or the other if she suddenly showed up again. So long as it didn't disrupt their lives any. She thought about calling home. She thought about going and trying to find another apartment. She could keep going to her job, where she made a decent amount of money and had a title that would look good on a resume. She could keep pretending that she had made it, even though there was more than a trace of self doubt. She could find another job, but it might prove difficult to do in these stagnate times. She could look. Or she could take a job that was maybe a little below her.

Sara went to the window and watched as it started snowing again. She saw the Salvation Army bell-ringers down on the sidewalk below, and remembered that this season was about the birth of our savior. She thought about how in order to be born again, first you must die. Before there

can be the lushness of spring, first there must be the harshness of winter. She knew that this would be a turning point for her. It wasn't the lowest that she had ever been, and it probably wasn't the worst thing she would ever experience. But it was a start of a turnaround. She wasn't exactly sure what was in store for her or where she would go next, but she wasn't at all scared. After all, the world was full of possibilities for a woman that was willing to tough it out.

Biographies

Aubrey Bonanno - No bibliographic information submitted.

Natalie Esposito - is a senior English major with a double minor in professional and creative writing. She will be graduating in Spring 2003, and is currently applying to graduate programs.

Ann Hudson - is a Secondary Education English major. She resides in Charleston with her husband, their baby, Hannah, and two English coon hounds.

Caleb Judy - is a senior English major with minors in creative writing and professional writing.

Melissa Knoblock - I used to think I didn't like to write. I continued thinking that way until I took a creative writing class and found out that I actually love to write. It wasn't until I was allowed to express myself through my own style of writing that I learned about my liking for writing poetry and short stories. I just wanted to make sure that everyone knows not to assume the narrator is the author. All I can do is hope that others will like what I have written or find meaning in my writing that maybe they can relate to.

Andy Koch - No bibliographic information submitted.

Dave Moutray - No bibliographic information submitted.

Alex Nicol - is a freshman graphic design major.

Jennifer Probst - I wrote this poem for my poetry class. My grandpa had just passed away, so he was on my mind.

I'm a senior English major, and this is my first submission to *The Vehicle*.

Biographies

Jodi Sanchez - I'm a junior English major from Chicago. Writing is what I do.

Mike Scales - Having taken only two photography classes, one at Eastern and one at Lake Land, I do not consider myself an expert photographer. I like to think that I simply have a knack for turning everyday scenes into cool looking pictures. My other hobbies include music (making, listening to, and obsessing over) and keepin' it ROWDY as much as possible.

Dallas Schumacher - No bibliographic information submitted.

Rachel Sefton - I'm a junior English major with a lot to say. Writing is the best way for me to get it out.

Nick Slicer - Nick is a sophomore English major, with secondary education certification. When not fighting crime, he enjoys to sit back, relax, and destroy brain cells in front of the television.

Thomas Webb - is a senior English major.

Editor's Note

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who submitted to *The Vehicle* this semester. Please continue sending us entries. We greatly appreciate it, and this publication could not exist without your contribution.

Editing *The Vehicle* has been a privilege. I've found organizing such a mixture of creative expression both rewarding and enjoyable.

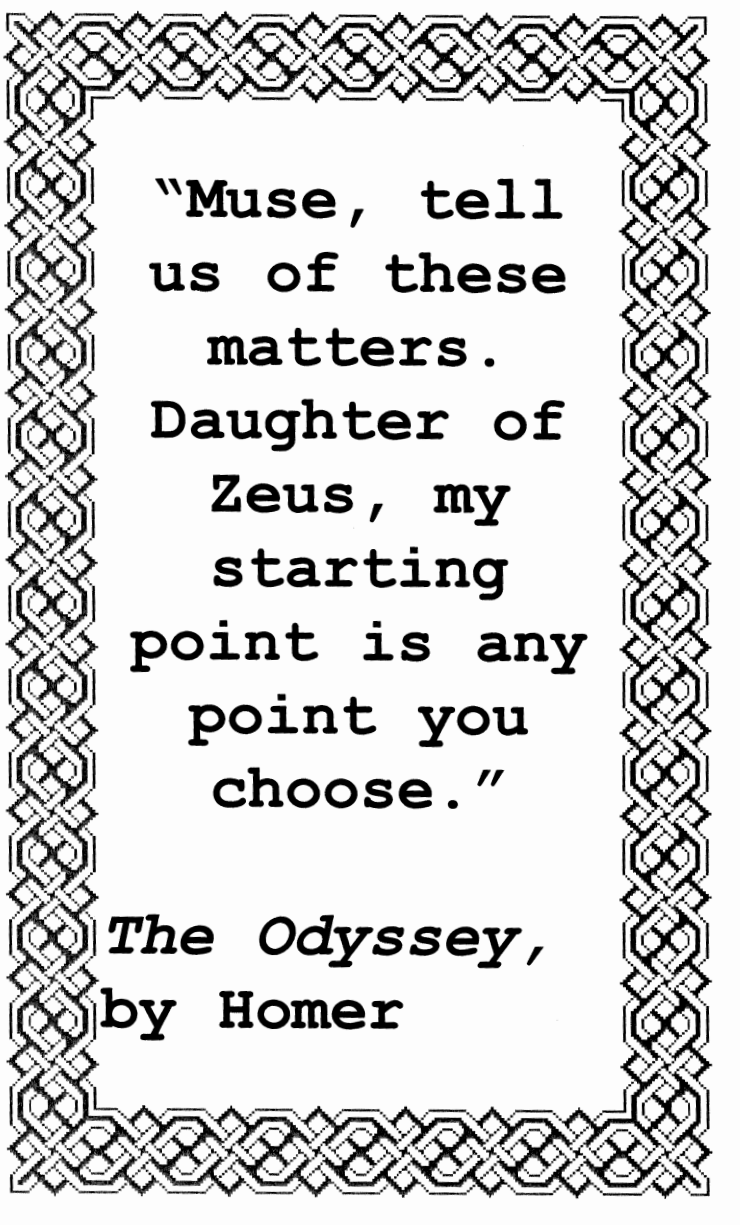
I want to thank all those who helped in the production of this literary magazine, and once again I'd like to thank and encourage all those who contributed to do so again.

William Peck
Editor

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"Muse, tell
us of these
matters.
Daughter of
Zeus, my
starting
point is any
point you
choose."

The Odyssey,
by Homer