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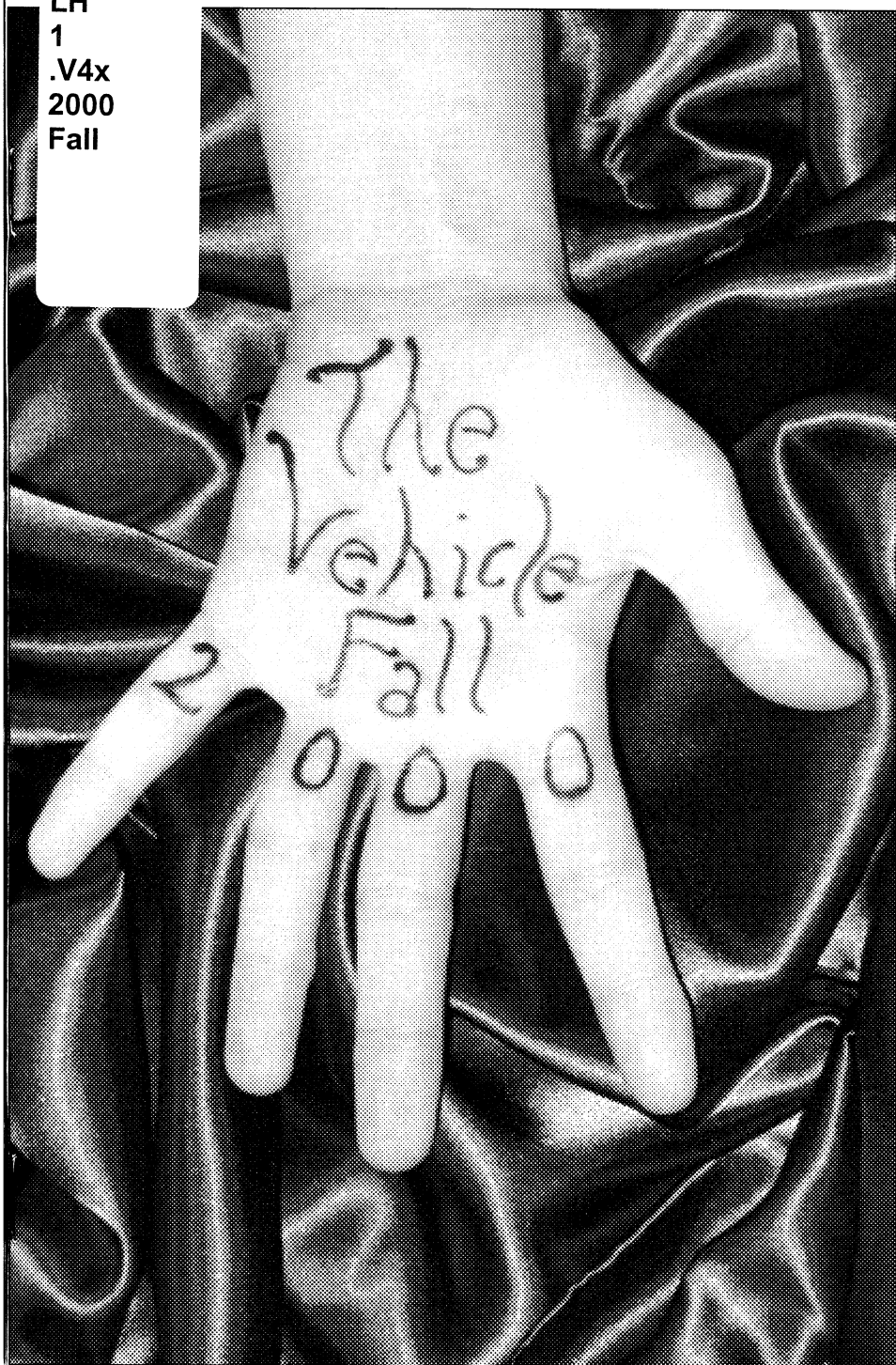
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I NEVER EVEN KNEW THE ROOM NUMBER

By Jeremy Hartzell

Not once did I visit him inside the white lab coat
infested maze of curtain pulled private rooms
I could only imagine, what he looked like
Tubes running in and out and God knows where.
Pumped full of healthy, painful radioactive isotopes and ions

hospitals frightened me away from his side. I always
stood by him as children, playing time-machine
in the woods behind Grandma's. But needles,
tubes and cold bed-pans steered me away,
more than the howling dogs, and echoes of the

woods at night ever could. Hospitals are full
of sick people and lost loved ones. Guilt overwhelms me
I wasn't there for him because I was frozen.
with unsubstantiated fears. I remember him with
hair, and without, but I don't remember him losing
it. I wasn't next to him for the duration.

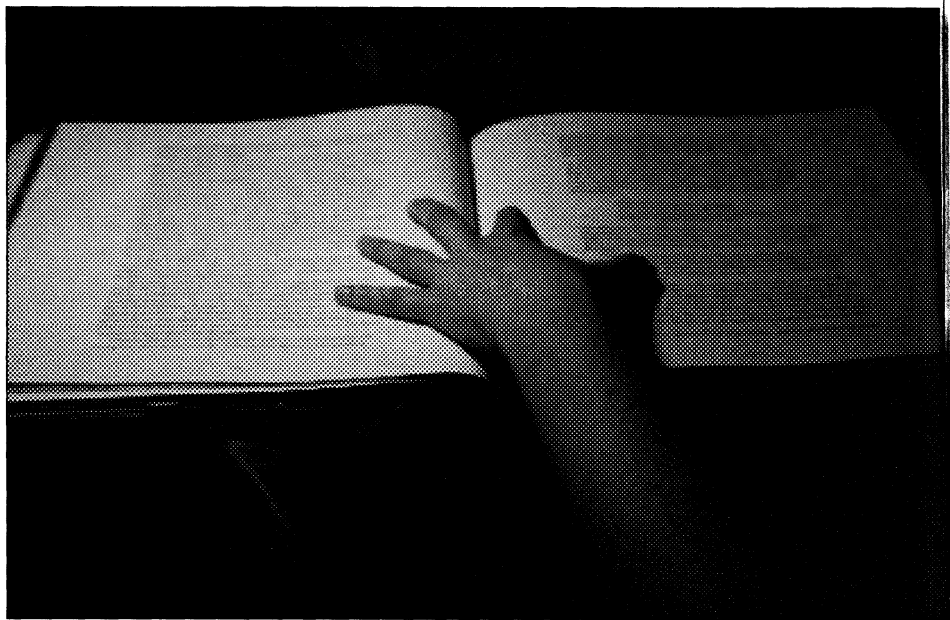
Today his hair is full, and a deep dirty blonde.
His arms bear the scars from excessive intravenous
needles, that were nailed into his veins, for hours
at a time. I feel like those needles are slid, coldly,
into my own blue veins. Pumping me full of
condemnation, holding me accountable, for my
own failure to support him.

Now I feel like I'm the one. Lying alone,
in a bed. Sick with my own shame.

Charcoal Sketches of the Moon

By Alex Cardona

I paint in so many colors
Words are paints with so many blues
And I wish I wasn't so blind
Maybe a little more deaf
A lot more dumb, no speeches
In those colorblind eyes
I can't taste the wasted wind anymore
The walls are melting in rushes
Of mixed together colors
There has to be something
On the other side of a sunrise
When the sun runs so fast
I wonder where he wants to go?
Maybe he's fallen in love with the moon
Chasing a falling star
At least there are two of us in the sky



A Street, a Cat, the Sky, my Shoes, my Feet, Tonight

By Janet Windeguth

A Street, a Cat, the Sky, my Shoes, my Feet, Tonight
By Janet Windeguth

A lonely light illuminates my street
And transforms a quiet bundle into a gray cat,
Its fur glowing in the pale light from the sky.
She scoots over my shoes
Right in front of my feet,
Tripping me as I walk abroad tonight.

The moon is shining bright tonight.
Bathing in moonlight, the street
Provides a guide for my feet
As well as showing mice for the hungry cat.
Gray in the daylight, my shoes
Are now black in the midnight sky.

The weatherman says there will be clouds in the sky.
But he was wrong tonight.
Disturbing the silence with their shuffle, my shoes
Make clouds of dust in the unpaved street
As I follow the pawprints of the stalking cat,
Erasing her tracks with my clumsy feet.

I leave the walking to my feet
And devote my attention to the starlit sky.
Brushing past me, that cat
Is still hunting mice tonight.
Perhaps she will have better luck down the street.
But as for my shoes,

My poor worn-out shoes,
It is all they can do to cover my feet.

A Street ... continued

With twists and turns the street
Runs ragged beneath the sky.
No one is out tonight
Except me, the mice, and the cat.

It is a poor hunt for the cat,
As the mice flee the squeak of my shoes,
Deserting their holes for tonight,
Making me watch where I put my feet.
They pull my eyes from the contemplation of the sky
And focus them back on the street.
Down the street, a mouse is captured by the cat
And the clouding sky dulls my shoes
As I follow, knowing my feet still have far to go tonight.



Mainlining Amore

By Shanna Hull

I fall into you and you fall away from me
I reach out for you but you're just out of reach
I know the way I need you I think I need your love
Whatever it is I want from you I crave it like a drug

Now I need a little more
Than I ever have before
When you come knocking at my door
And find me rocking on the floor
What I'm aching for
it shakes me to the core
Even two or three or four
I always need a little more

You give me just enough
To keep me coming back
Any more, you say,
And I'll have a heart attack
You give me what I need
You talk just like a shrink
You divvy up my doses
And retrieve me from the brink

Forest Choir

By *Jeremy Hartzell*

the dark of the night swallowed me
like a slow poured glass of whiskey

oozing across my chest, and face
a drink of silence, with no taste

same color, eyes open and shut
a thick rich black licorice muck

sliding like phlegm down my throat slow
I swallowed the light, and my hope

timbers, rafters, creaked with old age
big black spiders danced with eight legs

tickled my spine with a quick shock
a tingle crawled up my back

silver wolves howled, Georgia moon
and soon the locusts sang their song

a thousand voices, night chirped
the lullaby sounds so urgent

constant barrage of beeps, whistles
got me dreaming, softly, gentle

the night has gulped me whole, alive
a living nighttime, lullaby

Ritual Timepiece Configurations

By Stella Link

Tick inside an antique timepiece
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become the Colosseum
Or the ancient mimics of Stonehenge.
I am happiest being a timepiece.

From the outside, its rustic finish shines devoutly.
The cold, steel engravings cast out ultraviolet heat.
Society wavers around the revolving of time
And its gears shift under the dead weight,
Inner workings of assembly lines become vast;
A globe revolving its axis, quickly, submissively
To the monstrosities of Central and Standard
Where digital becomes an absolutist man
Ever focused.

I have seen it dangle mercifully from its chain
Wrapped limp around another's wrist,
Flung forward like a Riddler's yo-yo;
Perhaps there is a far cityscape
From somewhere in the subconsciousness of cogs—
Just enough hours and minutes to understand
Einstein's conjecture of $E=MC^2$, the universe
Swirls in abrasive textures.

Carpe Diem

Robb Dunn

82° and no rain in the forecast for the rest of the week.

It's one of those rare and splendid Summer days that makes me forget that only four months ago I was trudging through two feet of soot stained snow, and fighting bitter arctic winds to get to an interview at the Board of Trade, where they told me the position I was applying for only paid \$7.50 an hour—barely enough to pay the rent on that overpriced one bedroom apartment that Maria talked me into getting in the Fall. But that's all in the past: Maria, the apartment, the Board of Trade all washed away with the spring thaw.

This is the present and I'm alive. There's nowhere I have to be, no one expecting me. The day is mine.

And today, as a cool breeze rolls through the man-made canyon of glass, steel and stone rousing every pore in my body to enchanted ecstasy, I'm headed north on Clark street, headed nowhere in particular as the day like an open road lies spread before me: uncharted and untamed.

Lost in America

By Todd Beard

There is an Easternly breeze cooling my skin
It will in vigor tonight until tomorrow begins
Another virtue falls from the sky
in the color of you and the horizon of why
with all this living befalling my face
my only vision is to swim in the grace

(chorus)

Oh, I'm lost, lost in America
we circle the earth in tambourine night
yeah we're lost, lost in America
living in wind gives us eyes for the right

Another corner, the map's in the back
you're always right when you're right where you're at
nothing inhibits like a cry from the past
we are the owners of the wide-open-vast
there is perfection, just next to me
the eyes of a friend, the shine of the free

(chorus)

The truth is litter in the church of the impure
though they evoke just to be sure
to own a relic is not to relate
empty privilege, the unfounded's fate
but if a were a painter, my paint would dry thick
less of life's decision between the quill and the quick
I am humanity, the translator, I
I grant the natural a wrapping of sky
in the midst of history
grinning at the mystery
I'm going to be the light that shines

(chorus)

Neurasthenia

By Ben Erwin

Suction'd smiles
from a mouth, limp with fatigue.
On pins and needles:
This is my internal surgery.
Sutured laughter
stitched together from memory.
Bedside manner,
tableside machinery:
Keeping me alive.



Coward

By Veronica Espinosa

The inexplicable words of my earth
Caress the moon and describe to me how it feels.
Mountains crumble into balls
Of shimmery gold nuggets
And sell their souls to the hookers on 19th street.
Empty boxes block the alleys of my soul.
I cannot get through.
I need to get out. Find a way out.
The door is engulfed by heavy walls.
The bricks corrode and trap me where I belong.
I cannot justify.
Teach me how to feel. How to love...please.
How to come to the terrorism I call home.
I love this place.
The blood pumps out of my chest and into the mud.
I sweat and smell of salt.
The tears pour from his eyes
And I do not understand.
I crave his honesty and hate
Over his injustice and unfaithfulness.
No- I don't believe there is such a thing.

Untitled

By Carrie Smigla

So afraid of becoming the old, lonely lady down the street,
The crazy one with all the cats,
I stayed with you.
I stayed although
You shattered every mirror,
I could only see myself through your hazy bloodshot eyes.
I stayed although
As I lay naked on the bed watching you get undressed to leave me,
I felt like a two dollar whore.
Not a smile, not a kind word, not a touch or embrace,
Just the endless barrage of insults and threats.
I stayed with you.
I talked to the old crazy cat-lady,
The one who lives down the street.
She talked about choices and things that were worse than being
alone.
And I discovered that the loneliness I fear,
Is already here



When I Close My Eyes

By Jeremy Hartzell

I could sit like this forever
my mind awash like a load of laundry
everything becomes numb,
and my thoughts are still like frames,
in an old photo snapshot scrap book

I can almost reach out and touch the life I see,
a collage of moments and misdeeds laid before me
like a carefully thought out piece of modern art
on display at the local art museum
poorly funded by Boy Scouts selling cookies

to earn merit badges in an otherwise undeserving world.
I was a boy scout once. I hated camping.
My scoutmaster always waited until the chance of rain
was lower than twenty percent. and when we did go it
always rained. I could drone for hours and

a month in July about the rain and my disdain for
my lack of self-confidence listening to the jazz-
rhythms of Coltrane I can feel the sax wash
over me gently like the rain on the loose vinyl tent flap.
and I close my eyes and lay in my sleeping bag,

jazz mellowing my resolve, I reminisce over pictures
of things done and opportunities wasted and jumped on,
a myriad of life, and the life that could have been.
when I close my eyes the world melts away
in a b flat triad, harped out by as piano, sax, bass trio

melting like a snowman who rested peacefully-
in the front yard until the time came for him-
to lose his white skin, tainted brown by dirt
and debris, to the new green that sprang forth
under his cold wet bottom, when I close my eyes.

Brigstaff Butterfly

By Shanna Hull

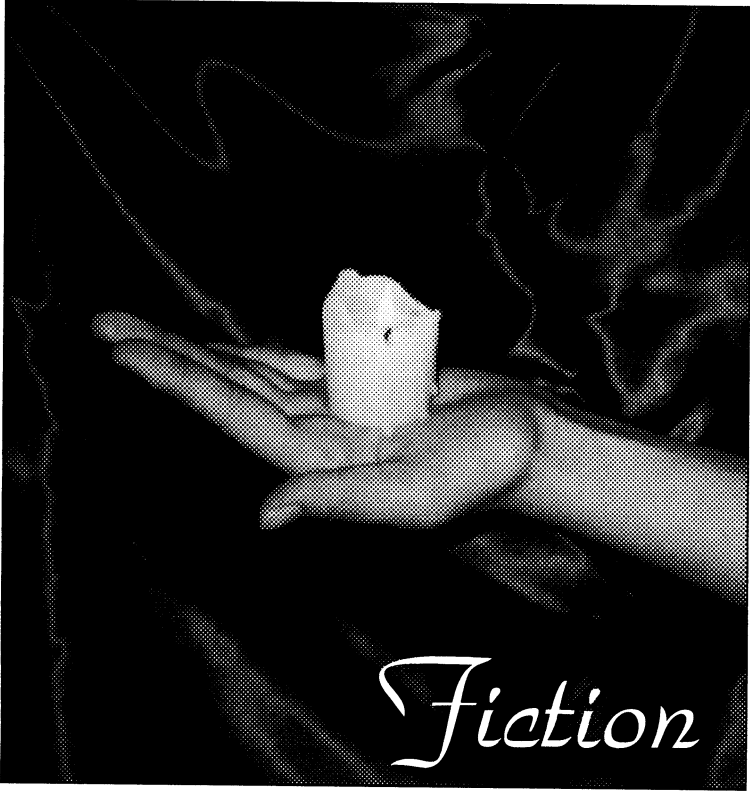
A butterfly landed on my tongue
Somewhere north of Brigstaff
On a Friday afternoon in late May.
Someone else was navigating,
And someone else was piloting
The old gold Oldsmobile down
The thin dirt road.
They had skidded to a definitive halt
To argue the decision of a crossroads.
The rattle and hum of their voices
Reverberated in the caverns of my brain
So I closed my eyes and stuck out
My tongue in silent and ignored protest.
And while their pseudo-persuasive words
Flew over me as grey clouds,
A butterfly was forced to land
Under the weighty subject of
Conversation. The softest place to land,
I suppose, was my juxtaposed tongue,
And she perched there, quivering eloquently
With wings black and golden like
An open treasure chest of pirate gold.
If I chanced to speak, she would launch
Once more, and I feared to move
In case it should frighten her,
So I lay very still and will
My traveling companions to turn around,
But the instant their argument lulls
Enough to clear the air,
My winged visitor takes to the wind
Again.

Mice in the Motel

By Robb Dunn

The Abe Lincoln Motel rises
dusty and weather beaten out of
Illinois cornfields. An oasis whose
time has passed. What was once
a stop for travelers headed west
to Frisco is now the home of a few
wayward souls who scurry in thin coats,
clutching half empty sacks, chased
by autumn wind, from rusty moth eaten
cars to dark rooms where they shiver
and pace til the radiator finally kicks in
after ten endless minutes. Leaving behind
the grey overgrown lawn, silent and forgotten,
where restless children once played on lazy
warm summer afternoons.





The Escape

By Shanna Hull

Second Lieutenant Eris Stark crouched low in the bush and tensed at the sound of M-16 fire somewhere nearby in the forest. She'd been in the jungles of Peru for days now, on the run from a rival mercenary band with four remaining soldiers under her command. They'd been hit pretty hard the day before, wiping out half her squad. She sighed heavily and spat on the ground, breathing hard from her 50 yard sprint from bush to bush. Not a great distance, but in full gear it was quite a haul, especially in the heavy humid air of the South American jungle. Chavez, Lyle, Gino, and Liz moved from cover to cover and lay low to the ground, waiting for word from her. Stark looked around at them, barely making out their camouflaged faces between the tangled thorny branches. More than anything else, the protruding barrels of their weapons gave away their positions. Stark rubbed her temples in hopes of quieting her throbbing headache and tried to think through their predicament. The odds were five to something like twenty, and her soldiers hadn't eaten or slept in three days. Not a complaint rose from them, but the wear was beginning to show.

"Miss Stark!" The sound of her own name coming out of Mr. Blake's mouth was enough to shock her out of her imagination. He probably hadn't shouted it, but that's how it penetrated her brain. When the cloudy look in her eyes evaporated, Mr. Blake folded his arms across his chest and continued smugly. "Eris, maybe you could tell the class the implications of the Declaration of Independence, hm?"

There wasn't a single note written on the sheet of notebook paper on the desk in front of her, except a few lines of scribbled poetry and a deeply lined three-dimensional box. However, although she'd been tuning out the lecture since the first bell rang at 8:00, she hardly hesitated. "The Declaration of Independence was propaganda to promote patriotism among the colonists. It didn't really establish America's freedom from the British because they were in fact still fighting the war at the time, but it gave hope and a sense of unity to those whose lives and resources were in danger because of the war."

The expectant expression on Mr. Blake's face fell to the floor and shattered like glass. She knew he'd thought he had her,

that she hadn't been paying enough attention to the lesson to answer his question. But he didn't let the fact that she'd bested him be to his disadvantage. Instead, with a disapproving stare toward where she sat in the back of the room, he rebuked the rest of the class. "Why is it that Eris can be off in her own little world, as usual—" The class laughed and gawked at her, slack-jawed, over their shoulders. She blushed fiercely and dropped her dark eyes to her notebook. Her one wish was to pass through the world without being noticed, but someone always drew attention to her. "—And she can still answer a question that none of you who were listening could answer?"

Before another word could be said, the bell rang signaling the end of class, and students surged like a tidal wave from their seats to the door and out into the hall, carrying Eris along with them. Dazed from her unnatural retrieval from fantasy, she moved slowly among the rushing tide, not as eager as the rest of them seemed to be to get to the next class — Elements of Writing. She had a rough draft of her next essay due, on the question of whether or not the driver's license age should be raised to eighteen. Although she had it done, she wasn't happy with it. As a matter of fact, she'd tossed off the three page draft in twenty minutes at midnight the night before. No wonder she was exhausted today. As she walked down the hall from US History in Mark to Elements in Ezra (all the classrooms at Lutheran High were named after books of the Bible), Lacey ran up to meet her.

"Hey, kid, you look like hell." Lacey was one of those people who didn't really have a personality of their own, so they latch onto someone who does and take on their characteristics. Unfortunately, she was also Eris' best friend. It was a friendship that sucked energy right out of Eris' muscles. Today, Lacey had adopted a rose quartz pendant almost identical to the one Eris wore on a ribbon around her neck. "Didn't sleep well? You've got circles around your eyes."

"Mom and John were fighting last night. He accused her of sleeping around, and she accused him of trying to monopolize her time." She smirked a little. "At least she was on target. Then when I got up this morning, he started yelling at me because I

had two glasses of orange juice for breakfast. He started going through all the same old bullshit, you know— with five kids in the house, we have to cut back on food costs. All the while his ‘one bowl of cereal a day’ comes out of the biggest fucking mixing bowl in the house.” Her voice stayed flat and exhausted even as the anger was building in her again. “Then he started yelling at Luke, and I told him to back off, so he started yelling at me again.” At ten years old, Luke was the youngest of the the five kids in their house, and he had the hardest time dealing with their step dad because John hated him.

“What did your mom do?” Lacey asked gently as they stepped in front of Ezra. Her next class, Advanced Biology, was across the hall in Revelation.

“She said I have to respect him because he’s older than me. I said I don’t have to respect me.” Lacey nodded and looked very sorry for her, but Eris wasn’t in any shape to deal with her. “I have to go. I’ll see you at lunch.”

“Okay, sweetie. Hang in there.”

In Ezra, Eris settled into a seat— once again in the back of the room— after handing her paper to Coach Dickens. It took no more than an instant to sink back into the hazy state of her own imagings. Coach Dickens began class right after the bell rang. “Let’s talk about what problems you ran into writing your drafts. I know some of you already came to ask me questions early this week, but was there anything else you wanted to discuss?”

Eris hid in the shadows of the penthouse suite, waiting patiently for her prey to return to his room for the evening. She had already been there for an hour, made herself a drink from the wet bar, and become thoroughly accustomed to the dark. She would get the drop on him the instant he walked in. The silencer was already screwed on her .40 caliber GLOCK, with a full magazine of ten Rhino armor-piercing rounds lying in her lap as she sat in her arm-chair directly across the room from the door. Her thinly gloved fingers ensured there would be no fingerprints left on the doorknob when she came or left, neither would there be any on the crystal tumbler she sipped from.

When she finished her drink, she took a fine white hand

kerchief and wiped her lipstick prints from the rim before replacing it in her handbag, waiting patiently until the door opened to let in a golden shaft of light from the hallway. In a split second, the discharge from the GLOCK punctured her victim's heart and left him a slumped heap of slack flesh just inside the doorway. The actual killing was the simplest part of her evening. The cleaning up after herself would take much more care and concentration.

It was too late for any bystanders in the hallway, but Eris stuck her head out to make absolutely sure. Only emptiness and garishly patterned carpet in either direction. She dragged the body far enough into the room to shut the door and left the corpse to go into the bathroom. Whether they found the body on the floor, in bed, or on the couch, the fact he was dead. The position of the body made little difference in this case.

Turning her handbag inside out to make it black instead of white, she pulled off her bobbed blonde wig to let her long chestnut braid hang down her back. Her little red cocktail dress came off over her head, and she dressed in the long silk skirt and white tank top she took from her bag. Makeup removal pads erased the blush, eye shadow, and lipstick she wore, and she flushed to pads down the toilet. No one who had seen her enter the hotel would recognize her as she left. The cocktail dress and high heels disappeared into the bag. Slipping into a pair of sandals, Eris appraised herself in the mirror.

Convinced she'd disguised herself adequately, she went to the small sink in the bar area and washed tumbler with scalding hot water and dish soap, still wearing the gloves she'd had specially made to be flexible and close-fitting. She replaced the glass on the shelf with its mates, and after carefully assuring the hall was still empty she stepped out and pulled the locked door closed behind her almost silently. As she stepped out to the stairway leading to the lobby, she peeled the gloves off and stuffed them into the handbag.

Eris dropped heavily into her usual chair at the lunch table she and her small group of friends normally occupied. A can of Orange Crush and a Snickers served as lunch, and she was starving because she hadn't had breakfast after the fight with

John. Her head was pounding so hard she thought she could hear the echo if she sat very quietly for a while. However, no such luck was hers. Gil, Allan, and Lacey were already there. Allan was shoveling pizza into his mouth as fast as he could manage to swallow it while Lacey and Gil argued the application of the Arthurian legends in contemporary fiction, namely Star Wars. Eris laid her head down on the stack of books she carried for her afternoon class- religion, American Literature, and Trigonometry. Allan glowered at her from around the book he buried his nose in when he finished eating his lunch. He'd asked her out earlier that week, and she'd turned him down. Now he was being pissy about the whole thing. Lacey knew what was going on, and she was supposed to be the mediator between them, but she was engrossed in her conversation with Gil, who was gesturing wildly with his skeletal little hands as he tried to convince her that Luke Skywalker was King Arthur.

"Can't you see the parallels? Luke is Arthur, Leia is Gwenevere, and Han is Lancelot. Light sabers... Excaliber... Darth Vader... Mordred..."

"I understand what you're saying, but I don't think the Arthurian legends have become as ingrained in our culture as, say, the Bible."

Nervously, Lady Eris of Avalon sat atop her high-strung roan gelding, the only woman who fought with King Arthur's knights. She was Fey, raised to protect the "enchanted" forest surrounding Apple Island along side her brothers in the Children's Guard. Still, the other knights resented that a woman rode into battle with them. She ignored them, reigning Starling in tightly and staring straight ahead down the ravine to where Mordred's army lay in wait. She wore trousers and a jerkin today because the dresses she usually condescended to wear would have been a hassle in the heat of battle.

She had feared that the people of Camelot would burn her as a witch before she rode beyond the gates of the castle. Her saving grace was that Arthur had insisted she go with him. Otherwise, she would have made a hasty exit to the forest long ago. In fact she was still considering it. She was no warrior and carried her short sword only because it was dangerous to be

traveling the countryside alone, whether dressed in the fine gowns Arthur had commissioned for her or disguised as a young boy, which her Fey height and build made possible.

Arthur had been riding through his ranks to inspire bloodlust in his men and then pulled in his stallion beside Eris. Confidentially, Arthur leaned close and whispered, "Lady Eris, I've sent Gwenevere to the convent for her betrayal with Lancelot. After today, my darling, we can be together."

Unbelievable! They stood at the ready to slaughter Mordred and his men and he was concerned with where he would find his ease that evening! "Your Majesty, don't you think we should concentrate first on surviving the day?" As if in answer, Arthur bridged the chasm between them with a kiss.

"Eris, your mother called this morning and wanted me to talk to you," began Miss Eller solemnly, folding her hands together on the desk in front of her. She was a heavy-set woman—to be kind about it—with long blond hair, and in spite of her considerable weight she always dressed so stylishly that it seemed to make up for it. Eris liked her school counselor, though they didn't really get along in a classroom situation. Their ideas about the responsibilities of fiction differed greatly. "She's concerned that your grades might be suffering this quarter. I've spoken to all your teachers, and they say you're doing just fine in your classes, but they're concerned about how little attention you seem to be paying. They tell me sometimes it's like you're off in your own little world. Has something been bothering you?"

Malcolm had brought Eris to this place some years ago, and the scent of melting wax in the long stone corridors sparked memories as he led her down one now. This castle had seemed magical to her once, long ago, when she was new to — and still enchanted by — his world. Now that strange allure of immortality had worn off, leaving her with the day-to-day drudgery of the eternal life he had given her in a swallow of his blood. After the mystery of the bloodletting and the secrets of the vampires had been revealed to her, there was nothing magical about this life, only the staggering need for humanity. It wasn't just the blood. It was the flesh, the scent, the liquid movements of their supple bodies.

With a wicked smile that promised she would not be pleased with what he had done, Malcolm led her past door after door until they reached the very end of the passage. He allowed her entrance before him, propelling forward excitedly as a child preparing to surprise a parent with the perfect gift.

The perfect gift, indeed. The young man she had seen dancing in the garden slept deeply on the silk-sheeted canopy bed, stripped to the waist and more beautiful by candlelight than he had been by moonlight. Eris' Bloodteeth began to ache. "What do you mean by this?"

They were staring at her and whispering about her while she pretended to be enthralled with the religion worksheet Mr. Clark had given them to complete during the class period. Laura and Missy were pastors' kids, the worst of the worst because their daddies thought they were perfect angels, and all the while they did everything from coke to orgies. For whatever reason, they had singled Eris out of the misfit crowd a year ago, when they were all freshmen, and decided she was Freak of the Year to be teased and tormented in every possible situation. It probably had something to do with the fact that she was a non-Christian attending Lutheran High, or maybe that it had nothing to do with it at all. The only funny thing about it was possibly the fact that she was steadily edging toward graduating at the top of their class, and they were both on the verge of failing. Too many Mondays spent groaning in Hang-over Hell.

Eris heard one of them whisper to the other, "Do you see what she's wearing?" A burst of screeching laughter followed. Their voices were as interchangeable as everything else about their existence, so she spent little time trying to differentiate. However, she did glance down subtly to see what she was wearing that would pique their interest. Faded blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and a flannel shirt. Was there something hilarious about that?

There was one other Eris found amusing about the animosity they held for her: somewhere along the line they'd gotten into their shared brain she was a witch. So they were afraid of her. In order to silence them, she exercised her "witchy" power. She scribbled something down on a sheet of paper. A single

glance at them over her shoulder, from behind a curtain of unkempt dark hair, made them shut their gaudily painted lips. Their mascara-encrusted eyes went wide when she turned around to slap the paper down in front of them. Just then, as if on cue, the bell rang, and Eris took her worksheet to Mr. Clark's desk.

Missy and Laura gasped in horror at the sheet of notebook paper. Two crude representations of voodoo dolls stared back at them, each bearing them name of its human counterpart on its shirt. Thickly drawn, dark pins protruded from their heads. As Eris passed back by them on her way out, she whispered, "The moon's full this weekend, girls." Then she was gone from the room. A thrill of victory ran through her.

Eris set up an altar under the light of the full moon. An athame, a highly polished pewter chalice, and a "scrumped" apple stolen from the orchard next to her grandmother's house. Raising the athame above her head, she called upon the power of the goddess Rhiannon, her patron, and then plunged the long twisted blade into one of the dolls. "So mote it be."

After she had waited on the steps for nearly an hour, Eris saw Mom's van pull into the parking lot and swing around to a stop in front of her. Sullenly, she got in the passenger's side and endured her mother's forced cheerful smile with clenched teeth. "How was your day? What happened at school?"

Eris laid her head against the cool window and stared at the high school as they pulled onto the main road and headed toward the grade school to pick up Luke. "Nothing," she answered flatly.

Just over the ridge, Mexico beckoned, though Eris could still hear the blaring of the prison sirens behind her. More frightening was the still constant growling and snarling of the search dogs the guards had put on her trail. She had coated everything left behind in heavy perfume, and she hoped it would throw off the scent long enough for her to make it to the border. Freedom awaited her just on the other side of the border.

Running

By *Nicholas Janquart*

I'm going to tell you about something I saw once, well, twice actually, but it is only in fact reputable once. I will also tell you what I did about it. I could catalog all the information about where I was and what I was doing beforehand and what my day was like and what my family is like, but I don't think you'd give a shit. In fact you are probably saying right now, "What the hell is this dumb son of a bitch talking about?" and I would say, "Why are you calling me names?"

Anyway, it was a couple of days ago. I was standing on the cold ass platform, waiting...and waiting for the train to pass, so I could cross the... you know, cross walk, so I could go to the other side to catch the inbound train. The one in front of me was going the wrong direction, so I could hardly get on that one, eh? I was waiting there with the many sons of bitches just like myself. Among those sons of bitches was my brother (he was the only son of a bitch I knew on that platform), and there were also businessmen (and women). I put women in parentheses because, let's face it, they aren't as important. The businessmen were the types who'd carry cool briefcases and also wear those little tan shoes with tassels that hang off and sway every which way, every time a step is taken. I love watching those tassels sway. In fact, I'd buy a pair if I could afford them; the fucking things cost like two hundred dollars. Plus, I'd look ridiculous in my blue jeans and T-shirt. Never mind I wouldn't buy a pair.

There were also the business ladies (as I previously mentioned in the parentheses), you know the ones that wear their skirts and tennis shoes for the long walk in the city to work. They must hide their dress shoes in their bags or attache, or whatever the hell it is that those damn women carry. They could hide them in their skirts for all I care. You can always tell the ones that are in fact getting ahead in the business world and the ones who will remain happily at the bottom. The ones that are attractive but are not beautiful, (Hell the only reason any of them are beautiful is because they cake on eighty pounds of damn makeup.) The ones who choose to wear dress slacks as opposed to skirts, the ones who have confident sculpted faces that couldn't be taken away by any man are nice. The

others, on the other hand, who wear skirts and “nude panty hose” and have bright red fingernails and sleep with the boss..... I mean work hard and have a killer instinct, I hate those ones. What the hell makes them think they are better than me? If they really were, don't you think they would have some high class apartment downtown and not be riding the train with the likes of a dumb son of a bitch like me? Whores.

The business ladies that I like very much are so sweet. They are always smiling and don't find it repulsive to talk to a dumb son of a bitch college kid like me. They are always considerate and aren't usually beautiful, but they are never ugly. They have mediocre husbands too, so it kinda fits.

There are usually college students, but I don't like to talk to those bastards. For some reason college kids are disgusted at the idea of talking to other college kids, at least on the goddamn train. There is this damn unspoken rule about talking to others of my own age on the train, and everyone abides by it. I only recently learned about this. Before I tried talking to some guy and he was like” ..” and just stared at me blankly . I almost jacked the bastard right in the jaw, but I could see he was just confused. So I just left him alone.

Who knows, maybe most of them are swell characters in their respective circles. I guess I just gotta find that circle.

So I was standing there with the bastard college students, the nice business ladies, the whore business ladies, and the businessmen sons of bitches. We were just standing on the wrong side of the platform waiting for the outbound train to dump the even lower sons of bitches off, so we could cross and wait for our train into the big city. The door of the train opened up and the conductor stepped out, as he usually does, and let the night crew off. He had black circles under his eyes and a mole just to the left of his right eye. I attributed his black circles to the fact that he must be tired. I told you I was bright, and if I didn't, I meant to.

The night crew usually consists of a couple of dirty janitor looking bastards with scraggly faces and tattered old blue jump suits with some name-tag that says Bill or Ted, or some damn name like that. Also, there were some Mexican ladies and a short fat lady with shoes that had no laces. These people usually walk down the steps

and watch the ground as they slowly make their way through the crowd of bastard college students, nice business ladies and son of a bitch businessman. These people also smell funky if you get too close to them. Sometimes you don't even have to get too close.

Just as this motley crew was getting off this little old lady ran out of the sliding doors, turned to her left and ran away. She didn't just run away like she was cold and wanted to get to her car, but she also didn't run like she really had something important to do. I pursed my lips, wrinkled my eyebrows in wonder and turned to my brother. He apparently was watching her as well. I saw his gaze was still upon her as she sprinted across the street without even checking for oncoming traffic. It isn't everyday that you see some wrinkled old bag bolt off the train, pick up her skirt, and go into a full sprint right into oncoming traffic.

I know I told you that I had seen this incident before, but I am reminding you again for all the bastards that aren't paying attention and just skimming. I happened to be waiting with a friend of mine on a different day. We were waiting at the platform, just like the last time I told you about, and we watched this little old lady scramble out of the train and run away. Presumably it was the same old lady. My friend turned to me, shrugged his shoulder resumed looking forward and said, "crazy bitch" without any enthusiasm. He is rather kept to himself individual and would rather put someone down or call him names if he doesn't fully understand a person's actions. He is a rather vulgar son of a bitch and not at all considerate like me. By the by, his name is Gabe, for all you bastards that need to know everyone's name. Oh, the other reason I don't consider this an accountable...um...account is because we had smoked a lot of ...um...we were just tired.

My brother was drawing a picture of this naked lady that happened to be in this book that he was reading by Salvador Dali or some dead bastard like that. Oh...he isn't a pervert or anything; he just has this figure drawing class. You know figures and such.. [Shrug] That is where they draw these chicks and guys' ass naked. He said it really isn't great though because for real good looking chicks it costs a lot of money, and no one in the class wants to pay more, so they just settle for the not-so attractive ones. Bums off the street work there too. They work for fries and stuff.

I wondered if maybe the old lady was a model somewhere. Or maybe she had to go draw naked guys, cuz she had a fetish. Hell, I don't know.

So the next day, I decided that if I saw this crazy old bag again I would go up to her and ask her what the hell she was in such a hurry for. Maybe she had to go feed her little poodles or cats or damn parakeets or something. I was so damn curious by this point. Like I said, they call me "Curious boy!" Just like that, explanation point and all. Oh, I didn't say that? Well, I meant to. I was standing at the platform waiting for the train to pull in so I could see if she was getting off. Not like that; I mean getting off the train. I was standing there with the regular crew of sons of bitches that never talked to me (cept the nice business ladies) but I was in no mood to talk anyway. I was so excited that I kept shifting from side to side. My hands were in my pockets cause it was so damn cold, plus I had a damn itch on my balls. It wasn't one of those easily curable itches either; it was one of those that you have to pinch the skin between your thumb and forefinger in order to get any satisfaction. If it had been warm I probably would have been snapping. Snapping is a terrible habit I have developed over the last couple of years. I could probably give you that little story, but it would be long and you'd be like "Damn I wish this crazy son of a bitch would get back to the story, it has gotten rather long as it is."

Finally the train pulled up to the station. It seemed like it was going incredibly slow. In fact everything was going slow. My brother turned to me and asked me if I thought the lady would be on the train. His voice was muffled because everything was so slow, like I said. So I turned to him and said:

"Talk faster you bastard."

He turned away irritated and stared at the train. I guess I made him mad with that comment, but I couldn't hear him. If you couldn't hear people it would probably piss you off.

The train doors opened and the conductor stepped out. Slowly, of course. After this happened everything sped up and things were going so fast. The lady stepped out of the train and I could hardly see her. She was just like a damn blur across my eyes. If I had to give her a nickname at that time, it would have been "fast old lady." Like I said, "at the time." I you gave me a few more

minutes it would have been cleverer.

I turned, "dammit" I thought to myself. Everything else has sped up but I was still just a slow bastard. I started knocking business out of the way like no one's business. I was like one of those slo-mo football players. If only I had a helmet, I thought to myself. This lady was on quick cookie. Yeah, and that isn't a misprint either you correcting, self diluted bastards, that think you can correct my story. Maybe you changed it in your head subconsciously, but that is no excuse. Knock it off.

By the way, a "quick cookie" is a cookie that you can buy in bulk at Sam's Club and it is chock full of proteins and carbohydrates and shit like that, you know, to make you faster.

I finally caught up with the lady at the crosswalk where the display read, "Don't walk." I was panting like a damn ugly dog. I don't like any dogs except those tiny little ones that you can hold in like your hand. Not the yappy ones, the quiet little ones and stuff. My tongue was hanging out.

I stood up straight and asked her my question.

"Why do you always run after you get off the train?" I said between pants.

She thought that about this for a minute. "I don't know; I just like to run," she said. She turned and walked across the street towards the sign that now read "Walk." I stood there for a moment not knowing what to do next. Then it dawned on me. I was mad. Furious in fact. She liked to run?! What the hell kind of answer was that? I thought of better responses she could have given. Like, "Oh, I have to go to an experiment. My master is a mad scientist" or "I have a medical condition where if I don't run everywhere if I don't run everywhere I go, my hemorrhoids act up." Something. What the hell kind of answer is, "I like to run." No words can describe my anger. I felt the need to shout something at her.

"Yeah! Well, you look stupid!"

She just kept on as if she didn't notice. I turned around. Forlorn filled my face. If in fact "Forlorn" can fill one's face. That's the only word I can think of for it. Forlorn. I walked back to the train station only to discover that I missed my train, and my brother was nowhere to be seen. I sat and waited for the next train that would be coming a half a damn hour later.

Running ... continued

I kept replaying the events in my head. "I like to run." What the hell? Maybe I will just stop being so damn considerate and start calling people names like my one friend. I guess then I'd not worry so much and I could dismiss everything. That'd be easier. Maybe I will just stop being so damn considerate and start calling people names like my one friend. I guess then I'd not worry so much and I could dismiss everything. That's be easier. Maybe I don't have to be a dick about it though. She liked to run. Who the was I to care if a woman wanted to stay fit in her golden years. I'm just a bastard kid. She has probably been around six times as long as I have. Well, maybe not that long, which would make her like a hundred and twenty or so. She was probably around a long ass time though. I could see her side I guess. I wasn't mad anymore as it started to snow. Not really a snow, more of a sleet. But I didn't care. Why should I be mad? Good for her. She didn't care what other people thought or how stupid she looks. She just liked to run.



Biographies

The Vehicle

Todd Beard is an English major. Born the twirling first girl of a future muse I soon found myself quaking in my ancient places at the rhyme and shine of life. I am a Poet in my youth; I am a polisher of Truth. In my art I attempt to translate transcendence into tangible matter so that we all may feel the grin of our redemption skin. My work is novel and songs to belong.

Alex Cardona is a junior English major with a minor in professional writing

Robb Dunn is a graduate student in English. I grew up in the suburban wasteland south of Chicago where nothing ever happens. Ever since then, I have been on an odyssey in search of the meaning of life. Along the way I've met Derek Walcott, Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich and Stephen King. I've attended universities in three different states. I've traveled extensively around the eastern U.S. and hope to do even more traveling after graduation. And I hope one day to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Ben Erwin is a freshman journalism major, student/writer/slacker ...

Veronica Espinosa is a sophomore undecided major. It's a rarity to write poetry, but sometimes I'll just get an attack of those creative juices! Woo-hoo!

Jeremy Hartzell is a senior English major.

Shanna Hull is a junior English major. She plans to pursue her master's and eventually her PhD. She has been writing stories since junior high and would like to thank all those who have encouraged and helped her, especially Eric Garvue.

Biographies ... continued

Nicholas Janquart is a sophomore English major.

Stella Link is a sophomore English major with creative writing and 2D art minors. I enjoy creative writing, especially writing poetry, submitting to poetry contests and using poems to help express my hidden side.

Carrie Smigla is a senior psychology major from a south suburb of Chicago.

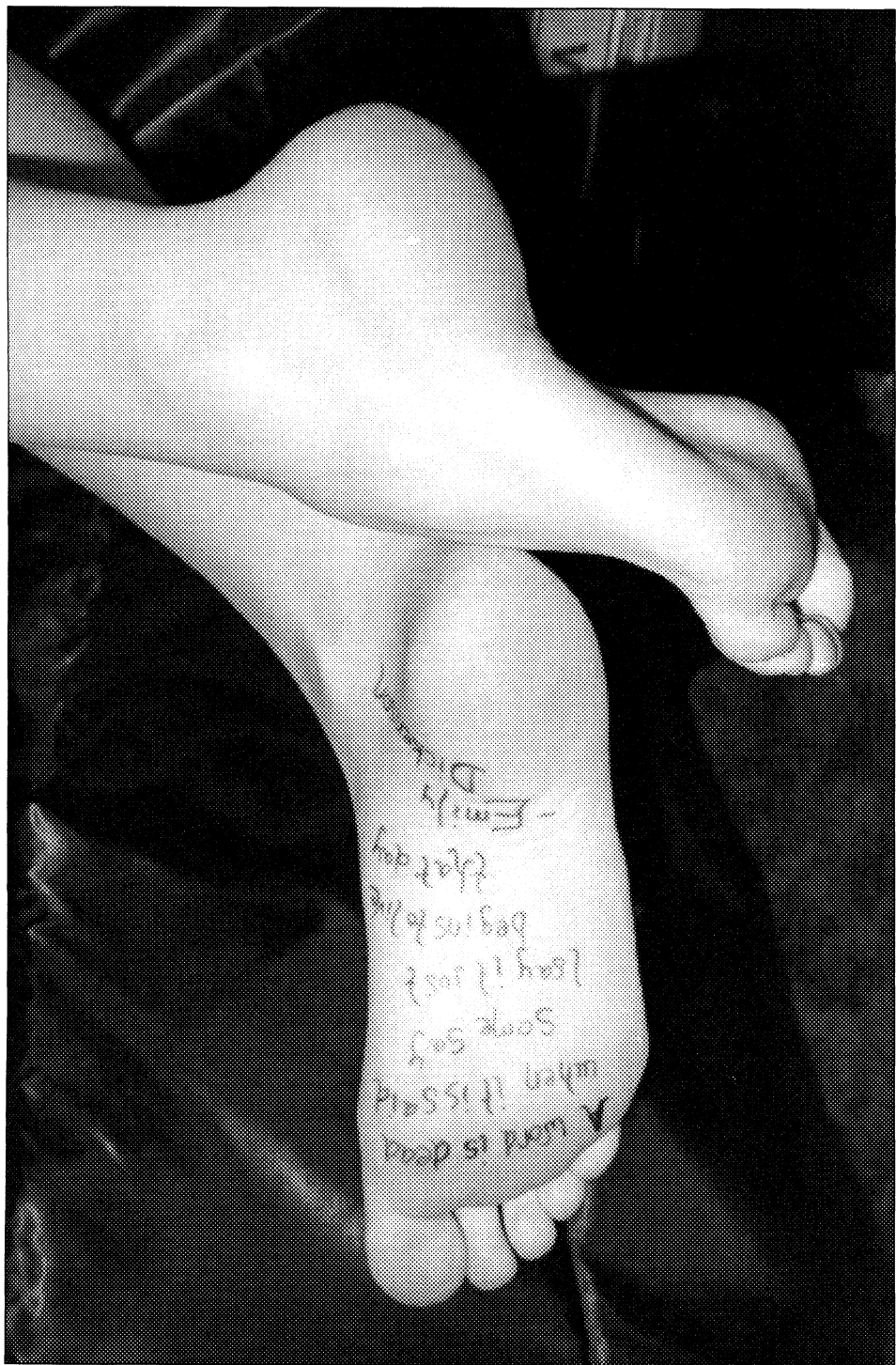
Janet Windeguth is a junior majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing. Someday I hope to be a published author.



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A word is dead
when it is said
Some say
I say it just
begins to live
that day
- Emily
Dickinson