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DES MOINES AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

West Campus **WORDS**

POEMS, STORIES AND ESSAYS BY STUDENTS

volume 2 2009-2011

light, my home, surrounded by forest, becomes a secluded fortress. I'M AT THE
LIFE WHERE I NEED TO STOP DRINKING. WINTER FADES AS DOES NIGHT AFTER A LIFE **we**
a little bit of what we started with THE STATE ARG
AT CAESAR HAS ABUSED HIS POWERS, AIDED IN FOREIGN AFFA
LOITED DEVOUT FOLLOWERS, AND OBSTRUCTED JUSTICE.
worth of frustration and struggle finally broke through her gene
ving temperament, and she erupted like the most tyrannical of bo
the box, line, and a pole. YOU TURNED TO ME AND REMINDED ME, THAT SUN
WOULD HOLD MY BONES TOGETHER AND THAT YOU ARE LIGHT, YOU ARE LI
ARE LIGHT. *He would take this moment, like an old photograph, and glue it into whatever*
brain that would make sure it would never ever be forgotten. **What attracts people**
form such excessive body piercings to a point that some me
professionals consider it self-mutilation? ... imagine a world wh
I care about the environment. **HAS THE VALUE OF A GREAT PIECE OF**
BE FALLEN SO FAR? He gets in my car, we drive to the lake and walk for
UGH WHAT A WAY TO LIVE A LIFE. SHALL I **AND CIGARETTES,** ideas taken form by religion, wild and shaky
few fathers of the fragile. *I ENVIED them, I HATED them. I wished to meet*
them, to be loved. Lynnet packed a few chicken wings in a basket with
nd a slice of cinnamon apple pie, nothing but the best for her
and watched in lazy contentment while quiet grew
nt blue. **I CAN'T BELIEVE, MYSELF.** She sees me
the shaggy undergrowth and buzzes towards me, her arms
above my head in her "tree pose. I would tell anyone
going except for maybe a note, written
s back to a grocery list, and I wouldn't

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LONELINESS IN WINTER

KEELY SUTHERLAND

The day was folding in on itself,
uncomfortable with night's accosting.
I followed you into an open field,
away from the setting sun and into a darkness I hated,
it settles stale and heavy in my body
leaving me weak and despondent for days.

The sun was reflecting off the snow behind us,
like the gleam of a thousand spotlights.
My eyes were burning from the cold,
and we moved through the field without a map.

I understood that we had no destination.
The darkness became loud,
my legs were numb from the snow.
My anxiety was crippling,
and I reminded you I'm prone to nighttime madness.

You turned to me and reminded me,
that surely you would hold my bones together and that
you are light, you are light, you are light.

YEARLESS

TAMARIA WRIGHT

There was a hint of fun in the air. It was a warm summer's evenin' in June. I can't remember the year, exactly, but the events of that evenin' are as fresh as if it was just yesterday. It seemed like evenin' stayed lighter, longer. The temperature was in the high 60s. A gentle, just-barely-touching-your-face, breeze blowin'. One that lightly moves a piece of hair 'cross your face. School had ended that Wednesday and we was already wildin' that Thursday night. The adults was out playin' cards and dominoes. Liquor breaths and fingers poppin' to Rick James and slow dancin' to the Isley's "Summer Breeze." Miss Yvonne, the neighborhood watchdog, was lookin' and leanin' out her window wit' her dog, Snoopy, beside her, yelling at Mr. Willie, her husband, the neighborhood drunk, to come upstairs and stop lookin' at the women's be-hinds gyrating to soulful tunes. We knew the adults was occupied in they own world, so this was the time to play Run, Catch and Kiss. We didn't hafta be in the house by the time the streetlight came on 'cause our parents was outside wit' us and most of them was feelin' too good to care.

We went to the Fish and Chips place located between the Firehouse and Building number 352 to get the boxes for our kissin' game. Pookie and Sherrod's Uncle Donald and Aunt Fay lived next door smellin' the frying fish drifting into they windows. They stomachs feelin' sharp hunger pangs.

They called for us from the window, tossing money down and asking us to get some fish and chips for them wit' extra hot sauce and ketchup. Time to eat and it was they treat 'cause they'd tell us to get somethin' for ourselves. Next, they sent two more of us to Mr. Hollis' store, 'cross the street, for some pickled pig feet and pig ears. Those of us sent to the store knew if Mr. Hollis was workin' we'd get an extra bag of candy for free. A bag full of Charleston Chews, Chick-O-Sticks, Big Blo's, Watermelon Wheels and Now 'n' Laters that only lasted for a moment once we joined the other candy snatchers. We used the Big Blo's as our breath fresheners as we got ready

for the sweet kisses we'd give and receive from our caught partners. If Miss Bea, Mr. Hollis' wife, was working, she'd make us pay for our candy. It was fascinating how Miss Bea could gossip wit' the women of the neighborhood yet count our change exactly just lookin' once.

By the time errands was run for the adults, the rest of us that was left would go and get the huge boxes and have 'em scattered, yet strategically placed, on the sidewalk between the Firehouse and Sydenham hospital. 259 was the building on the farthest end of the block next to Sydenham hospital. Sydenham was a huge 350-bed hospital. We'd go in there to get some water and visit Bonnie's aunt, who worked there as a nurse. Bonnie's Aunt Bunny, like so many of the staff members, would give us suga' balls. The doctors would give them as a reward, when we done our physical or sat still for our shots. The kind that melted as soon as we popped them into our mouths. The dentists at the health station would also give us suga' balls after cleaning our teeth. This angered our moms and caused them to raise their eyebrows at Dr. Slew, but they figured he was the professional and he knew best. Besides they'd end up buying us candy for a good visit anyway so why not have the good dentist give it for free.

Me, others too, been eyeing Gregory Watson. He was the finest boy on the block and he knew it (Michael Davis ran a close second). He had the biggest afro, the juiciest lips and the widest chest of all the boys on the block, nice firm and long fingers. Pecan tan skin and long eye lashes. Ummmmyummmmy! His brothers, Jeffrey and Dwight, was not as cute but we liked Dwight 'cause he was two year older and would play, Run, Catch and Kiss wit' us. The other older boys on the block would laugh at him 'cause he'd take time to play wit' us. Really it was because the other boys his age was allowed to go off the block and drink or smoke away from they parents, but Miss Mamie never allowed 'em to leave the block. Well, that's when she wasn't away herself. They had an older sister named Beverly but she often had company in the house and

sent 'em outside anyways when her mom, Miss Mamie, wasn't home. Jeff, well, let's just say he was the "odd" one. Now don't misunderstand, Jeff was Jeff. Anyway, on this particular June evenin', we tip-toed to Gregg and 'em's door hearin' and listenin' to sounds, discoverin' that night, we really didn't wanna hear. Pookie and Bonnie, runnin' upstairs at the last minute, couldn't stop and ran into the seven of us at the door causing us to fall into one another and the door like a barrel full a monkeys. Beverly jumped up in there, yellin' and screamin', snatchin' the door open wit' just her bra and panties on turned inside out. We girls tried to get up while lookin' back, and the boys were starin' wit' mouths open. Later the girls in the group would share they wished they'd grow up and have breasts as big and round as Beverly's. When we all gathered back downstairs there was looks of disgust on our faces. We called Gregg, Jeff and Dwight's sister nasty and headed back to our game.

At that point, we decided to get the game started before it was too late. We knew the boys was ready, especially after getting an eyeful of Beverly's boobs and be-hind. We stopped to pop our fingers to the Mary Jane Girls' "All Night Long." Ahh...that was the jam for the night. I can't remember who the DJ was but they was jammin' and settin' the tone for the "game." As we all counted to 10 and went every which way, I remember runnin' and lookin' back wishin' Gregg would catch me. Listen, the rules of the game was simple; if you was caught, then you'd hafta choose one of dem boxes, jump in and the boy kissed us or we'd kiss him or in some cases it was kiss each other, especially if it was a boy we liked. That's why we'd get the extra tall boxes from the fish and chips place. We had to find a box, jump in and get our kisses in before someone snitched and we'd run all over again. I'd taken all day to plan my moves.

As Gregg got closer to me, I imagined his full lips on mine and figured he'd probably cop a feel on my underdeveloped butt or my refrigerator bulb-size breasts. I didn't see Bonnie "Bumper Boobs" on my right side, and just as Gregg reached out to touch me, Bonnie jumped in front of me wit' her watermelon-sized breast and plumplicious butt and knocked me out of the way. Gregg grabbed her by her waist, both slicin' me wit' they eyes, as they walked away laughin' and smilin' from ear to ear headed towards the biggest and nearest box they'd find. His brother, Jeff, comin' in at a close second ate me wit'

his eyes as a dog would a big steak after days of starvation. Jeff and I was stoop buddies. That's it, that's all. "Yeah!" and granted we was the only one's on the block stayin' out until 11:00 pm on the weekends and during the summer months, but how could I kiss the other brother? "Yuck," I thought. "How'd this happen?"

Me, the reigning queen of the "Run, Catch and Kiss," not get the gran' prize? I always did. Was I slippin'? Girls like me only got caught by the cutest ones or the ones everyone else wanted. Even lackin' some of the advantages other girls on the block had such as huge cantaloupe breasts or ripe butts yet I had the "magic touch." That made me the idol and the envy of the neighborhood. I'd always had Gregg or Michael catch me. It made the other girls, like Bonnie, angry. They all wanted to know my skill 'cause I was the run, catch and kiss leader. I had dreams 'bout the winning kisses and now I was livin' a nightmare...his name was Jeff.

Jeff reached down and offered his hand to help me up. I was totally grossed out as he licked his big lips and rubbed his clumsily large hands together. I, hesitantly, grabbed his claws, and he pulled me up and close to him. His breath was kickin' but I tried to take in small breaths as he pulled me closer. I reminded him, wit' attitude, "Jeff, we gotta find a box!" But he was in his own world and just said, "Yeah, you right." It was if he was pullin' me along like a child wit' his brand new doll or toy on a string. I lost one of my sneakers and tried to go back to get it but Jeff said hurriedly, "We don't have no time, get it afterwards!" It was almost as if he had been waitin' for this day to happen and he didn't wanna be robbed of his candy delight. He popped one of them Big Blo's in his mouth and I knew this was it. Jeff put this goofy smile on his face, tryin' to make me laugh. Any other night, when it was just me and him, on the stoop, late at night, I'd a laughed but not this time. All the other boxes was taken so we hadda go to the last one by Sydenham Hospital. Slowly, as if walkin' death row, I went wit' Jeff down the street. I could hear the others laughing in their boxes and havin' fun. Some was coming out of them boxes and scoutin' out they next partner for the "kissin'" game.

I thought, "Can't they see my face? I'm miserable and scared. Won't somebody interrupt and stop this madness from happenin'?" It was in that moment it seemed

everything was movin' in slow motion. Like a special moment in time. Oh wait, there was one thing I left out of my story, here of despair; Jeff had all sorts of marks on his face and a lisp that was "Unforgettable." That was the song I heard, you know, the one by Nat King Cole. Strangely, I, then, heard the music blarin' from down the street where our parents was either fully filled wit' the "spirits" coming from the liquor store while they was dancin' and playin' cards or engagin' in their own adult version of "kissin' and feelin'" games. I noticed that it was just at dusk and I could smell the "air of night." A smell part of a warm summer's night, mixing of smells human and plant. My senses seemed high and I was more aware of my surroundings than I'd ever before. As Jeff held my hand, he lifts it up and kisses it a couple of times. I notice his lips are not as hard as I thought; maybe the cracks in his lips from last week healed. The acne disappeared and as we approached the streetlight, the neighborhood signal that it was time to go in...his face didn't look as bad as I first thought. We reached "the box" and the teeth that was behind bars the week before was now free from they prison. They was straight, white and sparklin'. I remember silently laughin' to myself and thinkin' he didn't have none of Dr. Slew's suga' balls. Silly Jeff, like on cue, gave an undercover laugh not like the awkward and goofy one he'd given earlier. Or perhaps Jeff hadn't given a goofy laugh after all.

Maybe it's what I'd created in my mind. Yeah...this had kinda become like a ritual but I realized this night was not like any other. This game was not like the others we had played in summers past. Standing at the box, tenderly, Jeff grabbed my face and kissed my lips. Not clumsily, like before, but as if he had practiced for days and months. It wasn't just the softness of his lips that sent my mind into a swirl but the gentle explorin' of his tongue trying to gain entrance, deeper, into my mouth. His breath didn't smell nor did his mouth taste like the Big Blo's; this time around it was a minty Tic Tac.

Comin' out of my heavenly daze, I found myself gazing into his beautiful light brownish hazel eyes. Had he always had them eyes? I'd never noticed how beautiful, shiny and bright they was. Especially how his pupils danced as he moved them from side to side while holdin' me. He's actually moved me, little by little, away from him as if he was plantin' a picture of me in his mind. Drawin' me closer to him, again, I heard a small sigh and a "Thank

you, Lawd. You do answer prayers." I held him close and didn't wanna let go as the song "Last Dance" by Donna Summers was playin'. One lyric kept repeatin' in my mind; "last dance, it's my last chance for love, my last chance for romance tonight...ohhhh I need you, by me, beside me, to guide me, to hold me..." and he grabbed my be-hind (what I've got of them, I whispered to myself) kissin' one last time. This one was long, wet and extra juicy. The kind when partin' left a string of saliva between us. It seemed like forever 'cause when we parted, from our heavenly embrace, the street was empty. All of our friends had gone in and all of the street lights was on. The Fish and Chips place was closed, and as we strolled up the block wit' our arms locked around one another's waist, soakin' in our own moment, I forgot 'bout his brother Gregg, I forgot 'bout Michael Davis and the fact that Bonnie had stolen my moment.

As we walked over to my stoop, our parents looked at us, nodded and smiled. They walked away to the ending of Al Green's "Love and Happiness" and the beginning of "Let's Stay Together." Givin' us the privacy that two teens live to experience for the first time. Jeff took a deep breath while cuppin' my face between them two manly hands. Wit' a deep Barry White voice Jeff said "I love you" and began singin' to me wit' "I'm Never Gonna Give You Up" by Barry White. He brought his hands down to my waist and I had my arms round his neck as we swayed back and forth. I hadn't noticed his voice change or the fact that he'd grown three or so inches taller from last week. As we released one another, and I went into the house, I turned around one last time, he swatted my butt (yeah, I know I got one now) and whispered, "I love you too." Jeff smiled and kicked his heels together. Silly Jeff...no...manly Jeff.

The next morning I woke up singin'. My mom, step-dad and brother was still sleepin' so I rolled over and looked at the clock. It was just 6:30 a.m. I grabbed my journal reliving the night before. I ended my entry wit' my plans for the evenin' game of run, catch and kiss. As I was gettin' ready I studied my body. I began explorin' every contour and curve of my body and realized it changed. A transformation happened and I hadn't paid attention. I began appreciatin' the softness of my skin and the roundness and tenderness of my breast, the flatness of my stomach and the maturity of my nature. I

was growin' into a woman. Excitingly, wantin' to share my discovery wit' Jeff, I went to his building and gave the usual signal, "the whistle." Yeah, I know it sounds like "so what" but what I'd realized the night before we was unique. We was "us" and I loved it! I waited a few moments and there was no answer. I whistled again and there was still no answer.

Droppin' my head, I began walkin' away. Beverly come downstairs in her pajamas. It was the first time I'd seen her up so early in the mornin' wit' clothes but her eyes was red. I knew somethin' was wrong. She walked over to me, hugged me and cried uncontrollably. I didn't bother to ask her what happened. I didn't care. My world and my heart had been ripped into pieces and handed to me. Beverly shoved a dirty, crumpled note into my hand. I snatched it and I ran wit' the paper balled up. Wipin' my tear-stained face wit' the note as I ran and didn't stop 'til I got to Morningside Park.

Jeff and I had a favorite thinkin' spot. It was the rope swing hangin' from the big tree located on top of the rocks. I cried and cried wondering why, just as I was experiencin' the beginnin' of my rite of passage into womanhood and relationships, Jeff, that traitor, had opened my heart leavin' me to deal wit' it by myself... "alone again, naturally." It was at that moment I remembered the piece of paper, still in my hand, torn and tear-soaked. And I read it. The handwritin' was shaky and hard to read but I was determined to get through it. It was all I had left. None of my life made sense now. It read: "I wanna thank you for the most memorable night of my life. I've always loved you, 'bet you didn't know that, girl and I bet you didn't know that ebony eyes" (lyric from Rick James' "Ebony Eyes"). Leave it to him to even joke in the middle of our pain. I smiled a half smile and continued readin', "from the first time we met because you accepted me for who I was. My clothes wit' holes, sneakers too small and a face...well a face...no one kissed but you. You're the brightest spot in my life 'cept Amy. Tired of mama's drinkin' and whorin' and Beverly's whorin'. Mama movin' all of us from place to place 'cause she can't stay away from drinkin'. Luv, she can't even keep a job. Cigarette burns on my back and legs from mama's men and going from one rat hole to another. My little sister, Amy, been touched by so many of mama's men. Dwight and Gregg don't argue wit' her 'cause they scared, but I'm not. But I'm tired. So I was gonna take my life tonight. I'd prayed the night before if God really loved me,

he'd show me true love...a Father's love. Your kiss was what I needed and I knew God truly loved me...me; no one will ever take that away." Now I can live. His handwriting, at that point, was illegible.

Tears filled my eyes as I was only able to read the last line which read...I'll always love you 'cause...and that's where the letter ended. There was several drops of dry blood on the paper along wit' tear stains. Three adults was gossipin' bout Miss Mamie and how she'd been taken out of the house screamin' and in cuffs. "Poor kids...I knew it'd happen one day. Well, they in a better place now. She was a no good tramp anyways. Girl...would sleep wit' a dog if it hung long 'nuff and paid good 'nuff." "Ig'nant" I shouted, throwing my head in the air and switchin' my plumpness-in-progress be-hind down the street.

I went back in the house and planned my night's game. Three playas was eliminated but we'd go around the corner to buildings 92 and 98 and grab more of them to play "Run, Catch and Kiss." They had plenty of boys to play, and I had my eye on Kurt. He was about two years older and he had brothers. Nice chest, full afro and so fine... juicy lips. Bonnie and the girls, they'd be real jealous if I got 'em. Yeah...they mine. Insensitive and no feelin', you say, may be but this be the life of this "ghetto child." "Feel me?" Finding the essence of one another, finally and havin' it ripped away. Now, just a memory to hold in my mind, pulling it out when feelin' rejected or unloved for being me. Sheltered in my difference 'cause Jeff made it safe and okay, for us, to be odd. When the times are tough and my life decides to take the rough side of the human experience I think of true love in its purest form....a teenage love. "What Does It Take To Win Your Love For Me...How Can I Make This Dream Come True For Me?" Junior Walker and the All Stars "Yeah, I'm diggin' it...."

What does that mean...define it for yoself! At-ti-tude you say...yea...sho' nuff cause this my conclusion: There was a hint of fun in the air. It was a warm summer's evenin' in June. I can't remember the year, exactly, but the events of that evenin' are as fresh as if it was just yesterday. It seemed like evenin' stayed lighter, longer. The temperature was in the high 60s. A gentle, just-barely-touching-your-face, breeze blowin'. One that lightly moves a piece a hair across your face. Thymed Season. Yeah, it's a Thymed season filled wit' finger poppin' and hips swayin' 'cause the sweetness

of Thyme meets wit' the yarrow, barberry and chamomile
of life. Creating an herbal recipe that no one can copy
'cause each is an original. Crossing paths and exchanging
experiences generating mess and joy all in the same
measure...yeah, Thyme's Ghetto Child! That's It, that's all.

BUT THEN I REMEMBER

MARY CLARE DOWD

On weary days when my feet hurt and my back aches
 like I've just hefted a couch up three flights of stairs,
 when really all I've done is work for five hours,
 teaching little kids how to read and write,
 and say their times tables in ten seconds flat,
 I wonder what it would be like to buy
 a one-way plane ticket to Barcelona
 or New York City
 or London.

I wouldn't tell anyone where I was going
 except for maybe a note
 written last minute in Sharpie

on the back of a grocery list,
 and I wouldn't bring my phone with me.
 Just a backpack with a passport,
 my ID, a credit card, all my cash,
 two changes of clothes,
 my contact lenses,
 and a camera.

But then I remember that I'm broke,
 so there is no cash for me out there,
 and my camera broke last year on
 a road trip to Chicago,
 and my passport needs renewing,
 and what about face wash and shampoo?
 So, instead, I trudge home from work on
 my tender feet and lay down on my couch
 and watch Doctor Who and pretend that
 I am Rose Tyler and that I can leave
 this place anytime I want,
 and that my dreams will come true,
 and then
 I am
 asleep.

THE MOTHER TREE (AN EXCERPT)

KACY COLLOPY

We walk up the brushy hill, our feet squelching together through last night's rain. Occasionally she runs ahead, splashing over the spongy earth, shrubs reaching for her flying figure, but never quite making contact. She is running when she bursts through the bracken onto the summit of the small hill, silhouetted briefly against the watery spring sunlight before dashing out of sight. We had returned again to see her tree in a park that overlooked our town. It is a short enough walk from her school that we've been coming every lunch period, spending a half hour or so suspended above the town, pointing out her favorite landmarks and eating lunch seated on the knotted, rooty skirt of her favorite tree.

Her teacher scowled at me today when I came to pick her up. I'd had her back a little bit late yesterday and the prune-faced biddy somehow judged her repetition of the multiplication tables "For, like, the a-thousandth time, Dad!" to be more important than lunch time with her father. I smiled sweetly at the dried up old shrew and steered my smirking nine-year-old out the door.

The excited countenance of an angel in training appears between the break in the trees and yells at me "Daddy! My tree's got an egg! It's sooooo pretty!" before dashing off again. Okay, her tree has an egg today, this is new.

When I breach the shrubby circumference of the top of the hill, I see her dashing delightedly around her tree, alighting for a moment on one side then the other and peering eagerly into its reaching branches. She sees me exit from the shaggy undergrowth and buzzes towards me, her arms held high above her head, in her "tree pose." I catch her as she crashes towards me and heft her into the sky; she wiggles her fingers high above her head and continues to buzz, fingers stark against the spinning wheel of the sun.

"Why do you buzz, little bumble bee?" I ask her. "Daddy, I'm not a bee! My leaves are singing!" Of course, of course. I assure her she is a perfect little tree and lower her to root into the ground. She stands smiling at me for a moment, "branches" stretched tall above her head and "leaves" waving in the sun, buzzing. I could not love my little tree more.

She bounds back to her tree and gestures frantically into its light-filled branches. As I walk across the sodden ground towards her I begin to see it: a luminously red, gravid shape hanging just out of my daughter's reach. This must be the "egg" she mentioned.

"Look Daddy! It's making a baby tree!"

"Yep, that's right," I reply. "It must want to be a mother tree." She scowls at that; I forgot, for an instant, that the word "mother" has become taboo in our household, but a fiendish smile chases away the frown in a flash.

"I want it! Daddy, get me that tree egg!" she yells with a dramatic flourish. It's kind of an odd-looking fruit, and I'm not quite sure what kind of tree this is, but it couldn't do her any harm as long as she doesn't eat it.

"All right little tree, I'll get you your egg. Just promise me you won't put it in your mouth, okay?" She nods furiously in response, not taking her wide, excited eyes off of the strange fruit.

I reach up and grasp the progeny of this high lonely tree. It feels smooth and oddly cool, as if water is flowing just below its surface. The sun catches it for an instant through the tree's stained glass windows of shifting leaves, and it glows like a light has blinked on within it, throwing off a faint red reflection the color of blood. It makes a quietly satisfying popping noise as I tug it free of its stem, and the red glow is extinguished. It is deceptively heavy in my hands, and its smooth plumpness is eerily reminiscent of a engorged belly, down to the little puckered scar of a bellybutton where the stem had been. Drawing the fruit down to my chest I am startled by the abrupt sound of the

mother tree's branches sighing melodically and, almost, mournfully. They dip and sway towards my hands as if straining to reclaim the tree her lost offspring. For an instant they look like aged fingers, twisted, knotty and strong, but made useless without the dexterity of youth. The branches brush against my cheek before springing upwards to their proper place in the sky.

My momentary absorption with the tree must have gotten the better of me; my daughter has grown impatient and tugs on the back of my shirt, "Daddy, did you get it? Can I see?" I turn to her and grin, holding the fruit in one hand triumphantly and she cheers wildly. I kneel and present it to her and she accepts it solemnly before throwing herself against my chest and hugging me fiercely. "You're the best daddy ever!" Once in a while she makes me believe that I am the hero she thinks me to be.

Breaking away, she studies the fruit intently for few minutes before deciding that she is ravenously hungry. I'm always surprised by how quickly her interests change. I set out our lunches and we take up our customary spots, the tree bobbing above our heads, and serenading us with leafy sighs. Suddenly our time is up, and I have to hurry her back down the hill to the car. She'll be late to class again, but these days are well worth a little impotent scolding from her teacher. It's only when we are ensconced safely in the vehicle and well on our way back to her school that I realize we left the fruit at the park. I can see it in my mind's eye lolling sadly on the ground as its progenitor bows and reaches desperately but is unable to retrieve it. My daughter obviously doesn't miss it, so it really should cease to matter to me, but a lingering feeling that we wasted that fruit summons some disconcerting feelings of guilt.

I deposit my daughter into her class room and her teacher shoots me another scathing glare but says nothing. I bend to hug my girl but she's already halfway across the room, haranguing a friend. It's a little past time for me to get back to work anyway, so I sigh, blow her a kiss and head out. Watching the elementary school recede in my rearview mirror as I drive away, I catch a glimpse of my face. It's adorned with a long red scratch from where the branches of the mother tree grazed me as I stole her child.

THE TRIAL OF JULIUS CAESAR

SARA JORDAN

Today we have gathered to determine whether Gaius Julius Caesar is guilty of the charges that have been brought against him by the State. The State argues that Caesar has abused his powers, aided in foreign affairs, exploited devout followers, and obstructed justice. We are charging him with seventeen counts of fraud. We are well aware the kind of penalty such crimes carry; one count of fraud carries ten years of banishment alone. For your consideration, I have prepared a document of specific events that clearly place this man on the opposite side of the law.

It goes without saying that Caesar is a man of questionable ethics, as we have seen in his tawdry affairs in Egypt. We are well aware of his goings on with a certain Macedonian queen. Of course she has her own agenda that is most assuredly in stark contrast with what is good for the Roman people. Surely a well-qualified ruler working with a rational mind (and not with a certain part of his anatomy) would see that. This young lady and her dysfunctional family have no right to claim the time, nor affections, of a Roman ruler. Consequently, Caesar is being brought up on charges for aiding in foreign affairs.

He defeated Pompey, a man he once considered a friend, and a friend to many of you as well. We remain unsure of the specific cause of this great man's death, or the location of his body, but a former Roman officer is now being held for questioning.

In what dirty dealings does this man not have his hands? His corruption is far reaching: Egypt, Gaul, Spain, Greece, and who knows elsewhere. Where do his loyalties lie? What allies has he made in these foreign lands? What is the price of true loyalty from Julius Caesar? As we can see, the loyalty and allegiance of thousands of Roman citizens are not enough. Such is a dangerous enough charge on its own.

We have worried his favor with the people would go to his head. He has shown his charismatic charm and debonair ways through eloquent speech and written word. But his enemies abroad, and the ones in this room today, see his true colors. We saw these colors bleed through when this man forced the Senate to make him dictator for ten years. Ten years! How absurd.

He then had the nerve to make himself dictator for life. Gentlemen, we know how this will end. This has to be the final straw! We will no longer work for Rome, but rather, we will have to answer in full to an enemy of the State: Julius Caesar. My friends, as all of you of course are, hear my plea: get rid of this enemy for the good of the State.

Some may commend that what this man has done to enrich our land and gain resources through trade. They, of course, are right. But that isn't the point. Colonizing and extending citizenship, how gentlemanly. How good it is to be on the receiving end of his generosity. But what is lost in the process?

And who could forget his "calendar" with its Egyptian ideas that I'm sure have no practical use on Roman soil. The people are, of course, right to be in awe of this man. But I think for the wise among us, that awe has turned to fear.

With absolute power, what is Caesar's incentive to help the people? There couldn't possibly be any reason to keep the people happy, unless there is a monetary gain for Caesar, and Caesar alone. Rome used to be a republic. Some argue it still is, but of course it is not. This man has made himself in the image of a king! What next, a god? Who does he envision taking over his rule? That nephew of his? An even more absurd thought.

Look at the Senate. Do you see any men that are not or have never been Caesar's officers or close confidants? His strategy is to place friends in high places. And if one doesn't have friends, buy them. Or better yet, appoint men who are

not qualified, men who are sure to become your friends. Nine hundred people inhabit the Senate now. I think my wife has even been made a member...please contain your laughter. I only said that to demonstrate how anyone is able to be placed in such a high status position. This is not the picture of democracy I envisioned from birth.

Martial rule has been declared by the Senate, yes, at which time Caesar took it upon himself to "strike while the iron is hot." We cannot allow such an abuse of power. We need to remove this man from the sham of an office he has created before it is too late. And of course, this scenario has already been created. For this mess that has unfolded, we can thank the man who sits over there, where I point.

So, today, I ask of you, members of the dikastai, to consider the full picture of the republic. How will it look ten years from now if this man is not defeated and brought to justice? What kind of laughing stock will he, and the men he appoints as his successors, make of Rome? That we are even meeting to discuss this matter tells me I am not in this alone. For those of you who are skeptical of what I say (yes, even from here I see the look of uncertainty on some of your faces) be reasonable. I know you fear what will become of you if you vote against your leader. But do not distress. Your reward will be your freedom to act as men in accordance with the law, not ones who live vicariously through it.

RUNNING WATER

ANNA S. WEIGEL

Today Maggie was particularly tired after her shift. She felt trampled. Exhausted, she felt too like her spirit had been accosted during the spans of work. "The great minimum-wage labor force," Maggie grumbled to herself. For the last hour she had been imagining a shower, fresh clothes, and curling into her papasan chair with a book—reprieve.

Maggie had no car. Living paycheck to paycheck, she couldn't afford one. The apartment she shared with her brother was a near two-mile walk, and often, she looked forward to it. On days like today, however, Maggie acknowledged the stretch like a grim fate. Summoning her will, she pulled her body forward; the keen ache for freedom and rest spurring her onward. "At least work's done," she thought, as she stepped down from the landing onto the paved parking lot streaked with motor oil and glittering with sand.

Maggie made it home, and impatiently wrestled the front door open. She called out for Greg, but there was no answer. She accepted the silence as a gift, grateful that she was allowed the solitude, and hoped he wouldn't return home soon. Greg and Maggie had never fully bonded. They felt more like brief acquaintances or strangers with common connections rather than brother and sister. This lack of affinity created an ever-present tension in the apartment.

Maggie undressed hastily as she shuffled into the bathroom. There was something strange in the atmosphere, but she was of a single purpose and ignored the sensation. As water streamed out of the showerhead, steam rose into the air. Maggie exhaled deeply and stepped into the narrow metal stall. Though she had longed for this moment a good part of the day, she hurried, hoping to be dressed and stake claim on the living room before Greg returned. When she emerged from the bathroom, steam escaped into the drafty hallway.

She descended a step from the bathroom into the hall and as Maggie planted her foot on the carpet, she felt it squish beneath her. "What the—," Maggie exclaimed as she jerked her foot up and attempted to side step around the matter, but as she landed the carpet squished beneath her once again.

"The carpet's wet?" Maggie questioned out loud. She bent forward as she inspected the carpet and discovered it was dark, saturated with some sort of fluid. As she looked down the hall, she noticed the dark stain ended abruptly not far from where she stood. She turned in the opposite direction then and found that the wetness seemed to stem from the living room. Maggie started forward cautiously, her eyes wide, brow furrowed, and biting her lower lip.

Ever-so-faintly she heard the methodical trickling sound of running water. She peered around the doorway into the living room for a moment and then gasped as her eyes locked upon the doorway of the kitchen. Water flowed freely over the tack strip which divided the kitchen linoleum and the living room carpet. The trickling sound at once made sense to Maggie and she bounded for the kitchen, sloshing across the water logged carpet, her socks heavy and dragging.

In the kitchen, her eyes lit upon the sink which overflowed with water onto the floor. Fluttering at the sink's edge were plates and cups, some already afloat and dancing across the attached counter. Maggie waded through an inch and a half of water to the sink and thrust the single knob down, closing the spigot and silencing the faucet of the old-fashioned single-basin sink. She looked into its depth. The drain was stopped up by the plug.

"What in the world?" exclaimed Maggie, still in disbelief. She turned for a moment, appraising the situation. Someone had plugged the drain in the antique sink. "Why has the faucet been left on?" she questioned.

"Greg," Maggie thought suddenly. "Gre—g!" she yelled. Silence. "He really isn't home, or he would have answered," she thought. "But then—who had turned the faucet on? It doesn't have an overflow drain!" Her brow knit again as she sprang into action, thinking of the damage the water would cause if left to stand.

Maggie's mind raced. "The neighbors!" she thought. They lived on the second floor. "Was water flowing into the neighbor's apartment?" Visions of a woman outraged and cursing at her made Maggie work faster. She could not ignore her wet socks any longer, however, and tore them from her feet. She ran from room to room gathering towels and any non essential piece of fabric she could find, a spare couch cover, a sheet, a throw rug.

She gathered the items into a laundry basket and hauled it to the kitchen doorway, where she used the mass to block water from passing over the threshold. While it stopped the flow, it did little to lessen the level of water adrift on the white and grey patterned linoleum.

Maggie felt pathetic as she pumped a sponge-mop to and fro, which did less to capture the fluid than move it about. "Where is Greg?" she thought. "Where is he?"

Maggie went back and forth, mopping furiously and running towels to and from the bathroom where, depositing them into the shower stall, she would stand and wring each piece, desperate to unlock its absorbency. She had been at the task for some time, noting only the slightest decrease in the level of water, when a rustling sound broke the internal din of Maggie's agitation. Maggie stopped mopping and glared at the entry door, which was visible from the kitchen doorway.

Greg pushed open the heavy door with his right hand and braced it with his foot as he commenced hauling several bulging grocery sacks over the threshold, oblivious to his audience. "You!" Maggie bellowed from the kitchen doorway. "What in god's name are you doing?" she shouted. Though Greg was startled by Maggie's fury, he was unaware of the current predicament. He moved to close the door before turning to her, with a scowl, asked "What are you talking about?"

"Gah!" Maggie yelled as she threw the mop down. The mop made a wet thwack as it hit the water's surface. The day's worth of frustration and struggle finally broke through her generally forgiving temperament, and she erupted like the most tyrannical of bosses. "Oh, you've done it now Greg! Oh, my god. I can't believe this, look at this!" she blared.

"What, are you, talking about?" Greg exclaimed. He spotted the mess of towels at Maggie's feet. "What is that—" he began to say as he started toward her, but the carpet squished beneath him, and he froze. "What the—," he said. "What did you do?"

Maggie felt fire red. Her blood pressure surged and her body tensed. Greg passed through the doorway into the room and set the bags on the kitchen table. "Me!" she boomed as her feet became iron casts bolted to the floor.

"Whoa," said Greg, his mouth gaped open, then shut, and his lips curled into a faint grin. He understood what had happened.

"You! You cl-cl-clean this up!" Maggie stammered loudly. She regained her composure miraculously, though, as she too realized what happened. "You plugged the sink and went to the store?" she let out in a whine.

"Yeah, ha. I did," said Greg. "I didn't mean to. If you hadn't nagged me about those dishes.... What can I say? I was hungry." He raised his shoulders and shrugged.

Greg, like Maggie, was without a car. He would have walked more than ten minutes each way to the nearest grocer. Maggie felt miserable. She realized that while she had been showering the sink was running over. These thoughts detained Maggie while Greg opened one of the cupboards. She was deaf to the click of the door as it closed. Greg threw the faucet knob up, and water gushed into the mug he held.

The sound from the faucet brought Maggie back into the moment, and she turned to see Greg tipping the blue porcelain cup to his lips. He felt her eyes lock on his outline with a burning acuity. Individual hairs rose on his neck. He turned and acknowledged her gaze, letting his arm swing out to her, cup in hand. "Want some?" he jeered, giggling.

I WROTE YOU 1,000 LETTERS

JEAN SCHWALENBERG

Don't leave me, you beg.

Your eyes are large and wild; your pupils have swallowed your irises. Tears stand out in your eyes, and I think to myself that I've seen them before. They swell and spill down your cheeks and this I've seen as well. The thing that surprises me, just for a moment, is the realization I have after thirty seconds of your tears. For the first time since I've known you, and possibly the first time in your life, you're crying without being more ashamed of the tears than you are sad.

I actually have to bite my tongue. You will never know this, but while I was packing my things these last couple weeks—while living in the same house, sleeping in the same bed as you, and you too self-absorbed to notice—I found a journal entry from three years ago, with letters to you tucked inside. Those letters: the things I ask for (and then justify, by comparing what you demand of me), the hurtful things you say to me, the way you shamelessly eschew anything that resembles work.

Even if I had the desire or inclination to tell you, you wouldn't understand.

My inner monologue has apparently reverted to phonograph for the moment, because that phrase bounces around in my head, not only figuratively but visually and with an odd, slightly irregular rhythm. It's punctuated by what I tentatively guess are spikes in blood pressure that cause such a strong "white noise" in my ears when the pressure approaches its peak that I am receiving the real, live audio around me with almost exactly the sound quality and signal strength of a cell phone call—on one of the models that had a solid antennae.

I am struck once again by how "broken up" we really have been. I would probably feel a lot worse about the pain I'm causing you in this moment, but I know, I really know, even though there's no empirical evidence and even

though you wouldn't believe a word of this (actually, more likely you wouldn't listen for longer than it took you to jump on an appealing word or catch phrase to redirect the fault back to me)....

I almost lose it. I have been preplanning this for five months. I have planned it for the last five weeks. The last seven days have been so full of stress and nerves that, on several occasions during the week, when I was **in a room by myself**...planning, **in my head, by myself**...or giving myself a long and intensive pep talk, **in my head**...I suddenly became aware that I had been tiptoeing around. Literally. Walking on eggshells, if you please.

After I noticed that, I allowed myself to feel a little bit sorry for me. That's progress.

The emotions flooding me now are the opposite.

I. Can't. Believe. Myself.

All it took was a [visceral] line of thinking [in which you were actively, falsely and manipulatively causing me undeserved guilt...].

And I fucking felt guilty. Just for a moment.

But then I felt so fucking ashamed for myself, for the way I let you debase me without fighting or questioning or even realizing, or even worse, even wanting to see it for what it was.

And then I thought, what the fuck? Because when I thought about it, now that I was just such a little bit more aware, I felt the only thing I needed to be feeling was pissed off at you.

Doubly pissed off when I remembered that the initial thought in this chain that resulted in all this bullshit—none of which are my feelings, as I'm realizing—was totally benevolent towards you. That we really had grown apart (among other things), but most of all that as soon as you

got over what you expected to feel if or when we broke up, I know you'll feel what I feel: a mild "sadness" that's becoming more simply nostalgia by the day, by the hour, and a deep, pervasive sense of relief.

After a little more time passes, I decide you got off way too fucking easy. My mourning turned out to be short because: a) I left; b) I was totally, completely in the right; c) I had a pinch hitter waiting in the wings so I didn't get lonely and come back for sex—HA!; and d) for three or more years before you left, every day you ripped out my heart a little bit more. I had mourned long in advance.

The letters were the beginning of the end, the time when I was both completely certain I would threaten to leave you if you didn't change and that would make you change because you loved me; as I reread, they become more and more sickeningly pathetic over the years.

The four rough drafts pressed inside the journal were some of, if not exactly, the first I wrote you. I found hundreds, perhaps thousands tucked away in flattened envelopes and disintegrating notebooks. I fill boxes with them. I fill multiple, large boxes with them, and when I go they go with me.

It takes several months before I can open a box without such intense emotional recoil that I shut it right back up. I read a letter, and the expected shame washes over me, but with it comes a genuine bit of pity and comfort and love for myself. I burn it in the can I keep on the porch for cigarette butts. I don't read another one until several weeks have passed, and then I read three before I want to give myself a break. I burn them as well, and when the catharsis has taken over my being afterwards I wonder quite seriously why I'm holding on to them.

It takes me about a month to come up with the answer.

In small batches, I read every word of every letter before I burn them, shred them; I dispose of them in any interesting or symbolic way that occurs to me. But I read them first so I remember, so I learn. I don't need the specific words or actions listed ad nauseum as warning flags, instead, when I read them I remember the things I did not know I felt at the time. I may not be successful yet or even near my full potential, but I finally believe with at least some part of me that I am entitled to them.

Ironically, this means something good came from you, and when all of the letters have been imbibed and destroyed, I am surprised at the strength of the temptation to call you and rub various aspects of this all in, just to be a bitch.

Then I remember you live with your parents still, by choice, barely working. I decide to stalk your Facebook profile (ex's prerogative) and am pleased that in the new picture where her face is visible, your girlfriend is even uglier than I guessed. I may crow, "Deformed! Not just homely!" to a few people. But the joke's already less funny. I regard this new part of me with curiosity; after all, it's not actively seeking revenge. I probe the part of me I don't yet understand, searching for a bit of information to help me index the phenomenon.

And then I realize. That's just how little I care about you. Your ugly girlfriend is boring.

I never did call.

SOMETIMES I FEAR I HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE.

TREVER JANE

Two young men, barely out of high school, sat near me recently at a downtown coffee shop. I was sitting with my own group of friends near the back and facing the door. The boys walked in holding hands, and it shocked me. Not because seeing two men hold hands is repugnant or threatens me in some way. Not because of any social or moral issue often pontificated about such things due to the intolerance of others. Not because I had any concern for their safety or well-being. Simply because seeing them hold hands, seeing them express affection so casually, reminded me of how long it's been since I held a man's hand.

To be reminded of that so bluntly was almost unbearable for me. They looked so young, so happy, so very much in love, all things I do not feel about myself. I do not feel young, I do not feel happy, I am not in love. At least not in love at the same time anyone also is in love with me, and since when does unrequited love truly count? I envied them, I hated them. I wished to meet them, to be them, to be loved.

I try to recall the times I felt and acted as they did. Could it really have been so long ago? Was I ever truly as young and innocent as they seemed to be? Have I really become so distrusting and closed off from the kind of love they so easily share? It seems as though I've become exactly the kind of man my young self would never have dreamed of being. Isolated, lonely, fragmented, compartmentalized, and afraid.

Although we sat only one table apart we never spoke. I could hear only fragments of their conversation. But I saw them; I watched them as they watched each other. They were oblivious to everyone around them and I longed to feel that way too. To brush hands, to bump knees, to smile shyly, to make eye-contact, to hug, to hold, to kiss.

To feel.

To love.

To remember.

UNDER 25s: THE NEW ENVIRONMENTAL HEROES

SAMANTHA TUCKER

April 30, 2010 was a very big and busy day for a group of students from Waukee High School. It was the last day of voting for that round of the Pepsi Refresh Project. According to refresheverything.com, The Pepsi Refresh Project looks for people, businesses, and non-profits with ideas that will have a positive impact on the community. The project selects a number of ideas and offers them to voters in four prize-money categories: \$5,000, \$25,000, \$50,000, and \$250,000. Then, for a month, anyone can go on to refreshanything.com, and cast their vote, one a day, for a favorite idea. Every idea that finishes in the top ten receives the money. Waukee finished in the top ten and was awarded \$50,000 dollars for its project. Now, what does this have to do with young people and the environment? The only reason Waukee got any of this money is because of its high school's Earth Club, which applied for the grant to get funding to install multiple wind turbines at different schools in the district, thus cutting down on the school's energy use. They won because members of the group were adamant not only in voting every day, but also in making sure every Tom, Dick, and Harry they knew voted each day as well. The students in this club represent a growing movement among youth today: environmental awareness.

Many young people today are large supporters of helping to preserve the environment, affectionately known as "going green." They buy clothes made of certain materials that take less of a toll on the environment, or they may, like the kids at Waukee, join earth clubs. They know how to recycle and they practice it. What causes this new movement among young people? Many reasons come to mind, including the following three: information is now more accessible, the outcome of years of environmental neglect are now being seen in dramatic ways, and (possibly because of the previous two reasons), kids are now being educated on how to help the environment at a young age.

For starters, kids today are obsessed with media, mostly in the form of social networking websites. While newspapers aren't as popular, Facebook and Twitter offer kids a way to communicate on various levels with, not only each other, but, at least where Twitter is concerned, with celebrities as well. Kids with Twitter accounts can follow celebs, who then post messages in 140 characters or less. A lot of celebrities post messages urging fans to support certain causes and most of the time they're about helping the environment. The kids of Waukee's Earth Club informed people about the Pepsi Refresh Project by sending messages to all of their Facebook friends multiple times throughout the voting period. Newspapers and news channels will always be a source of information, but for under 25s today, the internet is a valuable source that is used often.

Another possible cause of such a surge in young-oriented environmentalism is the fact that we're currently seeing an environment that has been disregarded. Those who believe in global warming, the heating of the earth by the sun's heat being caught in greenhouse gasses and getting stuck, are outraged at the way things have been going. According to library.thinkquest.org, one main cause for global warming is electrical pollution. The website states that many household activities, such as using a hair dryer or the dishwasher, add to the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted into the air. Many young people are going to great lengths to help stop this waste. They carpool, turn off lights, unplug appliances when not in use, and use products, such as hair spray and deodorant, that are made to have less of an impact on the environment.

Because concern for the environment is growing, and more actions have been taken to help the preservation, young people get an opportunity to see and hear more about it. There are now annual global warming summits, where leaders of all nations of the world meet and discuss

global warming and what to do about it. News about things like this are broadcast on the news and radio stations, and even a kid who doesn't pay much attention to either is likely to hear about it anyway. Living in Iowa presents a great opportunity to see changes concerning the environment. Take a drive down a back country road (or Interstate 80 west of Des Moines) and view the wind farms dotting the country side. That is a prime example of how people are taking strides in helping the environment. Ethanol gas is available and its use is encouraged. Any kid who's not living in a cave somewhere knows that now is the time to help save the planet.

Even if those kids did live in a cave, attending any public or private high school would offer them the chance to learn about preservation of the environment. A few years ago, recycling was barely hinted at. Now, in most schools, there are recycling bins in almost every classroom. In the state of New York, it's the law. According to www.dec.ny.gov, public and private schools, institutions of higher education and any other educational institutions in New York State are required to recycle materials collected in their local recycling program. Each municipality was required by Chapter 70, Laws of New York 1988, to have recycling law or ordinance requiring sources separation of recyclables by September 1, 1992. The municipalities developed a recycling program that fit their needs and met the goals established by the state. Things have continued along that pattern and now recycling is a big deal in many schools across the United States. Another way schools help to educate kids on the environment is through clubs. The Earth Club at Waukeel High School is certainly not the only one in the country.

The Disney Company is also helping kids get more involved. Disney's "Friends for Change" project has become very popular in California schools. According to www.disneydreaming.com, with Disney's Friends for Change: Project Green, kids are discovering that helping the planet is easy and fun when they work together and have the

right tools. In just one year, participation has exceeded their wildest expectations, and their intent is to build on that momentum by extending Friends for Change to kids in other parts of the world and enhancing the program with fresh new content, local community events, and more grant money that will empower kids with even more ways to get involved. In just one year, kids have made nearly two million personal promises to change the daily routine thanks to Disney Friends for Change: Project Green. Kids love Disney, they always will. Of course when Disney endorses "going green," kids are going to listen.

Now, take a second and imagine a world where kids didn't care about the environment. Or maybe not just kids. What if everyone under the age of 25 stopped being careful and let the environment go to waste? The rainforest would be much less of a forest and more of a small garden with some wild life. The air might be so polluted that sunshine would be a rare occurrence though all the smog. Landfills might be taller than large buildings. A common phrase used by adults directed toward their kids is "you are the future." If that is the truth, then worry not, old folks. It seems the kids today are going to be all right. According to freechild.org, young people around the world are advocating for protection and working to restore damaged environments. Granted the world doesn't end in 2012, our environment might just make it, thanks to the fact that young people today are so informed on how to help it.

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OCTOBER

HEATHER PURCELL

The trees outside were an ethereal painting
Classically framed by our bedroom window;
With their muted mustard
And dusty wine
Amidst the still and quiet grey of pre-dawn.

We had left the window open
To smell crisp parchment and wood smoke While we slept,
Reminding us of spiced tea, apple pie,
Cozy sweaters, and warm embraces.

I lay there and watched in lazy contentment
While quiet grey blossomed into vibrant blue,
And the sun tipped his hat good mornin'
To the madam lounging in the west.

ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND

ERYN SCHLOTE

Lynnette opened the heavy curtains in the parlor of her old Victorian home. The isolated part of Harmony, Michigan was peaceful and quiet, just the way she liked it. She grabbed her mug of coffee as she headed out the French doors to the patio where she found her husband, Wilbur, already reading the daily paper. Lynnette looked out over Lake Erie. The early morning fog was just beginning to lift; the Johnson lighthouse was coming into view. She loved to look at the water because she felt she could see her parents there in the old family boat, rocking on the waves.

"Beautiful day, isn't it honey?" Wilbur said, bringing her back to the present.

"Gorgeous, a perfect day to go out on the boat, wouldn't you say? I could pack us a picnic lunch." As Lynnette was finishing her sentence, the phone rang. Wilbur rose to get it, but she told him to sit and headed inside.

An old family photo caught her eye and she paused to reminisce about the good old days of her childhood, before everything changed. Another sharp ringing reminded her of what she was to be doing.

"Hello?"

"Hi, dearie, it's your Aunt Sylvia," the voice on the other end of the line responded. Aunt Sylvia? What could she be calling about?

"Is everything all right, Aunt?"

"Of course, hon', I call with good news! I'm in the neighborhood and wanted to stop by."

"Well, we'd love to see you."

"Great, I'll be there in an hour or so!"

"All right, see you soon."

"I love you."

"Bye." Lynnette hung up the phone, dreading the rush of cleaning and cooking she would have to do before her aunt was expected. Wilbur walked in the patio door.

"Who was that?"

"Aunt Sylvia."

"Oh?"

"She is coming over in an hour."

"Oh. What about our picnic on the boat?"

"You can still go, dear, I'll pack you a lunch."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, Aunt Sylvia is my family. I'll entertain her."

"All right." He kissed her cheek gently, "Thank you." Wilbur headed out to their private boat dock to pre-check the boat. Lynnette packed a few chicken wings in a basket with some rolls and a slice of cinnamon apple pie, nothing but the best for her husband. She packed up the basket and began preparing for the luncheon with her Aunt Sylvia.

Wilbur came back shortly and announced that he was heading out. Lynnette handed him the basket and wished him a safe trip. Moments after the low rumble of the boat's engine faded to silence, the doorbell chimed. Lynnette took off the apron that protected her faded denim skirt from the splatters of the spaghetti sauce she had just finished preparing.



Wilbur set the basket down on the floor of the boat and started the engine. He slowly pulled out onto the open water then sped up toward his favorite fishing spot. In the distance he could see storm clouds rolling in and made a mental note to head back before it hit. After fishing a while, Wilbur set the pole down and opened the basket of delicacies. He dug into a chicken wing and heard a low

rumble. He looked up in time to see a flash of lightning followed by more thunder. Rain started coming down in a slow, but steady pace; it was time to head back.



Aunt Sylvia rang the doorbell for a second time and was about to ring it again, but Lynnette flung the solid cherry door open.

"Hello, Aunt Sylvia. It's good to see you!" Lynnette said as she hugged her aunt and ushered her in out of the drizzling rain.

"It's nice to see you, too. Is your doorbell malfunctioning?" Aunt Sylvia asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

"No, I was just finishing up our lunch."

"What are we having?"

"Spaghetti, is that all right?"

"Of course, I'm just happy to see you, dear." They headed toward the back of the house where the oversized dining room table was set for two with a steaming bowl of spaghetti in the middle.



Wilbur was just leaving the small island with the left-overs of his lunch in the back of the boat when it really started to rain. He sped up, but the rain became denser and he had to slow down again. The sky was as dark as night and the rain was coming down harder and harder every minute. Wilbur thought that he saw the flickering light of the old Johnson Lighthouse, but the rain was creating a fog that limited his vision. He tried to aim toward the light and soon found the bow of his small fishing boat hitting the shallow floor of the lake. Something wasn't right. The water surrounding his dock was deep for at least 300 feet on each side, meaning that he was nowhere near his home. With a sudden jerk that sent him flying to the floor, the boat came ashore.



Aunt Sylvia took a small bite of her spaghetti and wiped her mouth with a cloth napkin she pulled out of the bag that goes everywhere with her.

"Where is Wilbur?"

"He went out fishing, but should be back soon," Lynnette replied. "I wish he would hurry home. The rain is coming down harder every time I look."

"Don't worry, he will be safe."

"I hope so." Lynnette looked out the bay window once more and felt the same panicked fear that she had felt only once before. It was a stormy evening, much like this one, when her parents left on the family boat and never came back. But she wouldn't let her mind wander there, not now, not tonight.

"Are you all right dear?" Aunt Sylvia asked, noticing her sudden silence and distant stare. "Are you thinking about your parents?"

With tears burning the back of her eyes, Lynnette replied, "I miss them so much."

"We all do," Her aunt said, with a gentle hand on her back.

In a quick change of subjects, Lynnette asked Aunt Sylvia if she would like her dessert now or later, but Aunt Sylvia insisted that Lynnette sit and went to get the raspberry custard that was a family favorite. Lynnette was trying as hard as she could to keep her mind off of the storm and her husband still on the boat.



Wilbur slowly opened his eyes to a throbbing temple and a roar of thunder. He sat up, but realized that that would create some complications. He had smacked his head on the wooden passenger bench when the boat ran ashore. Fortunately, the bleeding had stopped and the rain was slowing somewhat, but the sky was getting darker as night approached. Wilbur searched around the boat for his jacket to protect his head from an infection.

"Might as well try to get out of this rain," Wilbur said to himself as the pain shot through his head and down his right arm. He climbed over the side of the boat and felt every injury from his cracked head to the bump forming on his shin. Wilbur slowly stood and noticed some rocks jutting out over the lake a ways down on the beach. He headed toward the rocks. From there maybe he could get his bearings and figure out what to do next.



It was getting late and Lynnette was still worried. Even Aunt Sylvia was starting to get antsy.

"Do you think we should go looking for him?"

"I was wondering the same thing. I'll go see if the neighbors will come with us; would you mind getting the boat ready?"

"Absolutely, and Lynnette? It'll be all right."

"I sure hope so." Lynnette headed out the door and briskly walked toward the neighbor's house praying silently that Wilbur would be safe. Aunt Sylvia got to her niece's boat dock and mindlessly started the boat, all the while thinking of Wilbur and how lost Lynnette would be without him. He was the only one who could get through to her after her parents died in the boat accident. And they had been in love ever since. She heard the sound of crunching leaves as Lynnette and the neighbors approached her.

"All right everybody, let's go," Lynnette said, ready to leave immediately.

"Not so fast. We need flashlights, food, a first aid pack," with Lynnette's sudden stiffening, the neighbor quickly added, "just in case. You also need to get a jacket. The winds tonight could get pretty chilly." Reluctantly, Lynnette crossed the yard to her house with Aunt Sylvia following close behind. They both grabbed their jackets and the supplies and raced back to the boat where their neighbor was waiting with his wife in their own boat.

"You take your boat, we'll take ours. Head out a ways, and then we'll split up."

"Good plan. Do you have your cell phone on?"

"Yes, you know the number?"

"Yup, you have mine?"

"Yes."

"Let's go then." They headed out about two hundred feet and split up, Lynnette going right and her neighbors going left.



Wilbur slowly climbed to the top of the rocks. From there he could see far and wide, but could not see his home and he still did not know which way to go. He suddenly felt faint and sat down. He tried to stay conscious, but failed and lay limp in the cool of the evening.



After hours of searching, Lynnette was not about to give up. Her cell phone chirped and she fumbled to find it in her bag. The ID showed that it was her neighbors. Without a moment of hesitation, she flipped it open and answered it.

"Did you find him?"

"No, but it's getting late. I suggest we get some rest and try again tomorrow. That is if he isn't home already."

"I appreciate your help and you can go home, but I most certainly will not give up on him now."

"All right then. We are going back. Call if you find him or need help. We'll tell you if we hear anything."

"Thank you."

"Be careful and don't overdo yourself." Lynnette hung up, ready to keep searching.

"Are you staying with me?" she said turning to her Aunt.

"Of course, dear, but I do not want you to go crazy on me!" A chuckle escaped from Lynnette's lips before she could hold it back. Aunt Sylvia had a way of bringing light to the darkest of times. Speaking of darkness, the sun had long since set and she was beginning to feel the coolness of a Michigan night.



Aunt Sylvia was asleep and Lynnette was feeling drowsy, too. She had put everything she had into this search and

felt as though there was nothing left in her. She finally let the wind carry her to wherever it felt she should be, and let sleep take over.



Lynnette and Sylvia drifted off into the night, neither of them knowing where they were headed until the brightness of the early morning sun shone upon them. Lynnette sat up with the sudden realization that they were rocking in the waves, but going nowhere. She looked around, having no idea where she was, but knowing that she was right where she was supposed to be. She could feel her husband near, but still felt helpless. Without waking Aunt Sylvia, she climbed out of the boat and stepped onto the beach. She had a strange feeling about this place. It was almost as if she had been there before. But that was impossible, wasn't it? She looked in both directions then decided to go right. She walked in silence for a while constantly searching all around her for some clue as to where she was. Lynnette rounded a corner of the island and saw a giant rock jutting out over Lake Erie in the distance. A chill ran down her back and raised the hair on her arms. She had been here before.

Everything came back in a rush. The stormy night, her parents being gone too long, the phone call from her neighbors. All this was too much for her, she had to sit. How was this possible? What were the odds of the wind carrying her to the same island where her parents had died? Those were the exact rocks that her parents' boat had crashed into. She was sure of it.

After a moment to catch her breath, Lynnette rose and headed in the direction of the rocks. She wasn't sure why, but she felt drawn to them. Within a few yards of the giant stone structure, she let her eyes follow the smooth top to the water, but they didn't make it that far. They stopped on a lump that looked out of place near the very edge. Her curiosity pricked, she kept on going. When she got to the base of the formation, Lynnette could no longer see the top and still was curious about the strange, misplaced figure up there. She began to climb.



Wilbur was coming to just in time to hear the sound of feet against rock and the steady breath of a climber. He tried to get up, but found himself too weak so he lay back down. He could tell that whoever was scaling the cliff was getting closer and fear seized him as he thought of who it might be and what it would do to him when it reached the top.



Lynnette was getting closer to the top, thankfully, because she was running out of strength. She hoped to find Wilbur up there so this search would be over and her fears could be relieved. She stretched out her hand, but found no more rock to grab onto. She finally reached the top and pulled herself up with what little strength she had left. In a sitting position on the smooth surface, she tried to catch her breath, but it caught in her throat when she realized that the figure roughly ten feet away was a human. Could it be?

"Wilbur? Is that you?"

"Ughhh," was the only reply. With a new rush of strength, she quickly rose to her feet and ran toward him. She held his head in her hands.

"Wilbur! Oh, I am so happy to see you! I was so worried," Lynnette cried. She could not hold back the tears and emotion that swept over her. At last she had found Wilbur, her dear Wilbur. Suddenly she noticed the scrapes and bruises all over his face and could only imagine the ones covering the rest of his body. Her common sense came back to her and she pulled out her phone to call the police. She then phoned Aunt Sylvia, and then her neighbors. Wilbur would be safe now. Help was on the way.



Lynnette grabbed two cups of coffee and headed out the French doors to her patio. There Wilbur sat, bandages covering the top of his head and a cast encasing his leg, but he was alive and recovering and that was all that mattered to Lynnette.

"Beautiful day, isn't it honey?"

"Gorgeous."

HEART

TAYLOR PEDERSEN

Inspiration; the font of the unending mythos. Ideas taken form by reluctant minds and shaky hands. The new fathers of the fragile. A deep breath, a strung sigh.

Strung out upon this, your trails of veins. The life's web that extends from your warm pulsating core. The candy red glossy image flashing against your mind.

Rock beats against the membranes, making it beat across the floor rapidly.

Erratic, compulsion beyond words pursuing an ideal. The heart grows legs of force and will. Its arms sway from the blood.

It is out on its own. You've lost control but it is not at all lost, not in the least.

It traverses the locales that you dared not. It walks alone among the subway tunnels.

It uses back alleys as shortcuts in the pitch of night.

It walks into the rhythmic beats of the strobe lit rooms and dances among the people it does not know.

It stays out late and drinks, unaware of the morning after. Not so much uncaring, as unconcerned.

It is you. Though you would never think to have done as it does. You often dreamed of it. Of the simplicity of running without the worries.

But it is aware of your intentions. It wants to go, but you don't let it.

You pull on the tethers of the arteries. Its life's fluid pooling around its sitting body.

It sits and waits. It is unaware of your intentions now. It is blacked out.

What you do from there is decidedly uncertain, but entirely mundane.

Boring to the "T."

It sits and waits. When can it wander again?

It gathers its self back into your cave. It lets the white button-up shirt go on over its head. It lets the glasses slide back up your nose where it so precariously perched them before.

The drinks are replaced by milk. The noon eggs and ham become morning cereal.

Something healthy and early. The banana and the strawberries practically slice themselves into the bowl.

You walk the path that you have taken the day before, to your gray car once called a more mercurial "silver." A word too extreme for your cloudy dull skies.

You waltz the daily breed. You accept and allow it to take lead. Take care to not step on your dance partner's toes. You go get it a drink when you are done dancing.

She lets you off at your door. The slamming kiss, and the path is walked again from your gray lover.

She oft waits for your decisions. *Your* decisions. But not tonight.

Tonight is another night alone with the television. You have given up all hope.

It is decidedly so.

Until the next night, when the ideas will once again flow as crimson mercury, pooling where it can lead the way for your wayward heart.

"AND THEN HE SAID..."

KEELY SUTHERLAND

"Promise me, you will make this effort
worth my time."

"I promise."

What a way to live a life.

Shallow promises, white lies and cigarettes.

When you stand close, I can let you go.

When you pull away slightly, moving away from the close
watch of my eyes, I have to hold on tighter.

My fingers ache from clinging to the loose fabric of
your heart all day.

I read you my favorite Sylvia Plath poems,
and cringe when you ask me if I want to die.

Flinch when the words spill out of your mouth,
telling me not to wear bloody, twisted scars
on my arms to your parent's house tonight.

You. Your acerbic words, my sensitive ears.

Your personality is that of a wasp, which

I happen to be quite afraid of.

You have no reaction, until thoroughly exasperated.

Then everyone stands still, no movement.

You buzz harsh words into their ears,

Their eyes shut so tight, that the sweet pollen-filled
tears run down their faces.

That's what you wanted, isn't it?

Have you ever wondered, do we think the same things?

The things you won't say, the things I can't say.

That four letter "L" word. My tongue fights to hold
it back.

Does yours?

I capture you, I put you in a picture frame.

I decorate the frame with the thoughts you have.

I set it on my nightstand, so when I sleep

our thoughts fight and laugh with each other.

I want to live like this with you, even when I sleep.

One time you said to me,

"Quit feeding the madness in your mind."

I want to tell you that at the same moment,

I had the same thought.

HEROIN

(AN EXCERPT)

KEELY SUTHERLAND

She drew attention to herself. Not because she was obnoxious, or glamorous. She was small, short with a petite frame, and she could slip between bodies and words that were making their way to others easily. Her eyes were narrow and accusing, but always in the most innocent way possible. More curious than anything. Her hair hung in ebony curtains around her face, shadowing the angles of her cheek bones. Her smile seemed to sneak across her face, appearing without warning, wide and bright, her eyes sparkling with whatever light they could catch, her full lips smoothed into defining lines. Yet there was something so soft focus about her face, so polished and angelic. Her skin had never been scarred, never been affected. It glowed with an inner luminosity.

He remembered lying in bed with her at the hotel. The long curtain that covered the wall-sized window was slightly cracked, which allowed the bright lights from the skyscraping buildings to illuminate the room that they shared. She lay with only her small feet under the thick mass of comforters and bed sheets that were a huddled pile at the end of the twin bed where she slept. Her thin, white tank top had worked its way up over her stomach, and while her legs were a silvery, pale white in the darkness of the room, her stomach was glowing gold and warm from the lights outside the window. He watched them flash and glow on her flat stomach, her hip bones slightly protruding from the waist of her shorts.

Her face was calm, her lips lightly pressed together and her eyes fluttering ever so slightly. Her hair spread out of the pillow behind her, long and wavy, not unlike a princess who had been put to sleep for a hundred years. As soothing as the lights flashing their hidden signals on her bare midriff was, he stood up and quietly walked to the window. With one quick tug he brought the curtains together in the center, and her stomach faded to the angelic shade of silver-blue. It reminded him of a small pond at night when the water glistened and reflected the moon, lines and lines of its light being lapped into each

other, crashing together when the water so wished. She turned onto her side, her eyes opened slightly and she sighed. He looked away from her body.

"Are you watching me sleep," she mumbled, the grogginess noticeable in her throat. Her eyes shut again, her arms on top of each other with one leg bent at the knee, forming a distinct "4"-shape with the other.

"No, I..." he smiled. "I was." He looked back over his shoulder.

"Lay down." She threw her left arm back, using a single finger to point to the small area on the bed behind her. He knew he wouldn't be able to sleep. He would lay awake all night, imagining soft waves of water lapping on her skin. He would think of how soon they would be able to go to Central Park so he could show her just what he saw when he watched her sleep. He'd count her breaths and make sure her breathing stayed steady. He would fold the comforter gently at her feet, and inhale the sweet flower-tinged scent that rose from her hair. He would do anything but watch the hours, only beg time to not pass. He knew it would, as it always does, and he was sure tonight wouldn't feel nearly long enough.

He climbed over and lay behind her, wrapping his arm around her slumbering body. His back was pressed against the wall, and he couldn't figure out how to pull the covers out from underneath her without waking her again. It didn't matter though. He would take this moment, like an old photograph, and glue it into whatever part of his brain that would make sure it would never, ever, be forgotten. He would keep it to himself forever.

POETIC RESURRECTION

DAVID WILEY

According to Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination'; and poetry is connate with the origin of man" (Shelley). For a great many centuries poetry was one of the main forms of writing utilized by authors. While it is not an extinct art form, the popularity of poetry as a medium for expression has declined. With the emergence of the Victorian Era in the mid-nineteenth century, the novel rapidly gained footing with its popularity. When was the last time you heard about a book of poetry breaking sales records? *The New York Times* features only two poetry collections in its list of the top 100 books of 2009 (NYTimes). Once hailed as the primary method for writing, poetry has now taken a backseat to all genres of fiction: novels, young adult novels, memoirs, biographies, self-help books, and more.

Curious as to how far it has fallen, I explored two major bookstores in West Des Moines. My first destination in each was the magazine section where, much like Stephen King mentions in his essay "What Ails the Short Story" (King), I found myself on the floor in order to examine the small collection of writing magazines and literary journals. In both stores I was able to find a copy of the latest issue of *Poets and Writers* magazine, and in one I found a poetry collection anthology, but nothing else that held more than a small sampling of poetry within its pages. The next place to check was in the Reference section, mixed with books on the art of writing itself. In one Barnes and Noble store I found only a copy of the 2009 *Poet's Market* on the shelf. In the other store, I counted seven books out of at least a hundred writing-related books. There were more books on how to write a bestselling novel in 30 days, and other similar gimmicks. Dejected with these results, I moved on to my final destination: the poetry section. Twelve shelves of poetry in one, fourteen in the other. There were many copies of the classic works like *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *Paradise Lost*, *Inferno*, and more. The selection

of anything current was almost nonexistent, although there were a few exceptions to keep any aspiring poet hopeful, much like dangling a carrot in front of a horse to keep it running along.

Many other specialized non-fiction sections had a better representation, including New Age, Self-Help, and Cooking. Has the value of a great piece of poetry truly fallen so far? Is it seen as nothing more than the idle hobby of those who can throw together a few rhyming words? Long ago, a poet was seen as someone great. These days it seems the vast majority of would-be writers aspire to piece together the next great novel to hit *The New York Times* bestseller listing. Novels have grown in length over time. Take a look at the Fantasy genre for the perfect proof of this, starting with the late Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series. When a series breaks the 10,000 page mark, that is a sign of its epic nature.

Poetry used to be able to manage the epic scope as well. Consider *Paradise Lost*, *Beowulf*, and *The Odyssey*. The difference between a poem like *Beowulf* and a novel like *The Eye of the World* is the trimming down of the "unnecessary fat." The words, descriptions and actions not vital to the plot and character development are cut, leaving behind a more elegant, simple reading. Anyone can sit at a computer with a thesaurus and throw together five words that have similar meanings to describe something. Anyone can give a play-by-play coverage of the main character's dinner with his blushing bride. A true poet will leave all that aside and utilize precision with diction in order to evoke powerful reactions from the readers.

Socrates was a philosopher best known for his teachings that were passed on through the writings of Plato. In the dialogue known as "The Ion," he claims that true poets get their best writing in moments of divine inspiration, rather than through forced writing."

In like manner the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. (PLATO)

Later in this same dialogue, he mentions that a poet is not truly a poet until he hits this moment of inspiration from his Muse.

And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves say; for they tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles. (PLATO)

Later in history Aristotle hails poetry as a form of expression. "Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal, and history only the particular" (Aristotle). Aristotle speaks of universality, yet is that what poetry still contains? Can any reader pick up some form of universal meaning within a contemporary "poem" that simply consisted of the exact words printed on a sign? I have seen examples such as this passed off as poetry, and I suspect it is this sort of loose application of the word "poetry" that, perhaps, has contributed to the degradation of poetry in today's world.

So if this is an example of what poetry is not, how should poetry be defined? For assistance in answering this question I turn to two of the greatest poets from the Romantic Era: William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Both men fought to revolutionize poetry itself, breaking free from the strict metrical restrictions on form

and stepping away from the same overused techniques. They sought to alter the way people judged poetry, which they hoped would ultimately force critics and scholars to review the poems of the past and thus purify poetry. Wordsworth, in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, writes, "For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply" (Wordsworth). Shelley expresses what separates a poem from a story in his *A Defence of Poetry*,

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. (SHELLEY)

According to these two men poetry is not something that can be forced, and it holds some form of an eternal truth. Whether it be love, pain, joy, beauty, or any other great truth of experience, this is the realm in which true poetry touches. I've witnessed an example of this spontaneous overflow. It took a year for the words to form after my wife left me, but when they finally came my heart poured out in my most powerful poem so far. Had I sat down to try and write that poem immediately after she left, would it have been as strong? Would the emotion have seared through the words, expressing the heartache and despair? Good poetry cannot be forced.

This poses a bit of a problem for those who wish to be poets. No one has time to sit and just wait for a good poem to finally tear through the mind and explode onto the page. After all, many writers agree that the

key to writing well is to write often. Ray Bradbury puts it eloquently in his book, *Zen in the Art of Writing*, "Quantity gives experience. From experience alone can quality come" (Bradbury). So does this mean we should force out bad poetry? Once again I shall turn to Bradbury's sage advice to writers in that same book, "Work. Relaxation. Don't think" (Bradbury). My advice (to which I shall continue to hold myself to for as long as I can read and write): just write. You don't have to sit down and say to yourself, "I'm going to write a poem about Spring" or "I'm going to write a story where two people fall in love," just simply begin to write. Who cares what comes out? Whether it be a poem or a story or just random nonsense, it does not matter. I've done this with fairly reasonable consistency for a few months and, in the process, I have had some of my best poetry burst forth at unexpected moments.

This unforced, spontaneous poetry is what those Romantics fought for while seeking to gain acceptance, not only with the general readers, but also the critics of poetry. Undoubtedly that was the point in time where the free verse poetry gained its firm roots, and ever since this form of poetry has opened many doors for poets. It has enabled new groups of people to enjoy and understand poetry, reducing the emphasis on metrical form and the specific poetic diction predominant during earlier periods. Throughout the twentieth century there were a great number of poetic movements, each of them helping to influence the poems we find today. By the end of the twentieth century, free verse and avant garde poetry had become popular styles. Would poetry benefit from the complete removal of these, going back to strict restrictions on form and rhyming schemes? After all, that was the expected norm back when poetry was in its prime.

Free verse, in itself, is not a detriment to poetry. There is, perhaps, a mindset among people these days that anyone can write this style of poetry. They would be right, yet there is a large difference between poetry and good poetry. The responsibility of the reader, the poet, the editor, and the publisher is to ensure that poetry of sound quality is pushed forward, while the flood of average poetry can remain popular on forums and blogs and individual websites. Bookstores should have a section where new poetry,

quality poetry, can be found with ease. Local poets should be featured, a benefit to both the starting poet and the art of poetry itself.

Without a change in the way we handle poetry it is unlikely we will find a resurgence of poetry. It may never regain its popularity over the novel, yet perhaps it could reclaim a growing niche among readers and critics. The black scythe of death hovers nearby, waiting for the day that poetry loses its pulse. We can't allow that to happen. Poetry captures the essence of life, and to lose that would be to lose a part of that life.

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MY FAVORITE PLACE

ASHLEY HOMMER

An escape.

No doubts, worries, or fears.

They fade away

into the blue.

Tucked far away down the hill,

and surrounded by luscious olive pastures.

My favorite place.

Tackle box, line, and a pole.

The thrill of the fight

with the one deep beneath.

An image of success;

a memory to keep.

Time ceases to exist.

My favorite place.

OUT ARE THE LIGHTS

JOHN BRIGGS

I am old. I am withered. This winter may be my last. I don't know how to feel about the possibility. I don't have much to live for, not after Benjamin's death. I wake up in the morning and go through the daily motions, without purpose or reward. I eat, gather wood, and make sure my memories still exist.

In the evening, I sit in my chair by the fire and feed wood to the flames. I look up. My gaze pierces the emptiness of the room and focuses, outside my window, on the dangling, sparse leaves as they cling desperately to tree branches. Gradually, their efforts are thwarted by the uncaring wind. I have watched, day after day, as their color changes from green, like my eyes, to colors more closely resembling the brown eyes of my deceased husband. I look down, smooth the wrinkles in my dress, and allow my eyes to drift to the wrinkles in my hand. I read the ripples in my skin like lines in a book. I have grown old, and with age I have lost my childish fears of the dark.

These were fears that arose out of experiences I had as a very young child. Much of my memory from that time has left me, but what I do remember chills my brittle bones. I can remember midnight conversations with an unseen visitor. I remember a friend my family never met. I remember my mother always told me I was too sensitive.

Each day, as it becomes colder outside, my bones ache with pain and it becomes more difficult to separate the physical from emotional, to tell whether or not I am still living. I feel dead inside. I feel as if I died with Benjamin a year ago. I no longer speak. When I forget that there is no one to talk to and break the silence, I hear my voice; it frightens me. It is cracked and rough and the disheartened tone pains me.

At night, my home, surrounded by forest, becomes a secluded fortress. Separated from the rest of the world and forgotten in time. Forgotten by a god I no longer believe in. Yet in my home I find warmth in the comfort of knowing what is to come. It is bittersweet. As the late night falls into

a deep stillness, an unprovoked uneasiness grips me. My soul becomes like a small child swimming in a lake, whose feet have descended past the point of the sun-warmed surface and drift in the cold water below, the child's mind filled with strange images and the uncertainty of what could lie in the lake's depths.

My fire fades and the shadows of the room become pregnant with possibilities. I ponder. Soon, a few glowing embers die and I become aware of the night that invades through my window, causing me to see the few silhouettes I can through a lens of dark blue. This time of night is when I most desperately hope this coming winter will allow my darkness to be left in peace.

As a little girl, my father was my best friend. When he died, I cried harder than I ever had before and ever would again. At my father's funeral, on a rainy day in a cemetery, I wandered away from the group and found a nice secluded area with older graves. I slipped on the grass and fell right in front of a tombstone inscribed with the name of my invisible playmate.

These thoughts float through my head in the dead of night, in the midst of the uneasiness. They are soon shattered by a sudden, overwhelming fear. I feel as if my chair has fallen out from under me and I am weightless; frozen and paralyzed in fear. I feel a presence, unearthly and chilling to my fragile frame, it is a feeling I have not felt since I was a little girl. In the deafening silence I sense the anticipation of someone who needs to speak. I whisper burning questions to myself...*Father?* ...*Mother?* ...*Benjamin?* The words echo throughout the house, but I do not know if I have really spoken; perhaps the loudness of my thoughts is actually drowning out the beating of my heart.

Silence.

The wind picks up and whistles unsettling melodies to me as I close my eyes. On this night, I let winter embrace me.

CANCER OF THE HUMOR WHITE STICK

JOHN BRIGGS

Winter fades
as does night
after a life
we all lose a
little bit
of what we
started with

but it is better to be nothing at all
than to have wandered through a morning
with hopes to fulfill.

Where is my pen?
I swear, I swear
if you let me have my pen back
I will never ask you for gas money again.

And as I beg
a leaf will leave its mother tree
and float down
to its desired spot.

Because I cannot bear the weight of it
I must give way to those who can.
Please, ask for all that you can.
I beg of you, be selfish.

I say, waiter,
have you any hot sauce?
My lady desires more adventure
in her life.

EXTREME BODY PIERCING TRENDS

KEVIN CRAMP

It is hard to walk down a street in any metropolitan city or college campus without seeing someone with excessive body piercing. What attracts people to perform such body piercings to a point that some medical professionals consider it self-mutilation? There is no single answer to what appears to be a recent upswing in the popularity of body piercing. Body piercing throughout history is nothing new; anthropologists tell us that some 5,000-year-old Egyptian mummies with body piercings have been unearthed. Church officials and conservatives contend extreme body piercing is the result of moral corruption, while some psychologists argue extreme body piercings are associated with dangerous and sometimes lethal risk-taking behavior, eating disorders, self-loathing, substance abuse, depression and social alienation.

Most people have seen a *National Geographic* show or article detailing historical tribal customs and traditions that exhibit body piercings. Body piercings (not including ear piercing) are still common practice in many parts of the world, with nose piercings being the predominant form of cultural body piercing. Nose piercing was first recorded in the Middle East approximately 4,000 years ago, and was mentioned in the *Bible* in Genesis 24:22. Abraham requested his oldest servant find a wife for his son Isaac. The servant found Rebecca, and one of the gifts given her was a "golden earring" (the original Hebrew word used was Shanf, which also translates as "nose-ring"). This practice is still followed among the nomadic Berber and Beja tribes of Africa, and the Bedouins of the Middle East; the size of the ring denotes the wealth of the family. It is given by the husband to his wife at the marriage, and is her security if she is divorced (Morrison). In western culture, nose piercing has its roots attributed to "hippies" from the late 1960s that traveled to India in search of their nirvana. Nose piercing is believed to have been brought to India in the 16th century from the Middle East, and is still a valid cultural norm in India. Nose rings were once considered a cultural

taboo in the west, and are still considered taboo by many conservatives. In late the 1970s, body piercings gained prominence in western culture during the Punk movement and were seen as a rebellion against conservative values.

These days, it seems as if western culture, especially among those 18–25, year olds, is pushing the boundaries of body piercing. More and more, body piercing shops are indulging their clientele with "extreme" body piercing. You may wonder why it is that this phenomenon is occurring primarily in young people. In a recent article, Rubin Lawrence, a professor of physiology states:

Might there be alternate, less pathological explanations for this tsunami of seeming self-desecration? At a most basic and benign level, perhaps tattooing and piercing are simply forms of self-expression, a means of marking ourselves in a society that fosters, both wittingly and unwittingly, anomie and anonymity. Perhaps, as postmodernists might argue, this self-marking is a means of asserting mastery and control over our bodies, and anchoring ourselves, quite literally during a time of life when the only constant is change. Maybe it is not self-mutilation, but rather self enhancement and adornment, a means of saying "I am" in a way that is heard...body bling! And don't forget the socio/anthropological possibility that tats and piercings may demonstrate loyalty, affiliation or be a ritualistic rite of passage. For some, it may simply be the rush of adrenaline that accompanies a self-chosen and self-controlled moment of physical pain. (LAWRENCE)

The reasons for body piercings are as wide-ranging as the types of piercings available. For some, body piercing is a phase of their lives that will pass with maturity and life experiences. For others, it is a way of life and self expression and lends itself to social and cultural scrutiny. Given the association with pop-culture, it is understandable that some people are influenced by others. By seeing

celebrities of all walks and professions adorned in body piercings, it is inevitable that some people will mimic the dress and appearance of their idols, whether they are musicians, actors, or social radicals.

It is possible to have nearly any part of your body pierced, and access to places to have the procedure done have grown substantially. You might ask yourself why, in this day and age, do people feel it is necessary to set themselves apart in such a dramatic fashion? It is not uncommon to see a percentage of younger people that have had their tongue, lips, nipples, belly-button, eyebrows, and/or various parts of their genitals pierced. Social conservatives may be inclined to "blame the parents" and will consider piercings a form of "self-mutilation." Meanwhile, doctors warn about the increased risk of infections and the dangers of having the procedures performed by non-qualified practitioners. Social stigma aside, body piercing is here to stay despite what well-intentioned conservatives, parents and grandparents might say.

Due to the recent increase in body piercing, many states have issued guidance and laws to ensure the safety of body piercings establishments. Public health officials and medical professionals have published numerous safety guidelines and even warnings about the immediate and longterm effects of piercings. There can be a risk of major tissue deformation and cross contamination since most piercing guns are reused and place the recipient in direct contact with foreign bodily fluids from previous clients. The risk of infection is higher and more likely when using a piercing gun. Additionally, a butterfly clasp jewelry is placed within the nostril that sometimes becomes embedded and wedged into the flesh creating severe irritation and infection on the inside of the nostril, while the external stud places various points of pressure and digs into the skin on the outside of the nostril creating irritation on either side (Shafiei). Aside from the standard concerns of unsanitary equipment used to perform piercings, there are concerns about communicable diseases associated with the exchange of bodily fluids that have some medical professionals up in arms.

You might wonder why, given the social stigma often associated with extreme body piercing, would people subject themselves to such radical procedures. At one

time, these extreme body piercings would have been relegated to the likes of Ripley's *Believe It or Not*. Robert Leroy Ripley is best known for bringing the bizarre and unknown to light, as he cataloged his travels through the Aboriginal Tribes of Toro Bora, New Guinea and around the world in search of oddities. Today, many of Ripley's shock and awe discoveries are common place on any large college campus. In the near future, I suspect I'll see the practice of wearing metal neck rings to extend the neck, much like the Kayan (a.k.a. Padaung) Tribe of Burma, on college campuses and in the general population. Many cultures have passed down traditions of body piercing over the millennia, and they have become accepted norms. Is the recent occurrence of more and more extreme body piercings becoming a cultural norm in western civilization? Only time will tell.

The wide spread use and acceptance of body piercings in modern pop culture have brought piercings closer to the point of being considered an everyday occurrence in modern western society. Will body piercings end up as just a fad, such as the mini skirts of the 1970s, or the "big hair" of the 1980s? Given the history of past so called "socially radical" fads, I'd have to say that body piercings are here to stay. The resistance to change, social dogma, and the general public's resistance to past trends haven't been able to stem the eventual acceptance of a trend in general. However, although piercings are much more accepted in this day and age, it is still wise to consider the long range effects and first impressions they give to potential employers and the emphasis placed on the individual's creditability.

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CROSSING PATHS, A TRUE STORY

KACY COLLOPY

I see a guy on the street today near my favorite tea shop. Tall, kind of thin, red curly hair, tortoise-shell rectangular glasses, pile of books under one arm....

Following a whim, I pull over and roll down the window, introduce myself, and ask him if he'd like to go on a walk with me. He has blue eyes. He's carrying books by Heinlein, Eggers, and Pratchett. He gets in my car, we drive to the lake and walk for hours, he makes me laugh. His name is Jack, he loves my smile.

Jack and I meet for tea the next day. He is a tea connoisseur and loves smokey greens, nutty oolongs, and even the bonfire taste of Lapsang Souchung. "Just like Sherlock Holmes," he says. We talk about ourselves. He is a grad student and wants to be a photojournalist, he loves dogs, loves to travel, and plans on joining the Peace Corps when he's finished school. He is 26 years old.

We continue meeting at the tea shop for a few weeks before we go out to dinner, sushi. We can see the place we met from the window. We laugh and talk about politics, literature, philosophy, science and religion. We talk until the restaurant closes and then visit his apartment. He thinks the scar on my thigh is beautiful, he has freckles on his chest. He juggles for me.

He visits my house, meets my dogs, spends most of three hours rubbing Tily's tummy. The dogs love him. We take them for a long walk, boisterous cardinals follow us singing to the beauty of our spring day. He pauses midway through our walk and tells me he loves me, as the dogs dash ahead.

He meets my parents, charms my mom with politics, and surprises me by talking electrical engineering with my stepfather. They rave about him after he leaves. My stepdad declares he's in the "circle of trust."

He takes me out to a romantic dinner for my birthday and gives me a bracelet made of brown silk and tiny polished stones. We spend almost every moment together

through the summer; camp, hike, go skinny dipping in the middle of the night. We celebrate his birthday outside with a picnic basket. I give him a watch, and he wears it every day.

We take long drives in the fall, setting off with no destination in mind, stopping in beautiful, lonely places now bursting into fire with the colors of the season. We visit ghost towns, and nameless cemeteries, small copses of trees entombing forgotten foundations and surrounded by the stubby remains of corn fields.

We visit my grandparents for Thanksgiving. He meets my aunt and uncle, sister and cousins. He can talk about anything, and they all love him. I meet his mom and dad over Christmas; he is an only child. They are warm, funny, generous, intellectual. We all play Taboo together. He and I win.

Winter is starting to end and we have our first anniversary. Take a walk around a lake in the melting snow and share a pot of tea. Spend the evening together like we've spent so many. We're in love.

We both graduate in the spring, celebrate together and our families meet. Our moms both get tipsy laughing and hug at the end of the evening. Everybody enjoys themselves.

We apply for the Peace Corps and both get accepted. We're to teach English in Senegal, a country in Africa. We both learn French. We're there for a month before we visit Morocco and he proposes outside a hookah bar. The smoke makes our eyes tear as I say yes.

Months later our families join us in Senegal and we are married in the dusty yard in front of our school and our students. Our month long honeymoon takes us to Egypt, Israel, India, Thailand and Australia, before returning to our "home" in Senegal.

We spend the next two years teaching our young students and traveling. We'll eventually get to over twenty different countries and become fluent in French, Wolof, and Arabic. Jack becomes a regular photo contributor to *National Geographic* and I write articles to accompany his pictures.

When we return to the United States we settle in Washington D.C., documenting politics and doing translation work for various governmental agencies to finance our continuing travels. We meet presidents, ambassadors, and so many "very important people" that they become mundane. We become good friends with a former president and her husband, and they throw us an extravagant 10th anniversary party.

We eventually have two children, a girl and a boy: Matilda Anne and Dean Zephyrm. We raise them multilingually and always have a dog in the house. They inherit their father and mother's passion for adventure and teach us something new each day. They grow to be happy and compassionate adults with families of their own.

We retire to Colorado and spend years exploring its mountains and deserts. As we revel in the idyllic indian summer of our lives, Jack and I love each other more every day.

I shake my head and drive away, hoping the guy on the street with the books and the glasses didn't notice the extra moment I paused as he crossed my path.

THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

MICHAEL JEFFRIES

I'm at the point of my life where I need to stop drinking.

It's not really because my wife's gone or that my kids hate me really, I mean, it kind of helps me feel OK with that. Nah, I think it's because my wrist is starting to chafe from being handcuffed to the car door. It could be that or the fact that the gin and tonics I downed earlier tonight and the flashing lights on top of the patrol car seem to have teamed up to fill my head with a whole lot of dull painful "Stop it." No, it can't be either of those; it has to be sitting on the curb with my back against a Volvo that looks like it got dry-humped by a goddamned Transformer.

All right, all right I've really gotta be serious this time. Things could get really bad. Shit, I could have died tonight. That bitch in front of me slammed on her brakes. She screwed us both over. I'm staring down jail time and she's just lying there. And over there. And over there. OK that didn't really happen; she's OK and everything. I just kind of wish it turned out that way. Is that fucked up? Yeah, yeah it is. God, I hope that's the drink talking.

I don't give a shit if the reason I got to meet someone new in the worse way possible is because her bratty kids were distracting her when she needed to turn. I mean, since when is that an excuse? I'm glad they're OK at least. I mean her little boy broke his leg but he'll get better. It builds character. At least it would if he'd stop crying. I should try to calm him down.

"Kid, shut the fuck up already, my head's killing me."

"Don't you dare talk to him that way. Besides, it's your fault that this happened."

"You know what? Let's not argue about that because we'll never agree on whose ri...."

"I'm right, because you crashed into me, because with all the drinking you did you probably drove Budweiser's stock up by five fucking points."

"OK, like I said, let's not argue about that because we might say some things we can't take back. Also, I wouldn't have driven up Budweiser's stock because I wasn't even drinking beer, and they don't make...."

"I don't give a shit. You can't even begin to fathom how much of a shit I fail to give. Just, just shut up."

"Look, all I'm saying is that you and your kid should try to be a little considerate."

These people suck. Man, I can't even begin to remember why I was out driving tonight. All this talk about her snotty kids is—wait a second; they're pulling something out of my trunk? Melissa. Oh Christ, it's all coming back to me now. Watching them fish out that broken little body. Looks like the kitchen sink gets the rest of my Armadale.

I promised her. I fucking promised her, and there is no possible way I can spin it to make me not look like a total asshole. God, all Melissa wanted for Christmas was a porcelain doll. What am I supposed to do now? Should I just put the pieces in a box with some super glue and try to convince her it's even better than the ones her friends have since it's a doll and a puzzle? Jesus, what am I thinking. That would scare the holy hell out of her, and I can't afford another one of those dolls and therapy.

I couldn't afford the first one. Oh god, I stole that tacky doll. Oh wait, did I just say that out loud? Thank god, I didn't. I was actually able to make it to the department store. Fighting through thick crowds of rabid soccer moms, hunting for whatever piece of crap little Timmy or little Suzie just can't bear to live without. Darting out of the door, sweating and hunching over the bulge in my jacket like some perv. At least I won't get in trouble for that, though; it's not like the police are going to ask to see my receipt.

"Sir, can I see the receipt for this doll?"

"Wait, what? I mean no. Huh?"

"Are you saying you don't have a receipt?"

"You know what? I think I am."

"Well, that's funny because we also got a call earlier tonight about a man, who looks a lot like you, who stole a doll, a lot like this one, earlier."

Do I know this guy from somewhere?

"Well, that's weird."

Oh god I think I do.

"I wouldn't say it's weird, sir."

I went to high school with this guy.

"What would you say?"

Rick Derent was his name, I think.

"I'd say you stole the doll."

Yeah, I bet you would, you asshole.

"Why's that?"

I hated this guy. Figures he'd be a cop.

"Have you been listening at all? There are witnesses who saw you stealing the doll."

"Oh yeah, who?"

"The soccer moms who wanted to buy it, for one."

I knew I fought some soccer moms.

"You know what; I'll just let you do some thinking for a little bit. It seems like you need to catch up on it."

Oh good, he's walking away. I don't think he recognized me. Thank god. Wait, why are you turning around? Don't turn around.

"You know I can't shake the feeling that I recognize you from somewhere."

"No probably not."

"Wait a minute, Glenn is that you?"

"Oh my god, Rick? Is that you?"

"Glenn Brown, I cannot believe it."

"The places you'll go right?"

"You know, some mornings when I get up I doubt why I became a police officer, but getting to arrest a grade A asshole like you just made it so I will never doubt again."

You smug prick, I'd knock your teeth out if I wasn't handcuffed to this car. And drunk. And if you weren't in better shape. And if you didn't have a gun.

"It's going to be a blast telling everyone at the reunion about this."

"Wait, reunion?"

"Yeah, our class reunion is next week. Didn't you get the invitation in the mail?"

"No, it must have gotten lost."

"Maybe you weren't invited."

"I always wondered what it would feel like to be you."

"Har har."

"You think I'll be able to go? You know with the whole legal situation?"

"Probably not. You wouldn't like it anyway. It isn't an open bar."

"You're probably right then."

"Well, sit tight. I've got to go get a witness report from the poor woman and children you hit."

Thank god he left. I wonder if he was right, though, about me not being invited. If he is right, then I wonder if it's because they all hate me, or because they all forgot about me. Which is worse? It had to have gotten lost in the mail.

That doesn't change the fact that I need to try and quit drinking, though. Maybe I have to go about it in a new way this time, so it actually works. I should ask myself why I drink. Well Glenn, why do you drink? Well, all I can come up with is a lot of maybes. Maybe it's because my father did. Maybe it's because of my job, or rather, lack of one at the moment. Maybe it's because it's easier than being actually happy. Maybe it's because when everyone else left, the drink was there with wide open arms smiling at me like a warm lover. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

Now that I think about it, I think I have a little bit of my nearest and dearest hiding against my chest like a child scared of being taken away from its mother. Good thing I've still got one hand free or I might have to face the grim future of sobriety slightly sober. Just let me reach in there—got it. I'll just twist the cap off with my teeth, and then I'll hit pay dirt. Or pay liquor, I guess, whatever.

"You really think that's a good idea?"

How does he sneak up on me like that? Oh right, the drinking. I should stop doing that.

"You think it isn't?"

"I'll just take that."

"Come on, Rick, you used to be cool."

"You pantsed me in gym class."

"It's not like I meant it."

"Come on, time to get in the car."

"You're such a prick."

"Really? How many eight-year-olds' legs did I break today?"

"How am I supposed to know? I'm drunk, remember?"

"So, you know who you're going to use your one phone call on?"

"You know, I don't. I don't think I'll call anyone."



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