

SHORELINE

FALL 1991

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RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE'S MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS
FALL EDITION 1991



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover: Rose Composition # 2 by Christa Comeau

FICTION

Richard Anthony Bova	8	Kiss the Bride
Carolyn Westcott	18	Swimming Lessons
Kristen L. Hague	36	Visiting at Night
David Malley	48	Because You Have To

POETRY

Susan Crawford	5	Distancing
	6	Chiaroscuro
	7	The Silver Locket
Lisa M. Maneca	13	The Death of Leno LaBianca
Rod Siino	14	Bermuda Shorts
Kristen Bucci	15	Death on Christmas Morning
Brian Laferte	16	Letter to Dena from the White Heart
	17	Circles of Light
Susan Jensen	21	Sensations
David Hayes	22	While Your Mother Waits
	24	We Spent the Second Day...
Roy Collins	33	Finding Anchor
	34	Temal Nyuka (Earth Cousin)
	35	Water, Paint, Paper
Gary J. Whitehead	41	Cornucopia
	42	Making Soup
	43	Fish On
Laura Moran	44	To Sarah E.
	45	Dandelions
Arthur Levesque	46	"It's Not Just a Job"
	47	Only Human
Christopher Mayo	52	Lobsters and Philosophers
Jim Dowling	54	The Kind
	54	Night Winter
	55	Night Into Morning

VISUAL ARTS

Darren Johnson	25	Playground # 63
Christa Comeau	26	Rose Creation # 1
Christa Comeau	27	Rose Creation # 3
Jeff Chabot	28	Centerfold
Christa Comeau	30	Rose Creation # 4
Christa Comeau	31	Rose Creation # 5
Eric Auger	32	Black & White with Watercolors

Distancing

by Susan Crawford

The air rings with the damp decay of
greasy footsteps, distant howling brakes.
Tired faces stare deep into the dark tunnel,
awaiting their morning rituals.

Inside, bodies scramble for seats
while the briefcased men gracefully grab the rings
and balance their newspapers
with one free hand.

They stare beyond the naked green lights,
beyond the flying lines of ads and maps,
until the black wall
rushes in, to reveal their sunken faces
mirrored in the window.

At first, they did not see her.
Then one, by one, they felt her presence --
heard her murmuring chants,
saw her crinkled hands
wringing themselves, over and over.

Her hunched body slowly rocks,
her face fixed to the dirty floor.
A man quietly looks away,
settling into the hard plastic seat.

She does not lift her eyes,
the others do not lift theirs.
They sink deeper into their newspapers, the floor --
trying to look beyond, but cannot,
their mirrored faces stare back.

The subway ride comes to its screaming end.
One by one, they fall out of the gasping doors,
careful not to look in her corner.

They follow their familiar paths,
each step a little lighter than before,
each person gulping the city air
as if it was clear water.

Chiaroscuro

The unfinished painting alone.
Shadows, swirling with dying light.
A girl's smile softens, her eyes
grow larger from love.
In his mind, she breathes.
In his hand, the black pencil quivers.

He remembers the long summer nights,
soft laughter floating through the screen.
They rocked upon the porch swing not speaking
while he feigned immersion in newspapers.

He remembers the nights of rocking
a white cradle, her sleeping, unaware
of calloused fingers brushing her face.

Pink lips on tissues, lavender scent.
He sits in the darkness, the orange
glow of his cigarette, warming his fingers.
Half past midnight, he waits for her,
the little girl who would skip home,
ponytail bobbing in the sun,
trailing gossamer ribbons.

Outside, the yellow taxi cab, engine
sputtering, waiting with an open trunk
like a hungry mouth.
She leaves, suitcase, red scarf
flashing out the door, a kite
whipped out of his loosened grasp.

Now, the colors wash his sleepy eyes,
the painting blends with the night glow.
Tomorrow, he will finish the portrait,
resting his pencil when he sees
the little girl skipping home.
He will sit, drawing shadows slowly.
He will close his eyes and struggle
only to see the black and white.

The Silver Locket

In a mahogany jewelry box, I found
my grandmother's silver locket.
I squeezed its smoothness in my hand,
and saw her perfect dentured smile.

When she told me the stories
of dances of so long ago,
her voice crescendoed with the memories
of tasting champagne glasses,
perfume, silky flapper gowns.
Her arm would arch as if grandfather's
embrace was still present.

Grandfather did give her the locket,
but it was on Christmas day.
It was wrapped in colorless paper,
my grandfather's face, a stone.

As I looked deep at the tarnished heart,
I realized she never meant for me to know
about those years she only dreamed
of silk gowns and champagne.

I polished the locket until it
was almost as perfect as
her false-toothed grin
and her shiny stories.

Burying it within the jewelry box, once more,
I hide it quickly,
to save those dreams
from blackening.

Kiss the Bride

by Richard Anthony Bova

I arrived early that day in a black suit. It wasn't that Denny what's-his-name disco black, nor was it that undertaker funeral black. It was a nice black, a black for all occasions. Still unsure of my reasoning for being here, I walked up the stone steps to the alcove of a Neo-Gothic Catholic church. Suddenly I was reminded of my early days in Catholic school. I haven't been in a real church since second grade, when Sister Mary something-something-something Burke traumatized me by whacking my ass, knuckles or both for the least little bit of innocent hijinx. Through the wicked ways of Mary Burke, I honestly believe most nuns have some deep seated sexually repressed dysfunction. Better than me.

"Are you here for the bride or the groom?" a six foot plus usher mumbled in my general direction.

"Bride," I said. "Friend of the bride."

He lumbered down the aisle causing the floor boards to creak with every other step and placed me in the first pine scented pew after the two reserved rows. I looked around and noticed a small neatly trimmed family in the groom's cheering section so I proceeded to make a semi-graceful kneel as well as an air drawn cross symbol which came out looking more like a plus sign than anything else. I moved as far left as I could in an attempt to avoid any visual or verbal contact. I sat down, fidgeted, smiled that patented I have nothing to do smile and began to wonder if I should have stayed in my Cougar until more people arrived so I could sneak in unnoticed in the back. Good idea, bad time to think of it. I closed my eyes and softly began humming Pink Floyd songs. It passed the time. Some people arrived midway through the off-key version of "Comfortably Numb." I watched them without them watching me. It passed the time.

Average, they were so damn average. I wished there was something about them I could make fun of to pass the time. An odd smell, a nervous tick, a rotating head spitting

pea soup would have done just fine, but they were all disgustingly normal. They entered two by two, four by four, dressed well enough for a wedding. Beige, blue suits; pink, yellow sundresses; an occasional junior complaining about wearing a tie, basic *Brady Bunch* etiquette. Observing them didn't help pass the time so I closed my eyes and hummed some more. Led Zeppelin this time.

"Got any gum?"

"What?" I said as I opened my eyes.

"Got any gum?" the little blond whined.

"Sorry, I don't."

"Why?"

"Because... I don't."

"Lifesaver? Got a lifesaver? I like the green ones."

"Sorry honey, I don't have any candy."

"Why?" she said sharply. I sat perplexed. "Why, why, why?" she said even sharper.

Fuck if I know, I thought as her brown somber eyes widened with inquisitive rage. She had Cheryl's eyes, that is, when Cheryl didn't display green contacts.

"I'm sorry," a more mature, yet still whiny female voice droned. "Linda, leave the nice man alone. I'm sorry. She gets so obstinate sometimes, you know how kids can be."

"No I don't, but I'll take your word for it."

"I'm Stacy, Stacy DiMetrio, Cheryl's aunt. You are?"

"Alan... Beechum."

"Nice to meet you Alan. This is Linda, my granddaughter. Linda introduce yourself nicely now."

"Hello Mr. Alan Beechum sir," she said with a transparent grin.

"Hello Linda," I grinned in the same manner.

"I don't seem to remember Cheryl ever mentioning an Alan Beechum," the plump aunt said.

"We knew each other in college."

"How nice. How very nice. Here alone?"

"Yes."

"Oh that's such a shame, to be at a wedding without a companion. I'm sure you'll find someone very, very soon."

There's nothing worse than being patronized by a post middle-aged aunt (especially when you're twenty-six) except for being optically bludgeoned by a prepubescent female with a vengeance for those who live life without gum. I got both barrels at once. Lucky me. Maybe not so average.

"Oh there's Harry! Over here Harry! In the front. He's blind as a bat you know."

"Yes I know."

"I have to grab him before he walks right into the altar. Nice meeting you. Say goodbye, Linda." She turned and bustled toward the aisle dragging Linda by her arm. Linda chirped goodbye, then stuck her tongue out at me. I felt like telling her there wasn't a Santa Claus but she probably already knew that.

Stacy, Harry (whoever the hell he was), and another couple stood about seven feet to the right of me and engaged in idle chitchat. Linda, who was sandwiched in between the two couples, occasionally leaned behind them and glared at me through an evil version of Cheryl's eyes. I, pretending not to notice, thought of Cheryl.

Baggy sweatpants, solid black oversized sweatshirt, hair quickly tied upward and thin lensed glasses with dark collegiate frames, that was Cheryl, the Cheryl I knew from our first journalism class. Lamars hated us. We sat in the back. Anton J. Lamars hated those who sat in the back. Everyone knew that. We were late the first day and were forced to sit there. We purposely sat in the back for every other class. We hated Anton J. Lamars. Cheryl argued tooth and nail with him the first day of class over an ethical journalism anecdote. You just didn't do that with Anton J. Lamars, especially when you sat in the back. I took her side even though she didn't need me to. He hated us. We got coffee after class.

She was dating Steven Stein, an art major with an attitude. He worshipped Picasso, Sid Vicious and Annette Funicello. My significant other was Lori Broussier: favorite car -- Lamborghini; favorite food -- most expensive on menu; favorite perfume -- cross between most trendy and most expensive; favorite pet -- me. What the hell did I see in her? I remember, physical perfection.

So we became solid study buddy friends, Cheryl and I. There was no hint of romance. We were too busy consorting with vain, egotistical, schizophrenics to be attracted to anyone with redeeming human qualities. It was good that way. We traveled in different circles outside the realm of journalism. Cheryl spent most of her non-productive hours playing hostess or centerpiece (they grew to be one and the same) to Steven's artsy self-appointed Post-Modern pioneers while my leisure time

consisted of literally being dragged from boutique to salon to shoe emporium to those places where I paid "experts" ungodly amounts of money to wax the nude body of my goddess in order to strip away those feminine hairs. She told me it's what they were doing in Paris. I believed her. Why? Oh, I remember.

Because of our outside interests at the time, we never really got to know other peers in the journalistic field. I guess that's what started our bond. No one around us could actually empathize with the pressure of a deadline, the quirks and biases of our professors, the fine line of embellishment, the ethics, the morals, where to draw the line, how to draw the line, if to draw the line. As close as we were to others, they just didn't know. We knew. It brought us and kept us together. Besides, we were good for each other in a journalistic sense.

Fire and ice, that's what we were known as. That's how the professors perceived us. Even Anton J. Lamars picked up on it. He gave us each an A minus. She was outspoken, brash, unlimitingly headstrong. I tempered. I cooled. I helped her see clearly through her usual obstinance. Cheryl always had a bad habit of doing the wrong thing for the right reason -- or for that matter the wrong thing for the wrong reason -- as long as she thought it was right at the time. She pushed me, us (me most of all) into becoming not just a journalist but a passionate journalist. She had an understated intense sexuality.

Over the past few years our professional accomplishments grew while our personal associations less than flourished. I guess this was to keep the universal balance of fortune somewhat equal. After breaking away from the Lori zone (through a realistic slap in the face from Cheryl) I immediately rebounded to Diane, a sadistic grade school teacher. She reminded me in some ways of the *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* movie. Then came Cherie, the boss's secretary, Greta, the ever popular waitress, and a different Lori who, I believe, never had the willpower to hold a job for more than a week. Joan, a sister of a co-worker, happened. I like to reflect on that situation as an accident, a moment of weakness. No, it was two months of weakness. Then I was alone. Then I met Ann, another teacher, less sadistic, who wanted marriage -- as well as my cousin Ted. I was alone again and still am.

Cheryl, strong and stubborn as she was, made some hideous companion choices. Steven the artist was replaced by Dave the minor league third baseman who was dumped for Rodney, the manager of some steroid monster gym. Jason the millionaire's son, took his place. I hated him most of all. She was back with Dave for awhile, then she was alone. She was alone for a significant amount of time until Sal. He wasn't the striking athletic type I was used to seeing her with. Personality was fair. Financial status was upper marginal but nothing to brag about. "Honest and faithful," she told me over a large pepperoni and olive pizza and a bottle of white Zinfandel. That's

what was. That's what no one else had ever been to her. That was their bond. I liked Sal. We met a few times. Fiction publication was his circle. Cheryl smiled at her when they were together. I liked her smile. It was soft and real.

Cheryl cried to me last Friday. I'd never seen her cry before. It affected me. Midway through the Channel 17 late movie, my apartment door opened. Cheryl knew where I kept the spare key. She had been crying for a long time, the rims of her eyes were crimson, and her bronzed face was uncharacteristically flushed. Lou (my bassett hound) scurried to her as usual, clumsily stood on his hind legs, rested his front paws just above her knees, and gazed at her adoringly. "How ya doin' Mr. Grant," she said in a defeated tone as she patted his head and stared into nothing. After a long thirty seconds, I threw a racket ball into the kitchen. Lou chased the ball. It occupied him.

"Sit down," I said, putting my Cheerios aside. With false composure, she closed the apartment door and knelt across from me on the couch.

"Again," she said, brushing the hair from her eyes. "Again what?"

"Again, it happened again."

"What happened again, break a nail?" I said facetiously. She looked right through me. "What?" I said, taking her hand. Cheryl looked down. She began methodically and childlike to swing our hands between the couch and the coffee table.

"It seems my pillar of morality isn't so moral after all," she said, still focused downward. "It seems my loving sweetheart of a fiancé had to be one of the boys tonight." She expelled a quick burst of air, half a sigh, half a laugh. "Surprise him, I wanted to surprise him. He likes surprises. Bought what I knew he'd like to see in me. Be at his house before he got back from his bachelor party. Candles, champagne, the whole fuckin' fantasy bit." She snapped her head back and looked aimlessly toward the ceiling while still swinging our arms. "I walk in, ten feet in front of me there's Sal still with a shirt and tie on, goddamn pants around his ankles with his hand clenched around the back of some slut's head slamming it back and forth." Her hand tightened and swung faster. "I stood there, I just... stood there. He saw me. Couldn't stop slamming her fuckin' bleached blond head. So I stopped it. Hit her over the head with something. I don't know what it was but it broke. The fuckin' asshole just screamed. Hope she bit it off," she said as she expelled that same burst of air. Then she looked at me. "Why, why him?" she said intensely. I didn't have an answer.

"Anyone but him, everyone but him. No, no it had to be most everyone including him. Why fuckin' him Alan? Why him?"

Her composure crumbled. She swung our arms quickly, horizontally. We knocked over my Cheerios, a cable guide and yesterday's beer. Cheryl fell into my thigh

crying and clung to my lower leg. I was speechless, motionless while she cried. Attempting to comfort her, I began to outstretch my right arm to stroke her head. Quickly, I pulled my arm away. Without knowing exactly where or how to place it, my arm remained awkward in the air. Later, deftly, I lowered my arm, touched her chin and slowly brought her face up to mine.

"Remember what you told me when I told you Ann was screwing around with my cousin? Remember?"

"I don't want to hear what I said, not now Alan."

"But do you remember?"

"I don't know much of anything right now."

"Listen," I said holding her hand once again. "You told me if things were meant to work themselves out, they would. If no one cared enough to at least try to work around things, then just let go."

"What kind of bullshit line is that?" she said attempting to laugh.

"It's a bullshit line that made a lot of sense to me," Cheryl looked away. "So what are you going to do, give it some time and try to work it out, or give up and let it go?"

"He hurt me," she said with her face still angled left. "It's not the first time something like this happened but it's the first time it really hurt. I want to hurt him."

We were silent for a while.

"Where's that infamous Cheryl DiMetro 'can't bring me down' attitude?"

"Not tonight."

"I know it's there. It's in there somewhere."

"No... it's gone tonight." She softly began to cry. My hand touched her cheek, bringing us again face to face. Gently I pressed my forehead against hers and slowly began to wipe away her tears.

"No more tears," I said softly. "No more tears. I'm here for you. I'll be here for you. No more tears," I said softly. "No more tears."

Cheryl pulled her forehead back from mine, tenderly grabbed my hand and began to brush away her final tears with my fingertips. When the tears were gone, she dragged our hands down the side of her face to her lips and began to lightly kiss my fingertips. Index finger. Middle finger. Ring finger. Little finger. Her brown eyes looked so vulnerable as she reversed the order of the kisses. After a second and a deep breath I affectionately punched her in the shoulder.

"Well now that you feel better..." My feeble attempt at diverting the obvious had no effect. Cheryl looked right through me and I melted. Her body leaned toward me a little, then stopped. My body followed the same pattern. The process repeated until the distance between us was reduced to inches. Our eyes closed and heads tilted at the same time, I think, as we leaned in some more. I felt her lips touch mine. They just touched at first, then a small scared kiss and another and another and another. Like her smile her lips were soft and real. The pressure increased.

Each kiss became more defined, stronger, easier. Our mouths opened slightly. Cheryl's arms reached around my back. Her fingernails dug into me nicely as her lips grabbed at mine. I don't know how, but she was on top of me. My index finger twirled a lock of hair a few times, then glided to the base of her neck. Cheryl flinched. Her right hand curled over my left hand and made one complete fist. Softly, my right hand traveled inch by inch down the center of her back, tapered down the side of her outer thigh and up around her inner thigh. Cheryl held me tighter, kissed me deeper and positioned her body for more accessibility. She pulled down the front of my t-shirt and patiently kissed my exposed neck and chest. I held her tighter. The organ started. My senses heightened. I felt those around me stand up and turn towards the back of the church. My eyes opened. I stood up and turned around. The procession was about to begin.

It was an average wedding, I guess. I didn't pay much attention. Cheryl looked tired. Beautiful, composed, but tired. The battery of flashbulbs didn't phase her. Cheryl paced the steps and peered straight ahead down the aisle, with her train trailing behind. She smiled a pretty smile. I remained invisible with the help of plump Aunt Stacy. Through the mass people stood, sat, knelt, sat, knelt, stood, sat, stood, knelt, bowed their heads, sat, stood, knelt and closed their eyes. Awkwardly, I followed everyone's lead.

There was no concentration, even general interest in the ceremony. My thoughts remained nine days in the past. Between menacing stares from Linda, and words of honesty, fidelity, companionship and union from the pulpit, I thought. I really thought. The nape of her neck and the top of her chest had a sweet scent. In the past six years I'd never noticed that fragrance. Maybe Sal brought it for her. I hoped he did. Her body toned, firm, pleasant, wrapped around me well. Her shoulders glistened in the light of a black and white movie. She made a sound every so often. It was a cross between a squeak and a squeal. It was a squeal. Funny word. Funny sound. There was a warm, satisfied security as I lay pressed against her body in my bed, once we made it to my bed. We fell asleep side by side with our legs intertwined. I held her body, she held my arms, comfortably.

Lou's morning bark awoke me. I was alone. There was dry dogfood and fresh water in Lou's bowls and a discarded brass barrette by the coffee table. Awkwardly, I continued my week without any substantial emotional conflict. I thought of her over the past week, but not like this. This was different. The ceremony, the moment, time to reflect, ability to reflect, need to reflect, just seeing her, journalistic curiosity, I didn't know what it was which caused me to ask myself questions, but I did. Why did she cry to me? Why did I sleep with her? Did it just happen? Why didn't I stop us, myself? Why was everything so natural? Why don't I feel guilty? Does she? Why wasn't

she there in the morning? Why didn't she call? Why didn't I? Would it have mattered if I just slammed my face between her thighs and sent her home? Do I need her, or her me? Why was she getting married? Why was I here? Why does it hurt to think about it now?

"Peace be with you," Aunt Stacy said with a pulpy outstretched hand. "Wish the nice man peace Linda."

"Peace be with you Mr. Sir," she said innocently. "Peace to you Linda." I knew she was destined to ruin the lives of many men.

"Peace, peace," I said to an older couple in front of me. "Peace, peace be with you," I said to two younger women in back of me. I felt like a rap singer at the end of a performance. When the peace work was through, the questions started again. I made a conscious effort to stop them and ended up drawing a complete blank for the rest of the ceremony.

Near the end of the mass the priest said something about forever and perfect harmony. He blessed the couple and witnesses and cued the organ. As the procession filed out against another battery of flashbulbs, it occurred to me that Cheryl would have described every detail of last Friday to Sal, in order to hurt him and achieve an immoral victory. I would soon face them both. An informal greeting line followed the procession. Stacy and company were first in line, ranting about beauty and love. Linda disappeared. I waited to attach myself to the end of the line. Forty feet ahead of me, people of average shape and size were superficially kissing and shaking hands. The witnesses were handled quickly and efficiently as if the entire production was staged on an assembly line. Say a few words, kiss, say a few words, shake hands, exit. The pace was unbelievable. Forty feet, thirty-five feet, thirty feet; all in a matter of moments. Paranoia set in. For a few seconds it was mixed with arrogance. Anxiety hit, and I would have sold my soul for a shot of Primatene. At twenty-five feet, I could see the wedding smile plastered on those of importance. I wanted to hide behind plump Aunt Stacy but she was already out of the church and forging toward the pre-reception buffet. I perspired. At fifteen feet I saw Cheryl's green contacts twinkling. The only chatter audible was thank you's and hello's. Sal was shaking hands and responding in an expected way. At ten feet his head turned towards the end of the line, towards me. There was a lump in my throat which shot down to my stomach, expanded, then forced its way upward, causing my throat muscles to expand and contract. Our stars crossed, then locked. The assembly line continued. Her stare shifted, then again locked. It took only an instant. I could tell by the smile in his eyes he had no idea I was ever inside his wife. After exhaling deep, twice, I plastered on my wedding smile and found myself two feet in front of the happy couple.

They looked perfect, mechanically perfect. Her movements seemed almost automated. I felt uneasy see-

ing her act so artificial. She was out of character.

"Alan, it is Alan isn't it? How you doin' buddy?" Sal said, with his arm extended waiting for the customary reaction.

"Hello Sal.... Cheryl."

She looked up at me after turning away from one of her giddy cousins. Her plastered smile strengthened and became more artificial.

"It's nice to see you," she said.

"It's nice to see you.... Congratulations."

"Thanks buddy," Sal said while still shaking my hand. "It's been a while since I last saw you. Been keeping out of trouble?"

"Oh no, you know me, always into something."

"Hey, you got to have some fun."

"You know it," I said. "You know it." After a moment of silence I said, "So do I get to kiss the bride?"

Cheryl looked at me, cold and clinical, almost hateful, but she still smiled that wedding smile. I tried to hug her as a friend but I couldn't. I didn't know how to. She held me with distance. It hurt being held that way. Our cheeks touched. Her face was cold. I wanted to say something. I wanted to tell her that I missed my friend, that I loved her, that I was sorry if I had a reason to be sorry, but the words were lost. All I could do was try and hold her a little tighter. I tried.

"Don't," she whispered as she pulled away from me. I wanted to vomit but I smiled.

"I'm going to check on the photographer....bye Alan,"

she said without looking in my direction Mrs. Salvatore Verducci walked away.

"You will be at the reception won't you?" Sal said. "You'll be sitting with two of Cheryl's cousins. Who knows?"

"Who knew?" I said, throwing my arms up by my "That's too bad....well, good luck in the game," Sal said as he walked in the direction of his best man.

I stood alone in the church alcove for a while and watched average people I didn't know laugh and kiss and hug and be happy. Basic *Brady Bunch* ending. I didn't belong. I had to leave. As I exited the church, I was surprised to hear a familiar female voice call out to me.

"Hey...hey...got any gum?"

"No Linda," I said abruptly. "I don't have any gum. I don't have a lifesaver. I don't have any candy at all."

Her brown eyes widened and her little mouth puckered. She began to pout.

"You're a doo doo head," she screamed. Then she stomped away.

I laughed. I laughed a lot, but soon emptiness and self pity took the place of laughter. I began to think of Cheryl and how we ruined whatever it was we had. It hurt. My mind wandered, and the why's and what if's multiplied with the descent of each stone step. Why this, why that, what if, why not, should I, shouldn't I, should we, shouldn't we, will we? Oh shit. Why didn't I have any gum? Fuck if I know.

The Death of Leno LaBianca

by Lisa M. Maneca

(Leno LaBianca and his wife were the first victims of the Manson family.)

The body was sprawled
Across the living room carpet.
His hands fastened
Behind him with a leather thong.
His face was covered
With a pillowcase.
He was stabbed twenty-seven times.

The body was across
The sprawled living room carpet.
His hands covered
Behind him with a pillowcase.
His face was fastened
With a leather thong.
He was stabbed twenty-seven times.

The body room carpet
Was living across
The sprawled pillowcase.
The thong was fastened
Behind the leather face.
The hands were covered.
He was stabbed twenty-seven times.

The living pillowcase
Was sprawled across
The hands.
The covered room
Was fastened behind
The leather carpet.
The face thong was.
He was stabbed twenty-seven times.

The leather hands
Were sprawled
Across the living carpet.
The thong room
Was covered
Behind the body.
The pillowcase was fastened.
He was stabbed twenty-seven times.

Bermuda Shorts

by Rod Siino

And while at work
with the click-click of the keyboard
and the flowing coffee, the cigarette smoke
sneaks serpentine up the stairway weaving
a path through oak balusters in search
of my file-covered desk.

The whir of Ma Bell
awakens as the cloud's outstretched
arms reach with me for the phone. I win.
Remnant aroma of the cleaning crew,
two days gone and fading, thoughts
of their return.

And I hold in my hand
the young wavering voice of a
little girl, a novice to emotional
pain, alone and afraid; confusing
talk of children in the summer sun,
our grandmother, and sand castles
on a windy beach.

Driving to the house
the world is a bright flash of sunlight,
my hands grip the heated steering wheel,
I turn through the memories and see
pictures of her. She never did learn
how to drive.

At the house of summer
and Kool-Aid, a sprinkler tap-taps
the grass from its weary brown slumber.
Red lights of the ambulance are drowned
by the sun. Paramedics, their uniforms
dark blue with sweat, lift gently and
close the doors. I wear shorts.

And within the house,
as the young woman cries for herself,
I remember a day like today, on a white
velvet beach, seagulls floating above
a green steel barrel full of a family's
memories. My grandmother on a canvas
metal throne, always old, always
watching us burn our backs,
bare feet in the sand, and

the castles washed away by the rising tide.

Death on Christmas Morning

by Kristen Bucci

Losing bits and pieces of the past
While stumbling in the darkness
Of crumpled red paper
And tossed aside ribbon
Watching the fallen star falling down
Slipping slowly
From needle to pine-green needle
Nothing to break its fall
But alternating red, white and green
Blinking lights.

The ringing breaks the silence
As the girl picks up the machine
And words
Grandfather is dead
Suddenly become part of the scene
She stares strangely at the white receiver
In her hand
Hands that have molded snow as white
Recently as yesterday
It falls
As her emotions run free
Unwrapped and wild
Falling with the stars
And dried-up needles.

On the cushion of memory
Nestled deep beneath the tree
She sits and pulls the garland
Slowly down and around
Branch by branch
Tinsel against needle
Glistening reflections--
The fireplace, the windows,
All that surrounds her--
So closely wrapped by a strand
And those hands
Unable to recapture
The snowman built only yesterday
With the man now gone.

Letter to Dena from the White Heart

by Brian Laferte

Dear Dena: Goodbye. Now I've said it. Took
three years and thirty-five hundred miles. Here to Spokane.
How is that place? Cold here. Not cold like back in Florida,
desolate human frost, but real cold with iced ponds
for skating, though next week they say it will thaw.
Did you wear white? I heard it was Tony in West Palm Beach
some time last year. That sounds pretty.
I never understood anything but white. Tony knows that.
Knew that I'd leave before things were settled with Father.
Some birds migrate early. Spokane has wonderful birds.
Our cousin tells me. He's Navy. Port of Seattle.
Ends up in your place sometimes. Say hello if you see him.
Sergeant, balding with a white black mustache. Nine years
since I have. No strong bond but distance.
Drove half of the twelve hundred miles to leave you in one day.
Car packed with books, one ball glove, eleven socks, and memories.
I left the excuses back with Dan. Never heard from him.
Know that you got all I told him. He was the right kind
of brother, strong like good whiskey.
Sister, I want to take the birds, the cold, the white and the miles
and wrench them 'til their necks are broken.
Watch for me in Spokane. A man in a wool jacket,
the same thick hair and weak arms made rough by the distance.
I'll stop. Give my best to Tony and Dan and the balding
Sergeant and all the others. Again. Goodbye. Love, Brian.

Circle of Lights

I

Candles outside are glowing like madmen.
The window shade, up, rolled white vinyl
detracts nothing from the wooden frame
painted shut.

II

Blues reverberate through the wall
between two rooms. The glass
jiggles the lights to a blur.
I hold the panes still with my eyes.

III

Skyward, bear follow bear,
elongated legs and misshapen heads.
They wait for a drop of honey
from Queen Cassiopeia's lips.
Their repetition scores my eyes.

IV

A yellow outline in the dark, Orion stands,
sword drawn. The bears will have the Queen every
nights as he stands by, like a boy waving
to planes that will never touchdown in his world.

Swimming Lessons

by Carolyn Westcott Franzen

It's hot, it's boring, and it's summer. There are things about summer I like and things about it I hate. I hate my scrawny legs that never tan. They just get all freckly, then they burn blotchy red, then they peel. I hate cutting the grass. Cut grass makes me sneeze and it turns my sneakers green. And I hate my mother constantly nagging me to cut the grass.

And there are things about summer I like. I like the air-conditioned movie theatre with Derek's sweaty hand on my knee. I like eating lots of barbecued chicken wings in the back yard with my best friend Alison. And I like, no I LOVE love Thomas J. Sampson. We just call him Tom. He's my swimming instructor. Tom teaches the Minnows.

It was Alison's mother who made us take swimming lessons in the first place to "get off the couch watching soaps all day." Which is really stupid because the soaps don't start til 2:00.

She didn't want to do it. Alison's hips are huge. Hippo hips, thunder thighs, she's heard them all and she's earned them, but I'm her best friend so I say, "Wear shorts over your bathing suit and no one will notice," which is a lie, but if she didn't buy it we'd still be watching soaps and we never would have met Tom.

First day of swimming classes, we were all sitting on the edge of the pool shivering our butts off (except for Alison who was sitting on the bleachers wrapped in her towel because, like I said, she's got those huge hips), when we first laid eyes on him. He was kind of a cross between Matt Dillon and Danny of New Kids on the Block (I know, New Kids are queer, but Danny is soooooo cute!). His eyes were as blue as the deep end. No, bluer than the deep end.

He's not a boy, like Derek, he's a GUY, probably in college or something. First he taught us the "right" way to tread water and how to do the dead man float. Then he looked RIGHT AT ME and said, "In case you ever fall

overboard," I know what he was thinking. He was thinking about falling overboard with me! Get it? It's sort of a poetic way of saying he wanted to fall in love with me. I opened my eyes under water and saw his arms and legs just hanging, doing the dead man float as if he had already fallen overboard.

"We should call up Tom," I said that night when we were sitting on Alison's bed as bored as Susan Drake probably is every night because she is such a geek and has no friends.

"And say what?" Alison said.
Alison is my best friend but she is SO stupid sometimes.

"Nothing. We don't have to say anything. Let's just call him."

Alison opened the drawer in her night stand and took out a box of chalk. She took out two sticks the way they do in the movies when they are trying to be real cool about smoking. She held her stick of chalk between her index finger and her middle finger. She made two dramatic circles with her hand and put the chalk to her lips.

"You want a light?"
She stared back at me with that same seriousness she had when she asked me if I'd kissed Derek.

"Eat it," she said with chalk hanging from her mouth like an old man's cigar.

Usually when she gives me that look I do what ever she says and I don't ask questions. But chalk is chalk.

"You've lost it, babe."

CRACK. She bit off a piece of chalk and it disappeared into her mouth.

"Remember Red Riding Hood? When the fox tried to disguise his voice, he ate chalk. You're the FOX."

"You fool, it was a wolf." I bit off a piece of chalk.
"Chew it," she demanded.
It tasted like aspirin -- not orange baby aspirin, but ASPIRIN -- kind of a cross between aspirin and Ajax. I wanted to vomit.

"Swallow it." Alison held her eyes on me.
I swallowed the whole mouthful of the chalk paste I made in my mouth.

"Talk."
Really, when I opened my mouth I was expecting to hear Cybil Shepard. What came out was coughing.
"I -- cough -- hate -- cough -- you!"

"That's what you get for believing a fairy tale," she said as she threw her pillow at me. "Cinderella was a lie too. In real life you need to be a lot more than a dim-witted blonde." She pulled my NATURALLY BLONDE hair back until I had to fall back on her bed. Then she threw a pillow in my face.

"Quit your coughin', you're waking up my whole house!"

Alison is my best friend.
"Your -- cough -- gonna have to call him. I can't talk."
"Hello, is Tom there?"
"Sorry, wrong number."
We called eight Sampsons before:
"Hello."

Alison hung up. "IT WAS HIM!" Alison screamed.
"What's his number, write it down!" I opened my address book to 5 and wrote:

♥♥ Thomas J. Sampson #725-4881-77

We jumped on her bed until her fat mother came in, in her nightgown, and said we were behaving like six-year-olds.

The next morning I knew he knew. Don't ask me how, I just knew. Probably woman's intuition.

We all held on to the side of the pool. Flutter kicking. Alison is a great flutter kicker. I'm a mess, water everywhere.

"Barbara, take it easy," Tom said as he swam over to me.

"No. You're not getting it," he said. Then HE TOUCHED ME. He put his caressing hand on the back of my calf. "Straight down, straight up. Stop splashing."

I kept splashing so that he'd come back and correct me again, but he didn't.

Ring. "Hello?"

"Barb?"

"Yeah."

"It's me, Derek."

"I know."

"Ah, so, um, what's up?"
Derek is so boring. "Nothing."
"You want to go to the mall?"
"OK. You're not going to wear that little-league-left-over jacket are you?"
"No, Barb."
"Who will drive us? I hope not your Dad. He drives like a goat."
"A goat?"
"You know what I mean."
"My brother's driving. When do you want us to pick you up?"
"After dinner, six."
"OK, bye."

My bedroom has a perfect view of the street. Derek and his brother Bob pulled up a 5:56. Bob stared straight ahead. Derek stared at his watch. At 5:59 Derek left the car. "God! He's wearing the left-over little-league-jacket! I thought we had an agreement!"

At 6:00 the door-bell rang.
"Barb, Derek's here!"

I know he's here. I pretended not to hear. Derek shifted from left foot to right foot standing on the stoop. He always plays the stupid mini-video game strapped to his wrist.

"Barb, he's waiting!"
Of course he's waiting. It's good for him. I pulled my pocketbook out of the tangle of sweaters on my bed.

I clipped a Calvin Klein ad out of Mom's May Vogue. A Tom look-alike, arms stretched overhead. What biceps! Just like Tom when he does the crawl to pull himself through the water. Amazing.

"Well the face is wrong, but yep, that's our Tom," Alison said.

Our Tom. I repeated it in my head. He wasn't "our Tom." He was MY Tom. I saw him first, she never would have taken swimming lessons without me, and I clipped out the picture.

We stared at the back of the naked Calvin Klein man. "Whata butt!" Alison giggled. "Bet Tom's got a butt like that under those orange shorts."

"Wouldn't you love to know. You've got the dirtiest little mind."

"You're the one who cut out this picture! Sleaze!"

"No, this is a Calvin Klein. This is art. I have an appreciation for the human form, just like in Social Studies -- the Greek who played frisbee naked."

"It was a discuss."

"Shut up. All I'm saying is I didn't clip this picture because I'm a sex fiend. It's art. I have an appreciation for the finer things."

"Yeah, whata fine thing Tom is. Bet you'd love to appreciate that human form." Alison squeaked out that high pitched giggle of hers and then added, "And you can." "Impossible."

She touched my nose with her fairy godmother pencil and said, "Nothing's impossible. When does the Y open?"

"7:00."

"When does Tom get there every day?"

"What does he wear, say like on yesterday morning, when he came in?"

"Levi button fly jeans, Ocean Pacific t-shirt with a neon surfer, Nike Air sneakers, and I couldn't tell what color socks because you kept pushing in my way, but they were probably white."

"And what does he swim in at 8:15?"

"Orange shorts."

"OK. There you have it." She stared at me with those glaring eyes, and grinning mouth.

"I don't get it."

"Ug! Do I have to SPELL it out for you?! What do you think he's doing between 8:00 and 8:15? He's putting on those orange shorts! And tomorrow you'll be there, my little spy, in safe appreciation inside one of those sweet lockers!"

"You're nuts!"

"It's got to be you. I'd never fit in there."

Which was true, she'd never fit, so it had to be me.

We laughed our heads off and jumped on her bed until her fat mother came in and told Alison that when her father came home they would take her bed away for good. Her father was never coming home, but we stopped jumping anyway.

At seven thirty Alison and I walked to the Y with our cards: *Alison Cammy* and *Barbara J. Kent*. The ninety-eight-year-old woman at the desk sees us every day, knows us by name, and every morning asks to see our cards. She'll stare at my name and make sure my face still matches the face on the card. Then she says, "Take a hot shower with soap before entering the pool area." I never do.

We ducked into the ladies' room. Out of my gym bag I pulled Derek's little-league cap, and his little-league left-over jacket I stole last week out of his room when he was in the bathroom so that he wouldn't look like such a loser. They looked better on me than they ever did on Derek.

"I'll go out and sit between the Ladies' door and the Men's door. You peek out from here. When I stand up, the coast is clear," Alison said through her teeth. I had never seen her look so happy in my life. It scared me.

She sat there for an awfully long time. I almost got flattened by a muscular jock-woman. The kind that doesn't open a door, but WAPS it open with her hip. Two

elderly men slipped into the locker room. Shirt, art has it's limits.

Alison stood up. I nodded as I walked past her, and pushed open the door marked:

MEN
♂

The locker room was empty. No big deal, just the same as the women's except in reverse and with blue tiles instead of pink.

"Ain't she sweet? See her walking down the street..." SHIT! Sh sh sh sssshs CLINK CLUNK. I closed myself into the closest locker.

"Ain't she nice? Look her over once or twice..." The grandpa sang as he took his pre-swimmer shower with soap. My heart beat hard. Bumba. Bumba. Bumba. If anyone stood outside of my locker they'd hear it.

The shower turned off. I heard bare feet hitting tile but I saw nothing. The vent slats were above my head! I slowly tried to stand on tip toes. I lifted myself a centimeter at a time, slowly until I was on the tips of my toes. The light stripes still came down over my head.

A bead of sweat rolled down my back under my tee-shirt and Derek's little league jacket. It would be impossible to take it off.

It really stunk in the locker. I mean, I've sniffed my share of lockers before, but this won the prize. Old sweat, menthol shaving cream, sneaker insoles—I think I was standing on one.

The heavy door that said:

MEN
♂

opened and closed. Sneaker squeaked on the floor. TOM. It had to be him.

I could not breathe. I tasted acid in my mouth. The locker odor was making me pass out. Stomach, nose, exhale. Stomach moved closer to throat, mouth, Clunk inhale through mouth. Hold it. Hold it.

He opened the locker next to me. Shirt off. Pop. Pop. Pop. Jeans off. Rumpaling fabric. Clink Clunk, locker closed. Tom's dressed. It's over.

PUUH! EXHALE!

My locker door flew open.

My heart stopped beating. He stood six inches from me.

TOM.

I stared at him, paralyzed. He stared at me like he did not know what I was. His tan face had turned white. I did not breathe. I did not blink.

CLUNK. Tom slammed the locker door closed.

SHIT! I heard a pad lock go through the handle and then snap locked. My life passed before my eyes just like they always say it does in the movies right before you die. I saw Mom yelling, Alison laughing, and Derek feeding me

popcorn kernel by kernel on the end of his straw. Death was near. I could smell it. Taste it.

The lock clicked. The door opened. Tom. He was much bigger than he had ever been in the pool. He closed off the entrance with his bulk and reached in and touched my cheek. I made myself small and pushed my back to the wall of the locker. My sweat turned cold.

"Ain't she sweet? Well I'll ask you very confidentially..." The dripping grandpa shuffled in singing. I gasped. Tom turned. I pushed by, whipped open the door marked:

MEN
♂

I ran across the slippery tile. I ran past the ninety-eight-year-old gate keeper.

Alison panted behind me, "Wait up, Barb!" I didn't stop running until I'd crossed the parking lot and tennis courts. "Will you stop!" Alison grabbed the back of my jacket. "Wait!"

I threw off the baseball cap and the left-over jacket. They made a little heap on the pavement which Alison

promptly sat on. Her face was burning red.

"Well?" Alison stared at me with that same intense seriousness of hers.

I said nothing.

"Tell me!" she shouted. Her eyes were getting angry.

"Al, I..."

Alison nodded.

"Remember two weeks ago, at Diane's pool party when you asked me if I'd really kissed Derek and I said no? Well, I lied."

Alison slowly got up off the flattened mass of left-overs and put on the crumpled jacket and stared at the cap in her right hand.

SWAT! She hit my arm with the cap. "You mean I chased you --SWAT-- all this way --SWAT-- nearly giving me a heart attack --SWAT-- to hear you lied?"

Alison is my best friend.

I grinned and sang to myself a tune she's never heard.

"Well I ask you very confidentially, ain't she sweet..."

Sensations

Sharp tufts of amber grass
Cut through smooth paths of sand
and low clusters of stiff, blue brush
that poke at boney feet
and prick bare ankles
and slice thick air into thin shards
that pierce the skin
and slash the dunes
and carve soft wood for the sea to polish
and hands to hold
while sandspackle faces face the storm.

by Susan Jensen

While Your Mother Waits

by David Hayes

I.

You press
another long glass
of J.D. and ice to your
lips, dark eyes hovering
cold and hard over the rim,
throat bobbing
with the sting.
You speak of a night
five summers ago,
when cancer set deeply into
the dog, so he could not walk,
and your mother went out
with two army blankets
and curled with him
in the yard.
Death beneath
the stars, you call it,
lifting another cigarette
from the pack.
When the glass is empty,
you stare into it
as if the relief you wanted
was somehow still in there.
You say you could not understand
until now
that her need to take that pain
was a slow, steady grind
in the pit of the chest
and all you can do
is hold it.

II.

The glass stands
politely on the table,
waiting to be filled.
The kitchen hums
its ongoing song,
a soul-less, mechanical drone.
You are somewhere
else, beyond even
the identical kitchen
in the nighttime window
you fix on.
You speak of Christmas,
of three generations of womanhood
drinking blush Chablis in
your mother's kitchen,
arguing everything
from proper hors d'oeuvres

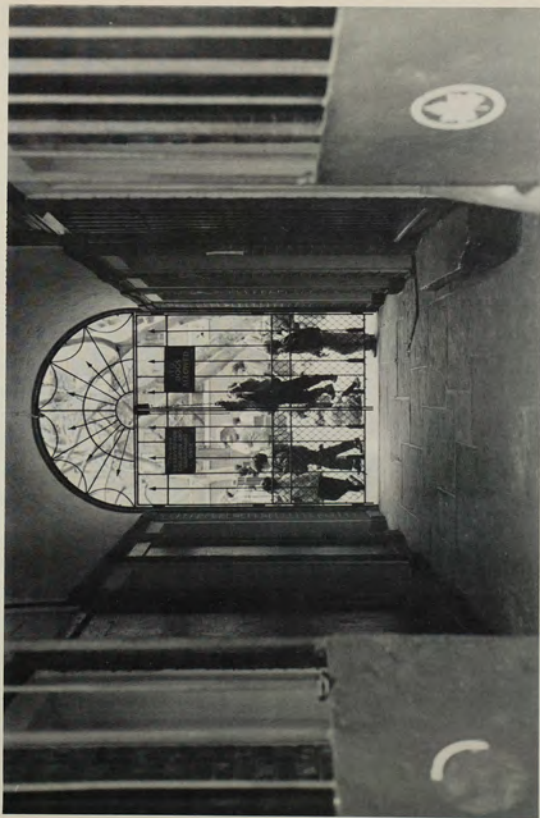
to winter pagan rituals.
Even now you cannot
help but smile
at the thought of your grandmother,
all 92 years of harsh
development, winning the debate with
a flourish, shouting
"I'm right cos I'm 92, that's
why, and I'm gonna live
forever! I got God
so goddamned scared right now,
he don't even wanna
take me!"
You were proud that day
of the sturdy back
and long, tough legs your mother
took from her and gave
to you; proud to possess
such strength.
A small,
ironic laugh
escapes through your nostrils.
You only want
to give them back.

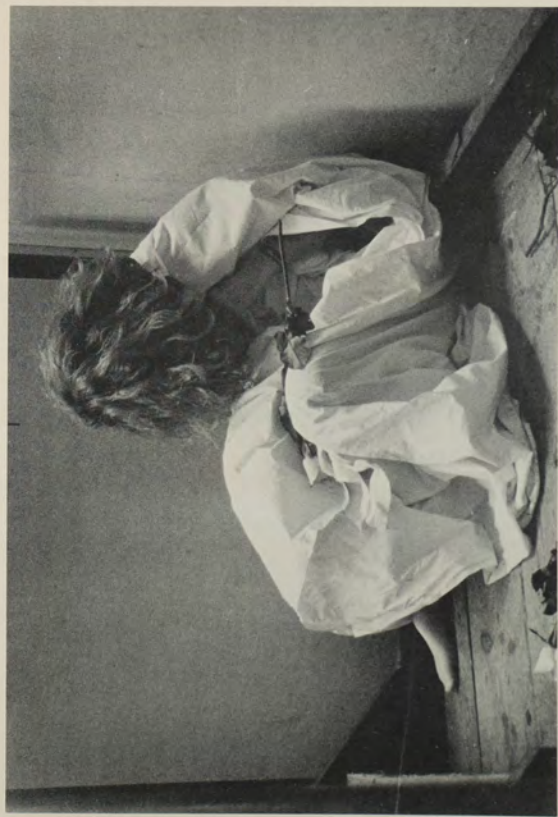
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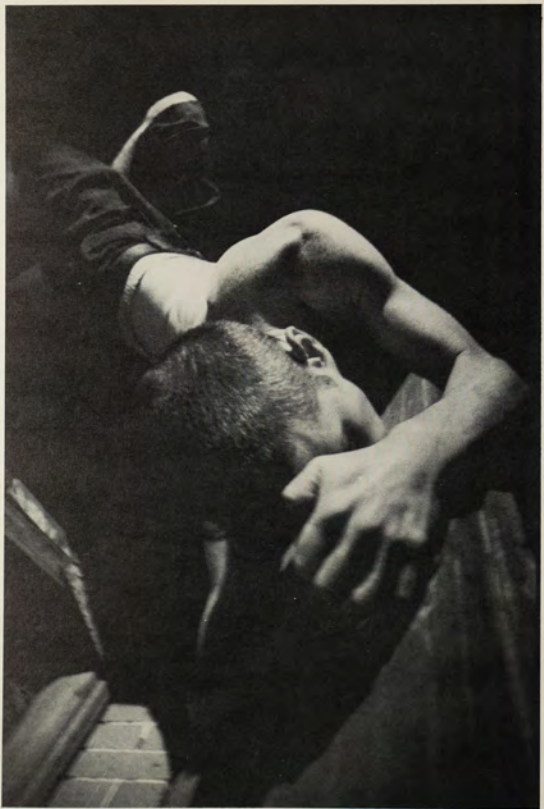
The telephone's ring
breaks the uneasy silence.
Again the ugly
game begins:
It is your sister,
existing now only
on the strength of anger,
hating her alcohol and cigarettes
for not living up to their promise.
It is your grandmother,
suddenly unable
to remember where her things are kept,
suddenly unable
to remember your name.
It is your father,
unable to lie
alone in his bed,
sleepless without the familiar sound
of her breathing.
You hold the glass
level with your throat,
and count the rings
in a whisper.
When you count eleven
the telephone rests,
leaving you again
with only the subtle rhythm
of mechanical things.

We Spent the Second Day of the War Smoking Joints Through a Two-Liter Coke Bottle

We spent the second day of the war
in Jay's barn smoking joints
through a two-liter Coke bottle & looking
for holes in the ceiling
while a T.V. droned from a shelf
near the door
& Someone said something
about speaking through gas masks
& Someone said something
about syringes
& powder to rub on the skin
We stood in a corner
where the roof had fallen through
staring at a patch of sky
cloudless overhead
Cannibis dancing
behind our eyes
Nothing but cool blue layers & the sound
of serious electric voices humming
& Someone said something
about Israelis in taped-up rooms
wearing masks & watching
T.V. which played
no pictures only music to sooth them
& Jay stuck another bone in the pinhole
& We passed the plastic tokemaster nodding
& coughing clouds which floated
up through the hole
like smoke signals in some spontaneous tongue
& Someone said something
about missiles
in the black sky over Saudi Arabia
& Someone said something
about craters
in the streets of Tel Aviv
& Someone said something
about a living room
Where an army wife came on
very live
insisting in a paper-thin whisper
that she couldn't feel any pain
Though it sounded like no one believed her
& My turn came around & I toked
long & slow then blew the smoke
back to the silent slice of sky
thinking I couldn't feel any either.







85

86







Finding Anchor

by Roy Collins

Fruitflies fat
from breakfast discards
buzz like black stars
before the window.
Outside, the honeylocust
holds in its arms
a portion of saffron sky.
At two, my daughter
has learned to see morning
as a form;
a type of sail
that floats the landscape
in endless shifts.
She is the boat,
stove by the passing
of her mother
from this life.
Today she will attempt
to steer clear of the remains.
While holding a worn snapshot
like a wingless bird
she will find anchor
by constructing a series of words:
"Mama is dead,
went to heaven."
Cry with a woman's voice,
heave at the chest
with a wind so great
the penciled ribs
near to the point
of snapping.
Learn to swim
without water;
crawl without legs;
fly with the wings
from a torn photograph.
Learn to forget
while still in diapers
the color
of your mother's eyes.

Temal Nyuka (Earth Cousin)

Wind is the stirring
of lizards
through stalks of wild barley
as we walk
this street
lined by pink sand and verbena.
The air is lime
and nasturiums
cling to the stone shadows
of villas.

In this desert world
the picture of life
is more pronounced,
bleached raw
by the constant battering
of light.
We've learned to listen
with our eyes
to know what our hearts
should hear.

Under a sky
broken by blades of palm
we walk a street
whose width
is no greater
than our own conscience;
as empty,
as full.
As city lights
wash into a lake behind us
and the cicada sings
its lonely note
to the burning stars,
we realize how minor
the distance
our traveling has been.

Water, Paint, Paper

Honeysuckle breathes
a sweet yellow
through the screen
where you sit
choosing cakes of color.
Your hair, raked
into thin furrows
mixes with the morning light.
Watercup, brush and pad
placed on kitchen table
wake to the sound
of your voice:
"Water, paint, paper."

Your hand falls
like a tuft of feathers
over a white square.
A garden of blue and red lines
blossom.

I am part of the furnishings
as your consciousness
flies toward forms;
a proud part
of the lifeless wood
knowing that such fullness
can be found
in so flat a world.

The passing years
have since ironed this image
into a jewel
which I store like a thief.
Your continued absence
increases its value.

Now, as morning's frailness
enters the window
and crows rise
and fall over the honeysuckle,
the summer passes
barely visible
before it darkens
and curls into the earth.

Visiting at Night

by Kristen Hague

The hospital looked different at night; almost like an old southern plantation. That was how the nurse had described it the first day. It had been an estate, originally. I would never have picked it for a hospital if it weren't for the granite sign at the head of the long driveway engraved with the name and year of incorporation.

I parked my car in the horseshoe driveway in front of one of the large houses that dotted the hospital grounds. The house had been easy to find. It looked like an old Victorian manor, but there had been signs directing me to it on the way in. I was clutching some books and flowers in one hand and my purse in the other as I walked up the steps to the huge entrance. The door wasn't locked. It never was, from what I understood. They had told me that the unit ran on a basis of trust. No one was allowed to leave, but the door was there, standing open. It seemed twisted. The patients worked with behaviorists, and the behaviorists thought this temptation was good, so who was I to judge?

I had only been here once before, when Steph had admitted herself. I had offered to drive her on the day she was going in. I had not wanted her to have a car here. We had both forced cheerfulness on the drive up. It almost felt as if she were fifteen again and we were going shopping for school clothes.

The reality of it hit me -- her also, I think -- when they took her bags from her to search for inappropriate items. Pens, pencils, tea bags, disposable razors, they were bagged and labeled. I couldn't fathom why they took her copy of *The Bell Jar*, until someone told me that it was written about the same hospital.

A month had passed. I had kissed her goodbye and hadn't heard a word from her since. I knew she was allowed to make phone calls, yet she never did. At least not to me. Her insurance was good for ninety days. I didn't know if she planned to stay for the entire time. I

was afraid I would never see her again. It hurt. Her brother had stopped talking to me, had moved in with his father after stealing most of the money from my savings account. I couldn't even get my youngest daughter to spend time with me. She brought friends home from school every day. She locked herself in her room. In a way, I deserved the silence from her.

A call from Steph finally came. I wasn't home to receive it. Something about *privs* and *visiting*. She wanted me to come on Tuesday night. I had left a message with some switchboard, confirming that I'd be there. Tonight was Tuesday and here I was.

"Excuse me. Are you here for someone?" A nurse smiled at me, but placed a restraining hand on my arm.

"Yes. Steph. Stephanie Monheim, my daughter." I didn't attempt to walk any further.

"She's expecting you. Follow me."

I followed her to a nurses' station. She took my purse and bag of books, and went for some type of visitor's pass. I sat down on a bench, not noticing the girl who sat next to me until she spoke.

"Hello." An accented voice drew my head to the right. I couldn't return the greeting. This girl, if she could be called that, was the most emaciated thing I had ever seen. In the hand she held toward me, I could see a pulse beating. I shrank back from it.

"I am Marissa. Are you coming to visit someone?"

She snapped me out of my stare.

"Oh, yes. I'm Ellen. Here to see Stephanie."

"Ah, Steph. She is a good friend of me." A smile lit up her face, and for a moment I could see a shadow of what she must have looked like once. I couldn't help it. I wanted to stand up and walk away from her. At her thinnest, when she refused to eat anything at all, Steph had never looked like this. I was afraid of what my daughter was going to look like now. Is this what the

hospital was doing to her, or had this girl come in here looking like this?

I stood, finally. I couldn't stand the smile that was on the girl's face the entire time. I stopped in front of some papers on the wall bearing little busses and the words *daily schedule*. I scanned for Steph's and found it quickly enough. Typical. Hers was in the brightest colors. She had everything written down, from showering, to taking a walk, to calling Jordan, the wonder boyfriend. *Mom visits*, was penned in also.

I remembered back to when she first started spending time with Jordan. It had been in December, five months earlier, right after she returned from college for winter break. She had met him through an old boyfriend, and had installed herself at his house almost immediately. It seemed so quick, but I didn't protest. She hadn't dated in a while and she was so unhappy. I thought he might be just what she needed. It made me happy, made things seem right, at least for a while.

She was returning for clothes about once a week, and had brought Jordan with her once. He was striking, tall with reddish hair. I liked his smile, even though he seemed uncomfortable being in the house with me. Fleeingly, I wondered if Steph had told him things about me that would make him uncomfortable, but I decided it was just the nerves of meeting his girlfriend's mother for the first time.

It was the second time she brought him home that I noticed they both gave off a strong smell of liquor. They appeared to be sober, but the smell was definitely there. Then Steph's father had commented on it also. They had stopped in to see him at his office. He told me, in the first civil conversation we had had in a long time, that she looked bloated. Her face was reddish. Between the two of us, we knew the signs of a drinking problem.

Shortly after that, I received a phone call from one of Steph's roommates in New York City. She wouldn't talk to me until I assured her that Steph was not at home. She had talked with her recently, and was worried. Steph was drinking in excess, she said, to the point of blacking and passing out. She and Jordan had been picked up by the police. They were on a beach, late at night in January, stripping to go for a swim. The roommate talked of bizarre sexual behavior. I didn't ask for details.

Drinking was something Steph never did, had never done. Her father and I were the ones with the problem, the ones who used to drink to numb the effects we had upon one another. Her little brother was the one who smashed cars. It didn't fit, didn't make sense. Neither did the fact that Steph had started to eat again, with no smells of vomit, or trips to the bathroom. It just didn't make any sense. Steph had never been a drinker.

Steph had always been our pride, the perfect one. She was the one who won awards throughout high school, the one with the 1400's on the SAT's, the one who made

Dean's List every semester. She had always been so open with me, so honest. When I confronted her with what her roommate had told me, she was enraged and full of denials.

She told me she felt great, that she wanted to return to school after break. She sobbed and yelled. She accused me of being unfair. She claimed Jordan was the only one who understood her, the only one who really loved her, and I was trying to come between the two of them because I was jealous.

Maybe I was jealous. I never figured it out. I snapped instead. I told her I didn't want her to live with me anymore. I said I couldn't handle the strain. It was brutal of me, but I meant it at the time. I got some type of strange satisfaction out of watching her run from the house, crying.

"Mrs. Monheim," the nurse called to me, pulling me from the flashback. "please stay here until Steph fetches you." She led me back towards the nurses' station and handed me my purse and the books, but not the bag I had carried the books in.

"I had to take the toenail clippers out of your bag. You can have them when you leave. Some of the patients, you know..." She let her voice trail off. "Anyway, I'll go get Stephanie."

From where the nurse had placed me, I could see a file with Steph's name on it in the nurses' station. I felt a strange sense of relief to see that it was no bigger or smaller than the others. Average size, average mental hospital patient.

"Hi, Mom." I turned, and there she was, wearing a shirt with a goofy face and Nuts emblazoned across the front. "What's up?"

"Hi, honey. How you doing?" *Keep it light, a little voice inside said, don't upset her. "I like your shirt."*

"Yeah? Jordan gave it to me yesterday." So it was Jordan already, and Steph letting me know that he had already been up to visit. Was it intentional?

I remembered Thanksgiving, when Steph came home weighing about one hundred pounds. She could barely walk. She was home for five days, and wore the same dress every day. It had a scoop neck, and showed her collarbones and the ribs in her chest. She would not speak about her weight, yet I knew then that the dress was intentional. The salad she carried to the dinner table was intentional, also. She looked better now. She had gained some weight back.

She motioned for me to follow and led me through a common room full of little tables. There was an enormous blackboard on one wall, full of names. I found hers. There were pieces of masking tape across from it, bearing things like *porch and bowl alone, ms to gym, and med center*. Diagonally across her space was another, longer piece of tape with *apr 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.*, written in red. Other names had the same tape.

Steph laughed when she saw me stopped in front of the board. "Yeah, I was SPR'd." She continued when she saw how confused I looked, "it means 'social privileges restricted'. I was caught smoking in the bathroom."

"Excuse me?" What was she talking about?
"You aren't allowed to smoke there. I did, so they restricted me to the hall for the afternoon."

"What are the other ones?" I'd noticed that some of the names had more or less pieces of tape.

"Those are 'privs'. You earn them as you go through the program. They mean you can go outside with an escort or by yourself, or off grounds, into town. The better behaved you are, the more you get." She gave a short laugh after this, almost a snort, and shook her head.

"Oh," I was still trying to digest what she said about smoking in the bathroom. Somehow, I didn't believe it. After those afternoons when I would come home from work to find pieces of partially digested food floating in the toilet, I was wary of bathroom stories. I could still hear the denials and excuses she would create when I would confront her. I tried so hard to believe her lies. It was easier than dealing with the fact that she was throwing up most of her food. As long as she denied it, it couldn't be true. We still couldn't call it bulimia, we still referred to it as "the eating thing".

Steph led me into a large family-type room, full of couches and chairs, with a television. There were other people in there, families, too. The t.v. was off.

"So, what did you bring me?" She reached for the books. I let her take them.

"Bukowski! You brought me Bukowski?" She looked shocked.

"Is that bad?" Confused again. Angry, too. Was she mocking me?

"I don't think they'll let me read them. Sort of like *The Bell Jar*. Bukowski's wonderful, I do love him, but he's a big drunk. They're already flipped over my drinking. I don't want to encourage them. I mean, thanks, but I don't think the books are mentally healthy."

"Oh." She was mocking me. "I'm sorry."

"No. Don't be. I am. Come on, Mom, lighten up. Hold them for me. I'll read them when I get out. The poetry looks wonderful."

"Are the flowers mentally healthy?"

"Yeah. They're beautiful. Thanks." She looked good. Happy. I don't know what I expected. Straight jackets?

"Is this the 'mom' I've heard so much about?" We both looked up as an older man approached. He was big, ruddy, with white hair and nicotine stains on his fingers and teeth. *Alcoholic* flashed through my head.

"Yeah, Steph laughed again. It was good to hear. Mom, this is Steven. Steven, this is my mother, Ellen."

We shook hands and Steven sat a few seats away. He turned the t.v. on to a hockey game. He made me

uncomfortable. I was afraid he was going to talk to us again and I didn't want him to.

"So," I broke the silence, "have you heard from your father?"

"No. Does he know I'm here?" Her face closed up.

"I suppose not. Unless your brother told him." Her brother. As if he had spoken to me during the past three months.

We both turned to the television in the silence that followed. Hockey. We both hated hockey.

"Who was that thin girl? The Italian one?" It seemed like safe territory.

"That's Marissa. Would you believe she weighs 62 pounds? She's a doctor, too. She still won't eat. They're going to move her soon." She related this information like it was a weather report, with her head still turned toward the television.

"Move her?"

"Yeah, to a locked unit. Since she got here, three of the E.D. patients have stopped eating."

"E.D.?"

"Eating disorder patients, that's what they call us. It's like a competition where some of them battle to be the thinnest. Marissa's the best at it so they're going to take her out of here, put her somewhere with no E.D. people."

"Oh." It seemed like the saying of the night. All this lingo was foreign to me. Steph seemed so sure of herself here. It was her territory and she knew it. She was using it against me, exacting some weird type of revenge. I heard her voice screaming at me a few months earlier, the night her roommate had called.

"Fine. You want me out. I'm gone. At least at Jordan's, I don't have a fucking conscience standing over me all the time, telling me what I have and don't have, and what I can and can't do."

She had slammed out then. I hadn't heard from her for weeks, and then it was just a card in the mail telling me that she was back in New York at school. The next time she spoke was the day she had called, strung out on coke, telling me she was dropping out and would I come pick her up. Of course I said yes, but a little part of me wanted to tell her to call the wonder boyfriend.

"Are all the patients here E.D.?" I tried again.

"No." She continued to face the T.V. "Some are alcoholics who were in the substance abuse unit, some are just depressed, some were sexually abused, OCD's-oh, sorry-obsessive-compulsive disorders. It's mostly E.D. though. Hey rides horses where I used to ride."

"Oh, wow." Maybe this was as difficult for her as it was for me. We sat in silence.

"Steph," the nurse from before stood in front of us.

"You've got a phone call. Do you want me to take a message?"

"Do you know who it is?"

"It sounds like Jordan."

"Really?" She jumped up, her face breaking into a smile. "Yeah, I'll take it. Be right back." She yelled it over her shoulder as she ran from the room and left me with skinny girls and an overweight man named Steven.

I couldn't understand why Jordan made her so happy, but he did. I remembered when she first told me about him, over dinner one night, and the poem she had written about him. She had told me about walks on the beach, and giving each other pretty rocks, and cutting his hair, and the guinea pig they had bought together.

I didn't know when things had started to change, when she couldn't split her time between us any longer. Her friends stopped calling her at my house. Her mail stopped, also. By the time she left for good, all her clothes, books, and records were gone, too. She'd replaced me, I didn't know what he had, but it was something I didn't have, couldn't compete with.

"Sorry." She sat back down. I hadn't heard her come back into the room.

"How is he?" It seemed the natural thing to say. "You're still together?"

"Yeah. He's good. He's going to work now. I sent him a book and he just called to thank me for it." She was still smiling, and looking off, not at anything in particular.

She looked at me after a while. I think she was trying to say she was sorry. I smiled back at her, but it was difficult. I didn't want her to know that I was upset about Jordan's calling, but I was.

"Has he been up to see you?"

"Yeah. He comes up a few times a week. It's kind of tough for him, with school and work. We went into the city last weekend for a few hours. It's nice."

"Oh." That saying again. Why? That little voice in my head kept asking me that question. Why did he get to come up when she waited a month to call me, and even now it was strained and awkward?

"Steph." The nurse was back again. "I'm afraid your guest will have to go. It's time for your staff talk."

"Okay. Um. Mom..."

"Well, if the nurse says so," I began, trying to make it easier. She had a guilty look on her face and she was twisting her rings. She did it whenever she got nervous. She said it was habit, not anxiety, but I didn't believe it.

"I'll walk you to your car."

I stood up and she followed. We walked back into the common room. She wrote on the board, beside her name, *went to car with mother*.

"Who's the nurse in charge," she yelled out to no one in particular.

"Erica," voices came from the nurses' station and various other doors.

"She's upstairs doing checks," a passing nurse told us. I had seen more nurses than patients in the unit.

"Be right back." Steph ran towards the stairway. I

was left staring at yet another wall covered with the names of patients. It was like some type of test. I hesitated a moment, waiting to see that no one was looking, and then located my daughter's name. It was there, on the top row. The word *contract* was typed across the top. Something that looked like an outline followed.

I began to read, not sure if I wanted to read what followed, not sure if Steph had left me at this spot on purpose. The first heading began with *I have had an e.d. for eight years*, followed by details of how she planned to remedy it. *Overcome my fear of the scale, eat three balanced meals a day, talk it over with someone if I think I'm going to purge.*

My father is an alcoholic, was typed next to the letter B. I skipped that one and found myself following C. Somehow, I knew it would be there, just as I knew the part about her eating and the part about her father would be there. It still shocked me. My hand automatically reached for the cigarettes in my sweater pocket, even though I knew I couldn't smoke.

My mother has a drinking problem. I have turned her into superwoman. I could feel my face flushing. I read on, knowing the details would follow. I must take my mother off the pedestal I have put her on, I will invite her to visit me here, I will let myself get angry at her and let her know if she does this.

I pulled my eyes away, forcing myself to look towards the nurses' station. Marissa was still sitting there. I couldn't look at her again. If I did, I knew I would cry. I was helpless, felt violated. She had put me into her contract, whatever it was. I was posted on the wall of a mental hospital, where everyone who happened through could know about me. I wanted to leave immediately. The friendly smiles from the patients and nurses seemed to hold something more now. Steph had no right, no right to list me as a problem. No right to attach a drinking problem to me, to blame me for her problems. I never asked to be put on a pedestal.

My eyes were drawn again to the contract, straining for the chance to glimpse into her mind, into what she wouldn't let me see. *I am in love for the first time in my life, was listed next to D. I have trouble dealing with the feelings I am having, I cannot express them to Jordan, and my fear of losing him causes me to pull away and keep my feelings inside.*

Inside myself, I began to scream at this. I wanted to scrawl on the sheet, write the things she left out. Things like, *I have developed a drinking problem since I started dating the wonder-boyfriend and I have cut my mother off from my life since I started living with him and I can't possibly be in love at age 20 and this is ridiculous.*

Seething, I was seething, and I felt trapped. The hand that touched my arm made me jump. It was Steph, out of breath.

"Come on, I have five minutes." She smiled up at me.

"It'll be great to get outside. It's been a few days."

I didn't respond, but let her lead me out the door to the gravel drive where my Honda was parked. I opened the door and turned to her.

"Well," she began first, "thanks for coming."

"No need to thank me." I knew it sounded cold. "It was nothing."

"Oh. Anyway, I am getting better." She wanted my approval. I could see it in her eyes. I nearly laughed, just to hurt her, at how absurd the word 'better' sounded, as if she were being treated for the flu. I pictured her face, shocked and hurt, if I were to grab her by the shoulders and scream at her that she was mentally ill, she was in the hospital. You don't get better. I didn't do it, I don't think I really wanted to.

"I'm sure you are." I slid behind the wheel of the car and started it up.

"It seems like I haven't driven in years," she was looking at me sitting there, in the driver's seat.

"Come on now, you've only been here a little while. You'll drive again soon." I didn't add that I didn't even know where her car was. Jordan's, of course.

"Yeah, I guess so. Well, bye, and thanks again."

"Bye." I put the car in gear and pulled away. I could see her standing there, watching me go.

"There just wasn't anything else to say," I assured myself. I looked back again to see if she was crying like I was, but it was too dark. I saw her form turn and walk back up the steps into the house.

Cornucopia

by Gary J. Whitehead

And then it was raining. In one flash drops seemed to stain the windshield, and in the field all the scarecrows looked too real. You shivered and I could feel it move the car. Or it might have been the wind, for whole corn plants were flying past by then, bouncing like bodies across the hood of the car, and I wondered, "are they?"

When I woke to the feel of naked steel against the nape of my neck, I shivered. I discovered a sliver of you under my thumbnail, so I bit it out and chewed it. It tasted like the liver my grandmother would hide in her chicken soup, but when the cop said what happened I spit it into my lap. And the end of his story shocked me.

He said they never found you. Said they felt the shiver of squealing rubber from another town away, but when they finally found me by following the skid marks, the only thing in the passenger seat was a map of Kansas, an ear of unhusked corn chewed through to the cob, and a goat's horn overflowing with flowers and fruit.

Making Soup

Then it's snowing outside, white swirls going by the window, and I stop chopping onions for a minute to study them and cry. I drop a slab of butter in the pan, turn the stove on low, and as the yellow block becomes a puddle, I add the onions, little translucent grins and frowns. Crushing black peppercorns I think of how my mother made me soup and sandwiches on Saturdays, clam chowder with grilled cheese, minestrone with tuna, Venus deMilo with whatever, and I think of how I will never again sit in the cellar watching cartoons like Johnny Quest, the smell of soup the only thing stopping suture, releasing me from the TV. The image melts away like the flakes of snow on the windowpane, and I see us now in the future. I will never make soup so strong. One works a long time, watches many grandmothers to cook a broth strong enough to embroider itself so thick in the cloth of a memory. And alone here in this cold kitchen the thought of her warms me like soup, melts the cold drift of years. In the glass I see myself, a semblance, making her again, making soup and tears.

Fish On

Heading back to Martha's Vineyard after an afternoon of sharking, having hoped for mako, but having caught only one eight-foot lazy blue shark lured by rotten mackerel, and such a dose of sun that I hear the countless silent drowned voices of the sea, we stop at the rips to let Laurel catch a bluefish.

"Catch a bluefish, will you?" calls the mate. He rigs two jigs for trawling, and two light rods for casting plugs from the bow. In the crow's nest Dave is bawling about a school, and Johnny, struggling like a man punch-drunk to stand up, casts, reels, calls, "fish on!" with a grin.

With a grin like a Great White the mate wipes his wet brow, claims how he's never seen stripers hit like this. All the time rigging, rigging lines, he chants in a low rip, poetic, of fish caught or lost, like addiction. Then Rich too calls "fish on!" and I hear the shriek of my reel.

My reel rips, the drag squealing like a power saw, and I slip on the floor wet with chum guts and water, grab the thick pole, the reel hung below like balls, and dig the butt of it into my gut. With two tugs I set the hook, and she runs in an arc around the boat, pulls for her life.

Her life in my small hands, I heave with all my might on the pole, and like a sapling out of earth, I pull the striper from the sea. She dances on the line like life and I want to let her go, but the mate appears beside me, says it's a taker, and gaffs it. He laughs, then we're all laughing and casting.

All laughing and casting, catching plentiful fish, I still wish for more. I think of fish and loaves of bread, wonder at my sunburnt friends, at the countless silent drowned voices in the sea, at the countless silent fish caught by countless fishermen at these rips heading back to Martha's Vineyard.

To Sarah E.

by Laura Moran

Time non-existent
Swimming in blood, breathing water
Number now in days. Complete
In creation of fingernails and nerves
Spinal cord and pulse,
Your infant hands will
Stretch and curl and grasp
For lined walls in
A new surrounding without.
A cry of respiration trumpets
Your entrance into this world,
Hails your acceptance of oxygen
Flooding your perfect lungs.

While you are still as soft as shells,
I fight the need to gather
All objects tactile and didactic--
Rose petals, silver jacks, copper pennies,
Graphite leads, ant hill sand, peeled grapes,
Crawling starfish, a new leaf
From the stem of my life
And press, each by each, singularly
In the cushion of your palm.
Knowing you'll remember as soon as forget,
Other images capturing your attention,
My only wish is that in forgetting,
One day, you'll rediscover the waxy smooth
Weight of a jonquil in your rough hand,
And remember me.

Dandelions

Sometimes poems fit like petals.
Even thistles have color.
Dandelions must be the best poems--
Weeds to clear away,
They never really leave.
Buried deeply grounded,
Anchored and branching,
Soil, air and water to grow.
(I need those too, and have them).

I will pull you up little delicacies,
Hold you in my hand, and
As a girl, pick you apart
For love and play.
Each by each will be my poems.
Denatured, so will you and I
Join in chains, roll in and smell
The sweet timothy, crab grass and clover.
Our hands wet with sticky milkweeds,
Scatter seeds, sing with raucous cicadas.

After, we'll sleep drugged in the sun.
Ants crawl in tunnels of our toes.
Eating from the earth,
Sassafras, blue and raspberries,
Pepperbush to sweeten,
Ramshorns too sour.
In our joy, a silence creeps.
Dead, pregnant.
In the stillness
A scratching from under soil
As souls part, fetal, barely green,
Head to the sun,
Leaves respiring in
One golden cry...
...a dandelion.

"It's Not Just a Job"

by Arthur M. Levesque

(King Henry VIII's Royal Executioner to his apprentice on the day of Anne Boleyn's decapitation)

Step lively, hurry up, come on, my lad,
Yer the slowest apprentice what ever I've had!
It's as sure a thing as yer death or yer taxes,
We can't do the job 'til we've sharpened our axes!
There be too many stairs in this bloomin' high tower,
Gettin' me bones up 'em always takes me an hour.
Put down them tools, sit wit' me and rest,
And I'll tell ye how I became the King's best...

Me old man would be proud to see me today,
Carryin' on the family business this way.
He was a torturer, one of the tops,
There weren't not a man not afraid of me Pops.
He were innovative, that's why he were good,
He'd try out new things on his kids, that he would.
But I unnerstood, though I was but a pup,
And vowed to be Torturer when I grew on up.

Yer prob'ly wond'r'in why I'm Executioner, then,
But it takes too much patience to torture most men.
And me, always wantin' to finish things quick,
Figger's Executioner'd be the best job to pick.
But me Pop was supportive, even up to the day,
After a failure, the King decreed he must pay.
The King himself made me Executioner Royal
When me Pop's execution showed 'im I was loyal.

I admit I'm uncomfortable killing his wives,
Whatever they done, it ain't worth their lives.
But I still gotta swing when they sticks out their necks,
For the day I refuse is the day that I'm next.
So I carry on, in all honor and purity,
For competent work guarantees job security.
The King himself took me aside and said, "Bert,
Do a clean job this time so me lover don't hurt."

Knowin' the King still cares for his queens
Shows me even he knows what family means.
He's a ruddy good fellow, a bit of all right,
I still can't believe how he spoke to me tonight!
So pick up them axes, and grab our tools too,
How dare ye sit there when we've work to do?
Mowe yer feet, Johnny, yer so slow, I swear,
But once we finish this job let's get us some beer.

Only Human

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Because You Have To

by David Malley

I squinted at the alarm clock and turned it off. "What time is it, Pete?" my older brother asked from across the room, his voice muffled by a pillow.

"Only six-thirty. Go back to sleep."

My brother, who was four years older than I was, had to get up earlier that year to catch the bus that went to the junior high. The school year had started only three weeks before, and he wasn't used to getting up in the morning yet. He didn't appreciate my waking him twenty minutes early, but the football players who ran across his blanket were soon slowly falling and rising again.

I liked to get up early on school days. If I wasn't dreaming, the alarm didn't bother me at all. It was a welcome sound. The morning seemed to be the only time of day that someone wasn't watching over me, telling me what to do.

But I was in the third grade now and, over the summer, I had become an altar boy. Sister Mary Eileen showed us how to do everything and how to stay out of Father Manigan's way. About once a month we got to serve seven o'clock mass for a whole week. If we were lucky, once in a while we got to miss a half day of school to serve a funeral. I hadn't done that yet and was a little worried, but my brother said you couldn't see anything. Just a metal box that was real shiny, like the hood of a car. He said people cried, though.

I served mass the very first week. My father dropped me off at the church and after mass I walked down the street to school. There was a half hour between the end of mass and homeroom. I could stop at the fire station and look through the windows, or stop at the waterfall and throw stuff down into the white foam, or I could stop at the bakery and spend my lunch money on donuts or cinnamon rolls. I liked that, being able to do whatever I wanted. I liked donuts and cinnamon rolls, too. Sister

Mary Eileen told us during the summer that even if we weren't serving mass we could still go, just to pray. I didn't really pray much, but I went to mass all the time.

After mass on Thursday, the week before, one of the old ladies who sat in the back of the church fell down on the sidewalk. I always left the church kind of slow, to give the old ladies time to get across the street, or down the sidewalk. If I got too close, they might talk to me. From the steps of the church, I watched the old lady stumble and fall on the other side of the street, her arms and legs flying around like she stepped on a bee's nest. For a minute there, I didn't think she was really going to fall, the way she just kept spinning her arms around. It would have been funnier if Manigan had come out in time to see it with me. She didn't say or do anything and just stayed there on her hands and knees. I started down the sidewalk on the church side of the street, looking around to see who was going to help her. There was no one else around, I realized, and I couldn't help looking across the street at her. Did she see me?

"Are you okay?" I asked, looking down at her.

"Could you help me up?" she held both hands out to me and I took hold of them. At the last joint, her fingers bent away from the thumbs at an angle. She was light and, once on her feet, brushed off the front of her old lady coat.

"Thank you very much young man," she said weakly. "You alright?" I asked again.

"Oh, yes, thank the Lord," she looked at the new scuff marks on her shoes.

"I could walk with you a little, just in case."

"I think I'll be just fine."

"That's good. Good-bye."

"Yes, good-bye. Thank you."

I took off down the street, glad to have made such

an easy escape. I should have just looked at the sidewalk and kept walking, then I wouldn't have had to touch her. Those fingers, all bent, felt empty, just mush and bone. Can you catch old lady stuff by touching? They are sick all the time. She would have been there all morning, looking at the sidewalk. Good Samaritan, I guess. I didn't keep walking. Still have time for the bakery, even.

The next day, just before mass started, she walked down from the back of the church and stepped into my pew. There was so much empty space in the church, why did she have to sit in my pew? She walked along, squinting at me, smiling yellow, getting closer to my side. Is she going to sit right next to me? Does she think I like her or something, just because I helped her get up? I oughta tell her to go sit somewhere else. So much empty space.

"Excuse me young man," she said, looking down at me.

"Yes?"

"Thank you so much for helping me yesterday."

"You're welcome," I looked at the altar.

"Not every body would have stopped to help me like that and I wanted to give you something."

The old lady handed me a folded five-dollar bill with her crooked fingers. She started for the back of the church when the bell rang and Father Manigan came out of the sacristy.

My brother rolled over and mumbled something. I crawled to the end of my bed and opened the shade. The sun made me squint and I couldn't even see the house on the other side of the street.

"John?" I opened the window and the cold air made me shiver and want to get back under the blankets.

"Hey, John."

"Mmmmm."

"If someone gave you a lot of money, for no reason really, what would you do with it?"

"Mmmmm."

"What would you do with it? John?"

"With what?"

"The money."

"Mmmmm."

The sounds of my parents in the kitchen reminded me of the time. I got dressed and went to the bathroom.

"Good morning, Peter," my mother said, "going to mass again this morning?"

"I've been every day except Saturday for almost three weeks." I sat down at the kitchen table, combing my wet hair.

"Well," my father shoved a piece of toast into his mouth and slurped his tea. "You ought to take a day off now and then, you need your sleep. Don't want you falling asleep during recess."

"I don't fall asleep during recess, Dad. I fall asleep during Math."

"Do you want some toast?" my mother asked.

"No, I'm not hungry," I poured myself some orange juice while my stomach rumbled.

"That explains that grade you brought home last week." My father got up from the table and went into his study.

"I'm only jokin', Dad."

"You never eat breakfast anymore, Peter." She opened her pocketbook and put lunch money on the table for me and my brother. "You must get uncomfortable not eating anything until lunch."

"No, I make it till lunch okay, Mom. Besides, I can't eat if I'm gonna go to communion."

"I know that," she said, "but you ought to skip communion on school days and eat a good breakfast."

Skip communion? Could you go to mass and just skip communion? They rang the bell and everything, and then everybody went to communion. I thought you had to.

"The only people who go to seven o'clock mass are old ladies and nuns." My father came back into the kitchen with his briefcase. "You ought to get more sleep in the morning and pay closer attention during math."

"My God, Danny, leave him alone. In a few years he won't even want to go on Sundays. I can't even get his brother up for school."

Not go on Sundays? You had to go on Sundays. It was a law. A law of the church...but still a law. If you didn't go on Sundays, they would excommunicate you. Mandy McCormick said that meant you couldn't talk to any Catholics, not even your family. Would they be allowed to talk to me? I should ask Sister Mary Eileen.

"I'm going out to start the car." He opened the door, "Finish your juice and let's go, Pete."

I pulled my sweater over my head and kissed my mother. It was ten of seven when I opened the door and the sound of my brother's blaring clock radio came down the hallway.

"Hey! Whaddaya doin' leavin' this window open?!" It's freezing in here! Peter!

"Bye, Mom." I shut the door behind me.

My father listened to the news on the radio as we drove into the sun. He pulled down his visor. I squinted through the glare, barely able to make out the shapes of the cars which passed on the other side of the road.

"You know," he said, turning off the radio, "you don't have to go to church every morning if you don't want to."

"I know." I felt inside my pocket to be sure I had taken my lunch money off the table. The four quarters made a grinding sound as I rubbed them together.

"Why do you go every day?"

"I... I just like to." I shielded my eyes from the glare and looked at the side of his head.

"Well," he said as the car came to a stop in front of the church, "I know you started doing this every morning because you wanted to, but if you feel like sleeping some mornings, that's okay too. As long as you go to mass on the days you have to, you're all set. The rest of the week, you can go if you want to, or not go, it's up to you, okay?"

"Okay."

I touched just the surface of the holy water with my fingers, avoiding the stuff that was always growing in the bottom of the bowl, and blessed myself. No one was sitting on the right-hand side of the church and I walked towards the front. My father was right, six old ladies and three nuns, including the old lady who fell. Ryan Massalo, who was lighting the candles on the altar, yawned loudly and then smiled at me. I waved to him as I entered my pew and knelt. On the wall above me was the Eleventh Station of the Cross. The caption read, *Jesus is Nailed to the Cross*. Sister Mary Eileen says that's the only reason he was born. I looked down the wall to the Twelfth Station. Its caption read, *Jesus Dies on the Cross*. He sure did what he set out to do.

A bell rang and Father Manigan came out of the sacristy, Massalo and the other altar boy behind him. He stopped behind the altar and looked out at the old ladies and nuns.

"The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you," he bellowed at us.

"And also with you," we mumbled back.

I looked up at Jesus being nailed to the cross by an evil looking man with muscular calves and a metal helmet. He didn't look very peaceful.

Underneath the altar, I could see Massalo's feet. He was standing on one side of Father Manigan, and his new white sneakers stuck out next to Father's big black shoes that zip up the side. They were the kind of sneakers I wanted for the start of school, but my mother wouldn't let me get them. She said the ones I'd gotten three weeks before were just fine. They weren't it. They were still new and everything, but she hadn't even let me pick them out. They were jerk sneakers. Ralph Gordo had the same kind. The first day of school, in homeroom, Miss Woods called his name to come up and get his free lunch token, and he had on the same sneakers as me. Gordo was a free lunch jerk. Massalo got whatever he wanted. His family was rich.

"The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want."

I watched the nuns who sat in the front row on the left hand side of the church, and stood, sat, and knelt when they did. The five dollar bill in my left sneaker felt strange. I shifted my weight to the other foot and my mind drifted down the street to the bakery.

Be able to get donuts and still have money for lunch all week. That's what I'll do with it, be a good week. Monday, won't be any old day-old donuts on sale. Powdered jelly donut? Not with this dark sweater on. Cinnamon roll? Milk, fortycents. Keep it to a dollar a day. Chocolate covered? No, cinnamon roll. Cinnamon roll and chocolate milk. Should be warmer after mass. I'll stop at the waterfall.

"Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you."

The bell. Transfiguration. Sister Mary Eileen explained that again two weeks ago. God migrates into the bread, and then into us. Not really bread. Stale, tasteless little thing. Does God migrate if he doesn't hold it up like that? Like the biscuits they give us with beef stew at school. Could they use donuts instead? Guess God wouldn't care if he were in a donut instead of a little biscuit. It dissolves on your tongue before you can crunch it though, every time. I don't have to go up there and get one if I don't want to. Every one else is. Never feel it, migration.

I fell asleep on my bed, reading a comic book, after I had been home from school for about an hour. I was dreaming about Mandy McCormick when my brother got home from football practice. It was wierd because, in the dream, I liked her. He turned on the light and threw his gym bag at my head.

"Tuh?" The overhead light made me squint as I looked around the room.

"Time for dinner, moron," he sat down on his bed and turned the pages of the notebook he was holding.

Outside, it was almost completely dark and the dog across the street was barking. I crawled to the end of my bed, rubbed my eyes, and opened the window. I pulled a pillow across my lap to cover my thing, which was poking out under my pants. The first few times my thing did that I got nervous, but it always went away. I could hear somebody talking and pouring dry dog food into a dish, but I couldn't make out the dog or the person.

"What were you saying this morning about money, anyway?" John asked, looking up from his notebook.

"Money? I didn't say anything about money." I looked back into the room, squinting, trying to get used to the light.

"You wanted to know how to spend some money or something."

"You must've been dreaming, I know... I'd know how to spend money if I had any."

"You've got a bone! What were you dreaming about?" He pointed at my pants.

"I do not! Shut up." I turned back to the window.

"You're probably stealing from the poor box every morning at church."

There's no poor box. There's lots of boxes, like at the candles. But I've never seen a poor box.

"Let's go guys," my father yelled from the dinner table.

"Put the window down, huh Pete?"

"You should be studying or doing something outside in the afternoon, Pete, not sleeping when it's a nice sunny day." My father handed me the potatoes.

"I guess."

"I've got a scrimmage after school tomorrow, Pete." My brother handed me the chicken. "Are you gonna come down to the field and watch me?"

"Sure." I reached for the bread. "Are you any good?"

"I didn't know you were playing tomorrow," my father said, "I'll leave work early and pick you up at school, Pete."

"Okay."

"I need some canned peas or something for the football team's Thanksgiving food drive, Mom."

"Already? God, the leaves haven't even started to fall yet."

"It's less than two months away." My father shook his head. The holidays are coming and it's a good time to help the poor."

"I'll go to the store after dinner and pick up some things for you to take, John."

"How come I never see any poor people?" I asked.

"You see them, dear. You just don't know they're poor."

"Oh." I pressed my left foot down hard against the floor, trying to stop the itching.

I went back to sleep on Tuesday because I didn't want to walk to the bakery in the rain. On Wednesday no one was sitting at the front of the church on the left hand side. I looked up at the Third Station of the Cross. Its caption read, *Jesus Falls the First Time*. How many times did he fall? Pillars blocked my view as I searched the walls of the church for the answer. The bell rang and Father Manigan came out of the sacristy.

I've got four dollars left, plus my lunch money. Wonder if she's poor? Could spend it all today. Five hundred day-old donuts...no, fifty day-old donuts. Fifty's not so many. All I did was help her up. Two nuns. Sister Mary Eileen's not here this morning. I wonder if catechism will be cancelled?

"Let us proclaim the mystery of faith."

Five old ladies. I could buy everyone a day-old donut and still be able to buy forty-three day-old donuts for myself. I could buy eight cinnamon rolls and two day-old donuts, or six cinnamon rolls and twelve day-old donuts. I felt the dollar bills in my shoe, irritating the bottom of my

foot, making it sweat, and rubbed the quarters in my pocket together. What about milk?

"Lord, I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word, and I shall be healed." Father Manigan, the old ladies, nuns, and altar boys said in unison.

Walking back from communion, I could see the Seventh Station of the Cross: *Jesus Falls the Second Time*.

Could I eat forty-three donuts? Forty-three day-old donuts? In a week? In two weeks? I could try... They'd be lots a days old by the time I finished. That'd be a sin. Gluttony. Jeeze, he's taking a long time today.

"The mass is ended, go in peace."

"Thanks be to God," we all replied.

I waited for everyone to leave, then listened until I heard the altar boys go out the side door. The sacristy door was open, but I knocked anyway.

"Why Peter." Father Manigan turned to face me.

"What can I do for you this morning?"

"I was wondering if I could ask you a question, Father." I smelled the blood of Christ on his breath.

"And that question is?" He continued folding his garments.

"What kind of sin is gluttony...? I mean, how bad is it?"

"Well," He put his hand on my shoulder. "What grade are you in, Peter?"

"Third."

"Oh, then you wouldn't have covered this yet in your catechism."

"I guess not."

"Gluttony, Peter, means that a person eats or drinks much more than they need to in order to survive, to live. It's a sin to do this because, among other reasons, there are people in this world who can't get enough to eat or drink. They starve to death or die of thirst."

"Poor people?"

"Yes. So, it wouldn't be right for someone to make a pig of themselves when others were starving."

"No."

"What's worse, this kind of sin can lead to worse sins. That's why gluttony is one of the Seven Deadly Sins." "Deadly?" I leaned to the right, holding my left shoe just off the floor. The burning itch inside my sneaker felt like standing barefoot on the driveway in the summer.

"Do you understand what I've said?"

"Yes, thank you Father." I heeded for the door. I limped to the front of the church, sat down, and pulled off my shoe, fishing out the four dollar bills. I still didn't see any poor box. The candles sat on a stand, beside me, in rows. Most of them were already lit and, standing over them, I squinted as the heat of the flames touched my eyes. The dollar bills needed to be folded before they could be slipped into the cross-shaped slot of the offering box. I stood there for a minute, looking at the flames, listening to the grinding sound from my pocket as I

David Malley

rubbed the quarters together. I put my sneaker back on, cool from the air of the church, and started for the front door without lighting a candle. At the back of the church, I noticed the Ninth Station of the Cross. Its caption read, *Jesus Falls the Third Time*.

I sat on one of the benches at the waterfall after I left the church, glad that the money was gone, but hungry. Maybe I should have just put three dollars in the box. Could I get a dollar back? Couldn't fit my hand through

the slot. It's good though, won't be a glutton and die of sin. I walked to the railing and watched the water crash onto the foam. Free lunch Gordo was trying to sell his token yesterday, for fifty cents. Hate to get too close to him with the same sneakers. Day-old donut and milk, token fifty cents. I did the right thing, won't even have to mention it in confession. Still time for the bakery, talk to that jerk Gordo before homeroom. I started off, along the lake, squinting down the sidewalk as the sun bounced off the water.

Lobsters and Philosophers

by Christopher Mayo

Lobsters curl like pillbugs, their swizzle
Stick antennae circle in short loops--
They are deep crustacean red, and white
With mottled brine stains, their claws
Have grown domestic rubber bands.

Black fuzzy marble line the bottom, and
The backdrop of the tank is painted--
Seaweed and rocks and wavy lines
Through the blue, so we know it's water,
So we know the lobsters feel at home.

Their eyes project like black pencil erasers,
Their club-footed claws, their segment tails,
Their several legs, each with a thousand feet,
Their delicate swaying feather mouths:
One is Nietzsche; God has got him by the back.

The Kind

(For Sharon Olds)

by Jim Dowling

Concern presses your voice gently
To our foreheads as if to tell
If we are warm. You shake your slim
Inquisitive fingers (their oval nails
Like beads of water) to stir away
The tin reflection balanced
In the clear plastic cup.
Your face is not made up; your hair
Not dyed, but hiding behind its
Camouflage pattern of years --
Old black, new white, and gray...
You could dissolve in any crowd
Without the crowd noticing. You
Dressed all in black, but your scarf
Holds onto its yellow and bright green
In case you were placed by a vase
Or a painting. A plastic clip grips
The hair that wants to drip over your eyes,
Drop its curtain between you and your words,
Your words and us, between you and us.
You can tell you had to be the kind
Of little girl who had to play hide
And seek alot, who could attach
Herself to anything, nearly disappear,
If only you hadn't felt the hot flushed
Face of someone who had to be **it**. You were
Not able to help yourself. You found yourself
Offering a soft cough, a discreetly cleared throat --
You always had to give yourself away.

Night Winter

April retreats from the east.
The crocus is the first to go.
Now tulips. Now daffodils...
Everything is growing backward.
The birds understand and fall
Silent in the south of night.
Snow appears, flake by blinking
Flake, but doesn't fall. It hangs
Frozen in unreachable air, waiting...
Windows close. Furnaces ignite.
The people have withdrawn indoors.
Budding trees, against the sky,
Become round-tipped skeletal hands,
Shadows of their ice-storm light
Groping where their sun would be,
As the wind shakes them cold.

Night into Morning

This is the night my father died
For me. My half-sister, who I met
Once, lost him a few days ago.

I stopped seeing him at seven,
So the family in the paper
Decided to leave my name out.

I have already missed the wake.
The funeral is in the morning:
I can be cold or unwelcome.

Gas stations used to give away
These glasses for nothing, for saving,
Making sets. I have only one.

I think about my father's face.
Drinking and straining to remember,
I see only paper airplanes.

He taught me how to make them fly
So fast, all I could see was the blur
They'd cut in the air where they'd been.

I leave the glass beside my desk.
No need to wash it now. Tomorrow,
At work, it will wait with my coat.

When everyone leaves, I will go
To the river. The glass will carve high
And far in the air as I turn.

Walking back fast from the water,
I won't watch where it falls, or listen
For any sound of breaking glass.

