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1994 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

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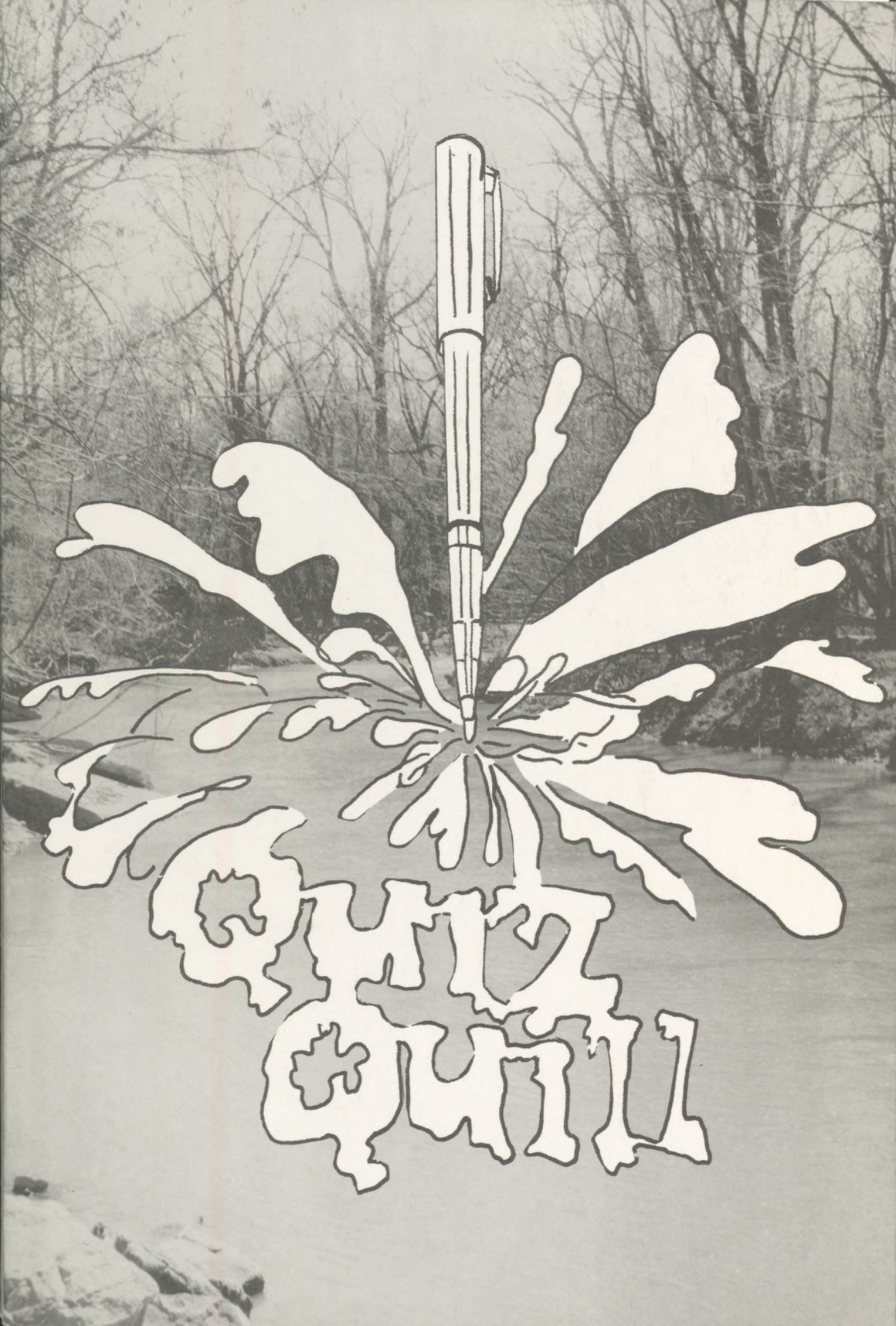


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Quiz and Quill

Spring 1994

This edition of the *Quiz and Quill* reflects the many changes that we have made this year. We hope the new format will encourage more students to submit their works in the upcoming years.

This edition also began Dr. Rittenhouse's endeavors into the advisory position. Throughout the year, he has managed to collaborate meetings, notes, and all the other technical aspects like learning PageMaker® (for which we are very proud of his patience).

1994 marked the 75th anniversary of the *Quiz and Quill*. In commemoration of our anniversary an alumni poetry reading was held in the Philomathean Room. The reading illustrated how the love of writing and reading literature can exist from generation to generation. After the reading, we, the students, had a chance to discuss the history of the literary magazine with its earlier members; this gave us inspiration for keeping the tradition alive.

I will be passing the "*Quill*" onto the assistant editor, Heather Spessard because I will be transferring next year. I wish her and the staff the best of luck. Enjoy this year's BIG edition.

Editors

E-mae Holmes, **editor**

Heather Spessard, **assistant editor**

Dr. Wayne Rittenhouse, **advisor**

Staff

Adam Ellis

Chris Grigsby

Steven Post Hitchcock

Shasta Hochstetler

Sonya Parry

Jessica Sykes

Mike Tichy

Bryan Worra

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Epiphany

I spent a lifetime the scholar in searching;
 Drunk upon my solitude,
 A glass bottle of academic pursuit.
Lifting my lips to drink of the elixirs
 Transient restorations,
 My search never over,
 My thirst never slaked.
I danced in the halls like a dervish
 Seeking the face of the father.
 I wept in the graves of my city
 Seeking the heart of my brother.
I slept in the chambers of my peers
Seeking the fevered dreams of the mystics.
 My mother would barely know me.
My face was engraved with grim, tired furrows
 And my arts left me as punishment
 Leaving me a yoke of heartless notes
Cast down onto paper by my monstrous, uncaring claw
 Unveiling my heels like poor Achilles.
 The doctors could do nothing.
 Their antidotes could only stall the grave.
 The priests could do nothing.
They could only sing criticisms to soothe the guilty.
 The lawyers could do nothing
Except prescribe blind justice, who had turned to harlotry.
 I was shocked into travel.
I crossed worlds by every path and means.
Buffeted to foreign shores and exotic altars,
 I was a leaf upon the sea,
 Fragile and fallen from the tree
My veins and ribs clutching to my flesh
 That had worn itself thin in my quest.
My face felt the storm and the moon
Soiled through the pores by my travels.
 To crush me or tear me apart
 Required no great effort.
 No struggle would ensue.
I was borne by waves through the night

Clinging to anything in sight of the debilitating search.
A kind soul carried me, once, beneath his boot
To a creaking tavern. Perhaps he wrote of me,
Or drank a last draught in my memory.
My mouth dried and crumbled away, some short time
After that, when I had come to rest upon the final shore,
Stopped with dust, split open and naked to the world
In curiosity,
A final teaching aid to aspiring children
Filled with the transient beauty
Of the maple seed pod.

Bryan Worra

Paradise Road Blues Section 43

The road to paradise is untraveled by men in white suits with blue coattails. After leaving the Renoir museum I met a man who said he had traveled a gargantuan trail from paradise and back. He wore a black suit with a blood red hat. He offered me a vial of wine that was tainted with green leprechaun blood. He said that it was the cure, the medicine of the blue, loose-shirted, surgery doctor with his stethoscope probing old women that suffer the disease of birthing too many farm children.

The rain pours out of a pitcher of clouds that hurl over the winds blowing south to the doorway of the crow that flies Paradise Road direct. Driving Paradise Road past people in jogging shorts that are too small to hold their golden buns of rainbows that they have managed to run underneath. The tint of red crawls over the horizon like a baby gurgling over the slobber that seeps out of the side of his mouth and the red approaches as I travel 97 m.p.h. past carnivals where bearded women and old men with elephants trained to eat straw and shit in circles play. Overland with Japanese and Native Americans carrying around decks of cards inviting me to their plantations to lose my pocketful of arcade tokens.

I take another look in the rear view, I'm out of focus and gibbering out a song that has no verse, no caption. Overhead a helicopter chops a rhythm through the air and I duck fearing Vietnam gunfire, knowing if I get shot no purple heart will save my soul. If I'm bound to the red, hooked-tail man from down under, I'm bound to the grey bearded wise paw from above who knows all the bus schedules. I am bound to Paradise Road.

Gently, I ease off the back of my three-humped camel, transport that holds water, wine for the disciples who all ran away saying they would be back next Tuesday to do hallucinogens and see the dirty-footed prophet again. I tell the widow I have no food for her or her lame, one-footed son. Follow the grain pickers, they drop shucks.

A train to the left of the road hollers, a maddening scream as the cars murder the trees that cross over the barren flatlands crisscrossed by roads that run perpendicular and parallel to each other dividing the world into blocks of organization.

Paradise Road seems a lost image between the red lights flashing out radio waves and the on coming headlights. Overhead nuclear sirens hide me underground in steel barrier walls, eating canned yams. Everyone in the shelter was heading down Paradise Road, no one found it and everyone wants to talk to dirty Sandalfoot.

Adam Ellis

Untitled

Orchid's mouth opened,
Sucked up the ground and sun
Then returned to rest.

Something smells like spring in March. Snow might be piled up at the door in February, but in March it starts to melt; that just might be it, it might be the smell of melting snow. Crisp winds replace the biting kind, and rain replaces snow. There's a lot to be said for the rain, you know.

Rain is like wisdom;
First sorrowful and chilly,
Then warm and welcome.

The rain ushers in the springtime in March. Rain is a natural aphrodisiac. The clouds are lovers, and the rain is their tears as they part from one another in March and April. The clouds part long enough to split open the sky and a glimmer of blue breaks away sometimes, if watched close enough. The ground is yet soggy, but it awaits the triumphant arrival of the Easter grass. Everything in March is on hold. Everything is expectant; waiting, waiting.

Immanent rebirth,
The world in silent wonder
Waits, pregnant and proud.

Then, even as it was expecting, baby miracles gradually take over. Leaves, sprouts, little green things start poking out all over. They push up out of the earth, they extend their arms from parent branches, they creep along the fences and adorn the old things with nature's jeweled youth. March is the beginning of something very special. It is the living time, the thanking time; it is the beginning again of all time. March is eternal as the summer, spring and autumn; it is nature's child every year. March's rain flows straight from the fountain of youth and tickles the vein of childhood. The rain fuels my system. I feel in it the life of ages and know that it is the potion of all this.

March is mine. The greys of winter become the blues of summer. The starched whites become buoyant green. Bare branches are clothed in their spring suits. The sun shines in victory over the frost, hearts thaw under his glow. The world is ruled gently for some time.

The moon's stolen light
Is enslaved by master sun
Till winter's return.

Enjoy it while it lasts, for 'tis but thirty-one days of the year. March is forever and finite, and the next one will have a different personality than the one at hand. Watch it closely as it grows; become its friend early and it will love you. Love it back and you, too, can live eternally each spring.

Katrina Seymour

11.5 Miles

It is eleven-AND-A-HALF miles until the earth's crust bends just enough for us not to see the onward sky.

Tonight, in one of my emotional midnights, I wish for flight, through my eyesight, to touch the horizon that I hear I cannot fight.

Since I can't fight or fly, I get higher by standing on a ladder and try to be profound by saying, "With the horizon being eleven-AND-A-HALF miles away, we're all blind to anything except our vicinity."

The physical distance never hurt me, just the idea of losing different shreds of sanity in such a social world as this one. But I hear the TV tell me to trust God and have faith, and the horizon will someday be mine. But I want it now.

Keeping my balance somehow, I realize it's eleven-and-a-half miles until I can see no more. "No more" is where God lies and my inner peace is stored.

But I'm knocked off the ladder on to my knees and I scream in verse, "God Damn this, I'm scrounging for a cross that is not made of wood; not of sacrifice, fear, or of 'what was' and 'what should!'"

With no reply, I cry and bandage up my bloody knees and try to fall asleep so I can possibly dream about being eleven-AND-A-HALF miles away.

Stephen C. Tobin

Gone by Now

So now it's winter
and our souls aren't
bumping into each other on this journey--
sometime gone.

If you had been here,
you would have been chanting
"Don't hold on to tomorrow" to me
while I was laughing through some tears--
gone by now.

Some people have had a dream
longer than they've respected love,
and if I could force what we had
into rhyme
maybe I could let go of you,
long enough to see what was beyond.

Shannon Reed

Eternity

The first I ever heard of him was during a strikingly cold December night. The highways were glazed over with a mixture of ice, snow, and small traces of road grit and salt. The winds were coming from the east and were supposed to pick up as the night went on. Large blankets of snow traveled with the wind, nearly making any sort of travel impossible. As I remember it, there were travel advisories in effect that night, if not, there should have been. My father was driving me, my mother, and himself to a staff Christmas party he was invited to. He was a foreman at AGS, American Glass Services. The party was an annual tradition at AGS for the upper management, but in the last couple of years some of the lower members of the business food chain and their families were invited. My father couldn't go last year because half the family was sick, so he swore to himself that he would bring as much of the family as he possibly could this year. My younger sister Chrissie and my older brother Bill were the only ones sick this year, so I was stuck with going by myself.

My name is Sara Packard, and at that age, 16, I was a very socially retarded, more than slightly selfish, child. If I was thinking halfway like an adult I would have realized that this party meant an awful lot to my father. I was the second of three very expensive children, and my father saw his invitation to the party as a way to show upper management that human beings worked for them. He wanted to show them that he wasn't just an employee number on a pay sheet. Deep inside I'm sure he dreaded going to the party. He hated people who relied on artificial manners and plastic personalities. Christmas usually brings out the least honest parts of a person in the first place, and in an office party setting it couldn't have been any better. In that way it was a definite sacrifice to my father's pride to show up at that party. My father was a proud man who wanted the most, if not necessarily the best, for his family. He would sacrifice to no end for us, and being young and stupid, I never saw this fact.

The party itself was pretty much what I expected a cor-

porate office party to be like; a large group of people standing around talking about their problems at home, but vaguely enough so that everyone could stay a comfortable arm's length away from each other on a personal level. The safest way to tell who was in which section of the company was: the Sears and K-Mart suits were foremen and the such, the J.C. Penney suits were middle management, and the Brooks Brothers and the odd Armani suits were upper management. Yes, it sounds cynical, but it was the absolute truth. Like I predicted, the main body of the party tried their best to stay within their own social groups. Only a handful of people tried to be genuinely sociable to everyone. One of them in particular caught my father's attention. I could tell he was high in the company the first time I saw him, but it wasn't until my father introduced him to me and my mother that I knew who he was. His name was Roland Sundquist and he had just taken over as the acting Chairman of the Board of AGS. Sundquist was a well built, but not stocky, man. He had salt and pepper hair cropped very close to his head and thin wiry glasses with round lens. When he shook my hand I felt a large ring on his right hand. It looked to be made of gold with a pearl in the middle of it. It wasn't entirely pretty looking, but it interested me. When I asked about it he said it was in his family for close to 200 years.

Sundquist stayed and talked to us for a good deal of the evening. By the time we left we found out that three years ago his wife and his daughter died in a house fire where they used to live in Michigan. He seemed to be well over it and actually quite philosophical about it. His final words on the matter were, "Live your life as much as you can. There is no forever." When we finally left the party at 9:30 the roads were beginning to get very difficult. We didn't get home for an hour and a half, which was 40 minutes longer than it would usually take.

When I went to bed it took me a long time to actually get to sleep. I kept watching the shadows of the falling snow on the wall to my right side. The window was to my left. I drifted off into sleep eventually. I had a dream that night. I dreamt I was in the fire that took Sundquist's daughter and wife. The burning house was huge and ancient looking. It was full of tremendous tapestries and elaborate furniture. I was alone in the middle of the floor, unable to move, while the flames slowly crawled over

me. The flames began eating away at my skin, singeing my finest hairs. There was a shape in the corner. A dark, faceless figure standing and wordlessly watching me die. I felt like I was screaming, but I couldn't hear anything past the flames burrowing into my ears. The flames invaded me, reaching my soul. I awoke with a jolt; my body was shaking, sweat was covering me, my heart pounded painfully in my chest, I couldn't breathe. I tried to bring air into my lungs, but I couldn't. I thought automatically, asthma attack. I clawed for my inhaler in the darkness and used it. I gradually began to breathe and I stopped sweating as much, but my heart was still pounding and I was still shaking. I looked over to the snow shadows on my wall and forced myself to relax. I sat upright in bed and focused on what happened in my dream. I could feel the flames even when I was awake. I brought my knees up and hugged them, making myself into a ball. The snow was falling just as heavily as before and the movements in the shadows seemed frantic. It looked like each flake was trying to run away from something. I stared and stared for what must have been an ungodly amount of time, until I began to feel like I was in a trance. A huge black shadow moved in front of the window, extinguishing the only light source and throwing the room into pitch black. Before I could even think of screaming, a cold hand threw itself onto my mouth.

"Don't scream. It's a waste."

His voice was smooth and calm, despite his appearance. He was just a black shadow to me. I could tell he was wearing a large coat or a cloak, and I could feel that the material was heavier than any material I've ever felt in my life.

"I'm not here to hurt you."

His hand was absolutely freezing my mouth. I tried to say "I won't scream," but my throat had tightened up. "I know you, Sara Marie Packard. I know you won't scream now." His eyes met mine and for a second reflected the image of my face. Then his eyes became deep pools of black. He removed his hand and moved back into the pitch black at the foot of my bed. A moment later he was beside me at the right side of my bed. I finally could see his face. He had the face of an absolute angel. It had no wrinkles, it had no flaws, and it looked only about as old as I was. He was dressed in all black, including his

cloak. He knelt down beside me and just looked into my eyes. His eyes became a brilliant emerald green.

All I could force myself to say was, "How do you know me?"

"You have a very old soul, Sara Marie. Very old and very predictable. That's all right, though, so do I." His voice trailed off into silence. We both stared at each other. He said he wasn't going to hurt me, but somehow I was still terrified. "What do you want with me?" I tried to say, but I couldn't.

His face became serious and harder. "The man you met tonight is dangerous. Stay away from him no matter how hard it is. He has been marked and he will be repaid soon." I knew he meant Sundquist, but I couldn't see what kind of danger I could be in.

"Stay away from him and you will be rewarded eventually." His cold hands burned into mine. I began to cry involuntarily, so I put my head down.

His face was only inches from mine. His breath was as cold as his hands. His gaze brought my head up to face his eyes. He could see my tears covering my face. "Don't waste your tears on this matter."

"What are you going to do?" I asked him through my crying.

He didn't answer. All he did was stare directly into my eyes, and I quickly drifted away.

The next morning I only remembered bits and pieces of what happened, or what I thought had happened. It had the haziness of a dream, but it seemed so utterly real and physical to me. In my mind I could still feel his icy hands on mine and I could still smell the frozen sterility of his breath. The whole night just weighed my mind down completely to the point where I put my sanity on trial. If I did dream everything, it was an elaborate and nearly impossible dream, but if I didn't dream it then what really happened to me?

For the entire week following that night, what he told me remained burned into my subconscious. I needed to know what kind of danger he was talking about. I went to the public library

and began to put together pieces of Roland Sundquist's life. Faulty wiring started the fire that killed his family. An accident. In the short span of a week I was an expert on Sundquist's life, as far as the newspapers and local magazines were concerned.

Two things happened late in the week. On that Thursday my father came home with an invitation for the whole family to come to Roland Sundquist's home for dinner on Saturday night. When he told us this my stomach felt like it dropped a mile. I went up to my room as soon as I heard about the invitation. I squeezed every memory of that night out of my mind in hopes of figuring out exactly what in God's name happened to me. For most of Thursday night I stayed in my room replaying that night over and over again in my mind. His face. His hands. His breath. His warning. One more memory drifted back into my mind gradually. What he said after his warning. He would take care of the problem himself when the time was right.

The second thing that happened that week was Sundquist's death. He died in his home, which nearly burned down late Thursday night. The fire department said that it had started in the basement and that's where they found Sundquist's remains. Someone had called 911 before the fire had much of a chance to spread, although a good deal was destroyed. The fire department found something in the part of the house that didn't have much damage. They found pictures of me. Pictures of me walking to and from school, pictures of me doing chores outside, pictures of me walking my dog, and ironically enough, pictures of me at the library. There were 10 or 15 good pictures at least. Sundquist was following me or had me followed during the first part of the week, taking pictures. The fire department also found more pictures. Pictures of his daughter. He followed her like he followed me; the shots were nearly identical in nature. But there were some shots of his daughter that were totally different than mine. Pictures of the fire that took her life. Pictures of her trapped in the fire. Pictures of the last moments of her life.

After I heard what had happened and the police were through talking to my parents and me about their discovery, I took a very long walk. I had told no one about my visitor and because of that I had no one to talk to then. All I could do was feel numb inside. I was in danger. He took care of it. I had no

proof, but I didn't need it. I just knew that he killed Sundquist. I also knew he deliberately ruined Sundquist's name. From the clippings I found in the library I discovered that Sundquist was a very popular person with charities and causes. The photos were evidence of what Sundquist truly was. He knew from the beginning. During my walk I recalled one more thing that he said...

I waited in my room for him that night. I couldn't rest a minute in anticipation. Hours passed and I grew amazingly impatient. At 3:00 or so I left my room, walked down the staircase and sat in the living room, watching the snow slowly fall outside the picture window. I stared for what seemed to be an eternity, just waiting for him. I periodically turned my head and looked around the living room and eventually found a shadow that was out of place. I stood up and walked to the foot of the stairs. That same figure was standing at the top.

I spoke first. "I know what you did."

"I know you do." There was no apology, just truth in his voice.

I could feel his eyes on me. I started up the steps one step at a time.

"You want to know who I am, where I come from, and why I did what I did," he wasn't asking me, he was telling me, "and why I came back."

"You knew he was going to kill me, didn't you?"

"History repeats itself, Sara. He killed before. He would kill again."

"If you knew he killed his wife and daughter why didn't you just go to the police?" I was walking up the steps very slowly.

"He was a cheating bastard."

"What?" I'm walking up one step at a time.

"His cheating had to be stopped and the game had to continue."

I stopped. "What are you?"

"I am something you would be best off not knowing about. What I am doesn't matter unless you make it matter." He

walked down to me, dragging his cloak behind. His hand reached out to mine and slipped a ring on my fourth finger on my right hand. It was the same ring that Sundquist wore.

"I don't want this damned thing," I said as I pulled it off and threw it at his feet. I turned and ran down the stairs.

"Why not. It's yours."

I turned and faced him.

"Look in your family Bible. Look at Sara Marie Jordan. Look at your heritage."

I went to the bookshelf and found our ancient, battered family Bible. I turned to our family tree in the back, looked near the beginnings and found Sara Marie Jordan. Two hundred years ago.

"So?" I Asked roughly.

"Two Hundred years ago, when your ancestors still lived in the old country, there was a baron named Gilliard who ruled over your ancestor's village. Gilliard had everything he ever wanted. He wanted Sara Marie Jordan. He raped, tortured and murdered her all in the name of sport." He placed his hands on my shoulders. The cold burned into my skin. "He cheated." We looked into each other's eyes.

"Sundquist was going to kidnap, rape, and murder you as his ancestors did 200 years ago. I stopped him, because it wasn't time for you and it wasn't the way for you to be taken. Believe me, I know."

"No, it's not. Tell me who you are."

"I cannot."

"Then tell me about the game."

"You cannot appreciate the game."

"Tell me."

"I play a game of life and death and meaning. I play a game you only dream about."

I looked at him, eyes full of confusion.

"I provide death, others provide life, and you provide the meaning to it all. Part of the enjoyment is finding a balance between the three." He turned to leave, but I grabbed his arm.

"Accept what happened and don't question further. Just be thankful I am fair."

He pulled an envelope out of his cloak. It was old and yellowed and smelled of must. "Here, Sara Marie. Open this

and discover where, when and how you will end. It's my gift to you. Consider it compensation for such unfair game play."

I refused the gift by backing away. "Why would I want to know that?"

"For you to establish meaning. To set the proper goals for you to win your portion of the game."

"I don't want to know when I'm going to die."

"Odd. Not unheard of, but odd nonetheless. Very well, Sara Marie, I'll leave this envelope with you in case you change your mind. I'll meet you again soon enough."

And he vanished, as fast and silent as...whatever the hell he truly was. I kept the envelope, and to this day still flirt with the idea of opening it. Every time I do I just remind myself of one fact. That would be cheating.

Scott Lowry

A Day In The Life Of...

Wake up 6:51 AM Always had a habit of setting unusual alarm times. Eat breakfast. Some kind of whole grain shit- mom's on another of her health kicks.

Bus comes around 7:30 and it's time for the half-hour trip through hell. Redneck mentality is strong here. I'm an outsider, a freak, a loser. I've got a friend who's also a freak. He rides my bus, too. Safety in numbers.

Get to school about 8:15. More rednecks and some "athletes." I'm a freak to most of them as well.

More friends here, though. About six or so losers like me.

Let's see, today I'm scheduled to be threatened by at least one farmer boy.

Without fail, here it comes. "Hey, you got a problem. I hear you been talkin' shit. You hear me, fucker?"

Just walk away from it. No honor in getting annihilated. No need to verbalize my disgust.

Rest of day goes fast. Bus ride home is easier. I'm in a better mood. I survived another day.

Get home about four and listen to some tunes—maybe Fugazi or Bad Religion. Think about how fucked up things are, maybe write a little.

Wonder why girls don't like me. Maybe I'm a loser. Maybe I'm a punk who doesn't need these girls—doesn't need anybody. Maybe I'm just confused and lonely. People suck. They see individualism as a mutation. Cure it or destroy it. Only two ways.

Parents are worse because they're supposed to accept you.

Mine just want unconditional respect.

Fuck you, I don't want to be a part of your clique. Respect me as myself, that's it.

Of course it's not gonna happen.

Society can be a dangerous thing with its mob mentality.

The struggle of a free thinker is integral to the survival of the human spirit.

Michael Tichy

Brothers

"How many times do we have to die for them before they accept us?" my brother asked, although he was not really my brother.

When he asked me this question, we had both finished talking to military recruiters. I had even gone so far as to go to the Detroit Military Processing Center, thinking of becoming a Marine. He had thought about going into the Navy, although his uncle and aunt would hear nothing of it as long as he lived with them.

He was a year older than I, and we were both looking forward to beginning our final year in high school. He had immigrated from Vietnam when he was eight years old, and with the help of tutors, tried to grasp the English language as quickly as he could. He was a thin man of remarkable enthusiasm and a tremendous love of art. He had excelled enough that he had even become a member of the high school's National Honor Society chapter.

I was a first-generation Hmong immigrant from Laos, adopted and brought into the country when I was only six-months-old. Because I involved myself in everything, I did not have what immediately appeared to be a clear "direction" in my life. A favorite teacher of mine once benignly referred to it as being "a Renaissance man" and turned a blind eye to some of my more colorful explorations in life.

As we spoke to each other of our recruiting experiences, it struck me as curious that both of us, having emigrated to escape the Southeast Asian warzones, would volunteer to join a profession whose very nature demanded war. More curious even, that an artist should seek such a violent path.

"I know it's strange, isn't it?" he said, looking off in the distance. "Yet I can't help feeling that I owe this country something for everything it's given me. Freedom, liberty, a chance to grow up in peace."

I nodded in assent, interjecting the tale of how I was introduced to the desk sergeant at the processing center as "a kid from Laos." The desk sergeant asked "Weren't we killing you in Vietnam?" and the recruiter who introduced me said "Yeah, but now he's fighting on our side this time." There was

some strained laughter, and I was shuffled off to the next testing room.

My brother thought it was strange. Puzzled, he asked, "How many times do we have to die for them, before they accept us? Why are they always afraid of us?" because he knew, as I did, that both our people had always fought for the United States in Southeast Asia.

Fought and died.

It would not be until a few years later that I would come across the statistics that would tell just how many thousands of my people died in battles, secret or otherwise, sponsored by the C.I.A. and other U.S. agencies, who convinced us that the path to true freedom lay in fighting the evil menacing spectre of communism in all its vile, polluting forms. The same words and promises used to also justify growing opium for them and poisoning the village fields with defoliants when it was no longer convenient for evidence to be around. The effects on newborns and children were unsettling.

But it was a grim topic, and my brother instead spoke of changing his name, to something more "American" and more acceptable. More Western, like mine. I thought he was joking.

He wasn't. I didn't believe changing his name would solve anything, but I also didn't have much room to speak, having lived with a "Western" name for all of my life. So I listened to his ideas, skeptically, but patiently.

Eventually, both of our plans to join the armed services fell through. Mine because of incorrectable bad hearing, and his because of pressure from his family. Later in the year, we drove home one day after school and he said, "You know, I'm glad I have you for a friend. You're like a brother to me that I never had." I responded in the same, thinking also of supper at the time.

"Let's be brothers," he said as he drove. He smiled.

I could do nothing except agree, and I smiled back, mildly surprised and highly flattered. I shook his hand, as if that made a binding promise and commitment that was unbreakable before heaven. We then drove to supper.

Something bothered me since that conversation with the desk sergeant at the Military Processing Center, and it was a strange memory to connect to this incident. When I was young

and living in Anchorage, Alaska, my mother had bought me a new pair of white shoes and set me loose in the front yard to play. When I stepped outside two of our, neighbor's young daughters approached me, and pushed me into a corner of my house.

"What are those you have there?" one of the girls demanded.

"New shoes? You don't deserve clean white shoes!" the other shouted.

They then proceeded to jump up and down on my feet, chanting, "Dirty Eskimo boy, doesn't deserve white shoes! Dirty Eskimo boy, doesn't deserve white shoes!"

It was a confusing moment then. My confusion prevented me from doing anything but listen to their chants as their stomps and epithets became increasingly painful until my mother came outside, wondering where I had gone, and seeing this scene, chased them off, at a loss of words how to explain what had just happened to me.

Did I think about this as I ate supper with my new brother and my family? There were many things to think about. Only a year or two previously, Vincent Chin, a recent Chinese immigrant had his skull caved in with steel pipes by a pair of drunk automobile factory workers who had mistaken him for a Japanese man. Or didn't care about the difference. The workers received a light sentence. The family received nothing. Perhaps I did wonder when, if ever, either of us, any of us would be truly accepted in this nation after all. How many hoops would we have to jump through, how far could we go, when people would still find reasons to hate you, even if it meant calling an Asian an Eskimo?

I'll never know what my brother thought about the matter. In February of 1991, I was among the first to discover that my brother had committed suicide, locked alone in the darkness of his family's garage, without reason or explanation. I'll never know if he found acceptance anywhere.

I'm sorry. I don't know how to answer, "How many times do we have to die for them before they accept us?"

Bryan Worra

A War Story

The beauty
and the horror.
The endless ripping
of the soul.
The heat
and the bombs.

The children
with no arms
no legs.
The people
with no faces.
The ones
you love
who die in the tunnels,
in the fields,
who get their limbs
blown off.
"It's a stupid thing."

You lose sight
of all the things
that had been
so important before.
You lose perspective
and the only thing
that matters
is getting through the day
in any way you can.

You get so close
so quickly there.
Because everyone's
so afraid
and you never know
if you're going to live
to see another day,
or if the people you loved

back at home
will be there
when you get out.
Because sometimes,
the people back home,
safe and secure in their own little worlds,
get tired of waiting for you.
They can't understand
your fascination
with the place that can be so deadly—
and yet so beautiful.
The place that eats away at you,
leaving nothing,
yet makes you
an addict to its lure.

You wait,
and you dream
of the day
when you can return home.
But when the day comes,
you find your home is no longer a haven
and the people you loved are strangers.
No matter where you go,
there is no escaping
the shrieks,
the cries,
the begging and crippled children,
the pain,
the stench of Death.
The awful stench
that is everywhere
over there,
a constant reminder
of the dead bodies,
many of whom never see a burial.
No one can understand
unless they've been there.
And most don't even care
enough to try.

So, you go back.
Back to the killing,
back to the horror and beauty.

Because secretly,
you can't live without it.
Each time you try to leave,
it pulls you back.

Because to go
means you've failed.
That it has beaten you.

And if you go,
not only will you be
leaving your buddies,
but also a part of yourself.
Lost forever in this land you love and hate,
this island of Death.

Then one day you wake up,
so tired of it all
you think you'll die.

Tired of the hopelessness,
the impossibility of winning.
Tired of the awful Death-smell,
tired of watching Charlie shoot down
your best friend,
and not being able to help him.

Knowing in your heart
that revenge doesn't work
and crying doesn't help
and all you can do
is wish with all your might
that you'd died
with him.

Tired of watching your buddy,
your captain,
the guy who saved your life in the tunnels
go M.I.A..
Tired of waiting

to see if they'll be found,
the P.O.W.s released.

Caught in limbo,
waiting for some spark
of hope to fall your way.

Not wanting to give
them up for dead,
yet knowing the odds
are against their
ever being found.

Tired of watching good men die,
days before they were scheduled
to go home.

Sick to death
of watching men leave,
taking nothing with them,
having lost even their souls in this war.

At night, you wake up,
covered with sweat,
struggling to remember
if the awful nightmare you'd had was a memory,
or the memory just another piece
of the nightmare you'd come to believe in.

Struggling to find
some small piece of reality to hang on to,
like a precious piece of sanity.

Trying to find something to believe in
in a time where everything you believe in
has been taken away.

Living a nightmare,
unable to get away.
And there's a whole
cemetery full of your friends,
people you cared about,
to keep you there.

Your own country drove you there,
and when you try to return home,
they drive you back,

screaming, "Baby Killer!"

"Murderer!"

back to the people who understand,
who lived through it
and who are still living through it.

You see the dead women,
the lifeless babies,
the blood running freely,
and even the soil is red,
as if permanently stained
by all the blood that has been shed.

Fathers,
Sons,
Brothers,
Lovers,
all stacked up,
in pile upon pile,
thousands at a time.
And yet, to save face,
we stay where we are,
letting our men die
because we don't want
to admit defeat.

At night,
you barely sleep,
crazy with fear.
And when the day comes,
you hang on to life
with all the passion
you have in you.
And you pray
it will be enough.
Because for you and all the
ones you love,
it's just another day
in Saigon.

Beth Honeycutt

Untitled

I have scars to show you.

I have a seemingly placid thought pool
If you would like to swim.

Sponges of scarring tissue
Float within the memories.

Grab slowly to them,

Feel the heavy, seeping blood they hold.

Squeeze—
To wring the saturation
To an equilibrium within the pool.

Only then can my memory flow.

Gabe Smith

Tomorrow

Sophie Morgans stepped on to the concrete walkway in front of the newly renovated St. Mark's Hospital. Her heels made a friendly clip-clap on the pavement, and a soft breeze winded through her short light brown hair. On her left, she noticed the landscaping: small tufts of bushes, small firs and clumps of yellow flowers; she wasn't sure what kind they were. She did know the tulips, red and radiant, growing tall over the other foliage, as if wanting to get the rays of sunlight first. The tulips reminded her of the bouquets her father would bring home for her mother on special occasions. Sophie was always allowed to select one single flower to put in her room, in the blue stem vase her grandmother had given her. She always felt secure when there was a bowl of pretty flowers on the dining room table. She knew her parents' marriage was just fine if he still brought Mommy flowers, because of that song, the one she had heard on the radio-- "You Don't Bring Me Flowers Any-more." Sophie smiled, turned her head away from the tulips, and mounted the steps up to the front doors next to the handi-capped ramp. The doors electronically swung open as she reached for the handle and she almost got hit in the nose. She walked towards the information desk in the lobby where a young nurse was typing into a computer. The nurse looked up as Sophie approached her desk.

"Can I help you?" asked the nurse, with a bright, toothy smile.

"Yes, can you direct me to the meeting of the cancer survivors support group? It's headed by a Dr. Dover."

"Of course." The nurse looked apologetic but Sophie wanted to laugh. "Don't be sorry," Sophie thought, "it's not you that has to go pick out wigs from Eva Gabor in a few weeks. It's me."

"Straight to your right, you see those elevators? Take one to the third floor, and look for room 304. It should be really close to the elevators, and there will be a sign on the door." The nurse looked at Sophie triumphantly. Apparently, directions were her specialty.

"Thank you." Sophie walked over to the elevators, and pressed the up button. She didn't mind walking up flights of

stairs, but she felt certain the nurse's eyes were on her now, and she resisted the urge to catch her at it. The doors parted, and Sophie stepped inside as a man carrying an overcoat stepped out.

"Mom's sure seen better days," George thought as he left the elevator. He couldn't wait to get to the lobby and out of the white walls, the fluorescent lights, and the shiny linoleum floors. The vision of his mother lying under the crisp white sheets, the horrible vial of brownish liquid suspended over her pillow; it could fall and crash all over him and his dying mother at any moment. They would be covered with glass and the stench he felt sure would emanate from the broken ...Whew. It had been a long day. It was getting to him, and all he wanted to do was go home to his wife, Grace. It wasn't easy. At least his mother still knew who he was. Who she was. He should count his blessings, as Gracie said to him. She's had a full life, and he can prepare himself for when it is his mother's time. George tried to adopt his wife's optimistic outlook whenever he got too bogged down, and he often did count his blessings after he thought of his wife. He had crossed the lobby as he put on his coat and strode through the automatic doors. He saw on his right a small garden, although bigger than the one he had at home. The Scarlet Beauty tulips caught his eye, and he stooped to examine them. He breathed in deeply, and felt as if his head were beginning to clear. He loved working outside, the meaty smell of the soil, the lavish attention a garden required. He couldn't wait to start again. Grace had given him a new hose for his birthday, a 40 footer, just waiting like an ashram's cobra to be uncoiled. He secretly believed the garden truly missed him during the winter months, needing his work and love like a young child. Like his mother. George got into his blue Oldsmobile and headed onto the freeway. These trips, two hours from work to Mom to home, took a large chunk out of his day, and he had felt a small pang of guilt coming home the first few times to see the setting on the kitchen table for one, knowing Grace didn't like to eat alone, with his portion in the microwave, ready to be heated as soon as he wanted it. He thought of her hands on his shoulders, squeezing the tension out of the

knots between his shoulder blades as she had been doing recently. Grace addressed his guilt and assuaged it as soon as it had come. "Your mom needs you now, George," she had said last night. "I have my health, and I've had you all to myself for so long, I want to share you with someone who needs you so very much. I don't want you to regret later, when she is, ah..." She squeezed the tops of his shoulders and let her head rest on his shoulder, her ear on his cheek. "I understand." He knew she did, too, and felt comforted now behind the steering wheel, passing a white pickup truck that had a huge basket on a flatbed behind it. Must be one of those hot air balloons. As he looked in the rearview window, George wondered if the couple in the cab of the truck were going home or going up.

They were going up. Melissa and her guide Hugh, were heading out to Buckeye Field, to go up for a bit during the sunset. Hugh and Melissa had never met before today, and they were getting along wonderfully snug in the old pickup's cab. Melissa thought he was some pretty hot stuff, in fact. She wondered if you could do it in a hot air balloon. She intended to find out. Hell, she didn't have long to live anyway, why not accomplish two things on her list at the same time? Go up in a hot air balloon at sunset, and have sex with a stranger. Her list, "Things To Do Before I Kick the Bucket," had started out as a whim, an entry in an eighth-grade journal, inspired by her flighty and often times tipsy English teacher. "#1. Have children." The fact she would never accomplish her very first wish really bothered her. She remembered how confident she was in junior high, making that her number one thing to do, and showing her best friend Carrie her entry. Carrie had copied it down in her journal too, but the first thing on her list was "Get my ears pierced." Melissa knew Carrie had a long way to go. "#14. Try marijuana." Well, she had scratched off number 14 at the age of the same number, and bigger, better entries were to be inscribed. "#20. Have sex with a woman." That was crossed off sometime in her first summer at college, but she felt a little guilty since all she did was get french-kissed by some drunk psychology senior, but since she never really knew how to define actual sex with a woman, she felt a little justified, too. "#22. Shoplift from

Bendels a heart locket and then send it back in the mail." Check. "#25. Make love in the Atlantic Ocean." Check. God, that was good. The only thing she had done that was not on her "Things To Do" was to get Lou Gehrig's Disease. That was definitely not on her list. In a matter of months she wouldn't be able to walk, much less take a crap by herself. And she didn't want to be around for that. Just as soon as her list was finished, she'd take some pills and just never wake up. Something painless. And she'd write a big letter to her parents telling them she didn't want to be a vegetable, and they'd understand, and she will have led her life the way she wanted to, and stopped it before anything bad could start to happen. Not that she hadn't had her share of breakups, car wrecks, and a favorite grandmother dying, but those were out of her control. Not this time. Melissa turned in to Hugh, staring at the road, fumbling with the dial.

"Damn this radio!" Hugh yelled, and hit it. "Sorry," he muttered and looked over to her. "And damn this woman, too," he thought mischievously to himself. If she came on to him any stronger, they would never see this balloon off the ground. She was practically in his lap, and he didn't mind. They had been talking for a good hour on the way to the field, and they saw eye to eye on a lot of things. Actually, he was thinking of asking her out after the ride was over. She was his kind of girl--loose, but not a slut--just really... laid-back. Easygoing. And her legs-- Chhhhhrist.

"Maybe if you pushed in on the side here, it seems to be a little wobbly." She touched the right-hand side of the radio and instantly, there was music. "See?" Melissa smiled at him.

"Hey!" Hugh looked pleased. "How'd you do that?"

"I dunno. Magic." Melissa liked his looks, wavy brown hair touching his collar in the back, brown eyes, strong jawline. He looked as if he belonged on a ranch.

"Guess so." Hugh drummed his fingers in time to the radio on his steering wheel.

"Is it much farther?" Melissa asked.

"Not long now."

"What made you decide to do it?" Hugh was interested in her, and he liked to hear people talk about what he loved doing most.

"Um, it's on a list of things I want to accomplish. Things I

want to experience. There are so many things out there, and I want to do them all." That seemed pretty general, Melissa thought.

"Must be a pretty long list." Hugh looked over at her.

"Not as long as when I started it, glad to say," Melissa answered.

"Well, I'm happy to be of service, lady." He liked her spirit. The need to experience life, to grab hold, was something they both had in common. Life was too short. That had become painfully clear only recently, when a good friend of his had told him he had lung cancer. He and Tommy had just been shooting pool last week when Tommy told him. Hugh hadn't wanted to believe it. Tommy's news had branded him--with a new strength to make the most out of life. Life was too short.

"Hi. My name's Tommy Clevinger, and I was diagnosed with lung cancer about a month ago. The doctors told me it was due to smoking two packs a day. Needless to say, I've quit." Tommy paused. "I'm scared as hell."

Sophie's heart went out to this young man. It was amazing, but every person in this room was going through the same kind of hopelessness. And they all wanted to share, to be heard by people who didn't run away, but who understood. Sophie was glad she came. She listened to Tommy.

"I can't believe I was so stupid. Everybody told me to quit...but I kept thinking, I'm too young, it won't happen to me. Well, all of my friends were right. I know you're not supposed to blame yourself, but, this really is my fault, and I could have stopped it." Tommy looked at the woman next to him, who began to speak.

"Suicide? Sure, I've thought about it. But I decided I want as much time as I can with my husband and our two kids. I want them to remember, to remember me at home, making cookies, helping them with their homework. Not feeble, not like this..." Her voice trailed off. The older woman seated next to her took her hand.

"Even in the face of tragedy, there is always a little bit of hope," Sophie wanted to say. She analyzed her own philosophy. She wasn't gone yet. She could still love, and cry, and sing and

laugh. She was going to see this thing through. At first, she had felt robbed, that life was such an unfair game, a roulette wheel on which she had put her chips on the wrong color. Or being punished, for some wrong doing in her past. But she knew now, with the help of her close friend Marjorie, that bad things happen to good people. And, the most important thing, her life was not over.

"The thing I dread most," the man seated next to Sophie was saying, "is saying good-bye to my wife and daughter. Knowing I may not live to see her get married, or to hold a grandchild in my arms, it seems to just eat me away. My wife cries in her sleep. I want to hold her and tell her everything is going to be okay, but I can't believe it. I'm going to miss her so much..." He covered his face with his hands.

Sophie put her hand on his arm. She felt a need to speak to him. "It's okay. We all know what you're going through," she said. "But you're not gone yet. Don't rob yourself of the life you still have right now--time is too precious. Let your wife know you love her. Tell your daughter you're proud of her. They need you now more than ever." Sophie wanted to give this man hope, the hope she had acquired realizing all the beautiful things in life. This man just needed to realize what he wanted to live for. She looked out the window and saw the beginning of the sunset. The colors awed her: crimson, gold, dark blue. The dying of the day.

As George turned off the exit towards his house, he was struck by the beauty of the sunset just ahead. He was so glad he and Gracie had moved out of the city now. Even though it was a fifteen minute drive to the nearest grocery. "You could never even find the sky in the city," he thought. He supposed he moved back to the country because of his childhood, and how happy he was in the hills of Carolina. His mother had loved the farm. He and his mother often caught the sunsets together over the tops of the mountains, filling him like a symphony. He remembered one summer night, when he was eleven, there was a meteor shower. Lying on his back in one of their fields, he saw the familiar constellations, the ones his dad had shown him. He had never seen a meteor shower before, but he had seen shoot-

ing stars, and he figured it would be like that. He had only been lying down for a few moments when a huge meteor, silvery-white and a tail as long as the width of the sky, went right across his very own field. He had stopped breathing, it was that beautiful. He made a wish. That his mother would always be there, always by his side. At eleven, that seemed a very important wish indeed.

George snapped out of his reverie. Little boy's wishes on silvery-tailed meteors were a long time ago. And now his mother was dying. Tomorrow when he saw her again, he would tell her about that night, and about his wish. Maybe telling her would make it come true. Or at least, make him accept the fact that wishes were wishes, and strokes were strokes. And he would tell his mother tomorrow that he loved her. And thank her, for everything she had ever done for him.

"Thank you. This is so beautiful up here. It's really... breathtaking." Melissa and Hugh floated over some houses now, looking down on what seemed to be a miniature model of her hometown, not the real thing.

"Yeah, I love being up," Hugh said. "It gives me a chance to get a new perspective on things, on my life, to get away from it all." Hugh sighed. He had been thinking about Tommy. "Sometimes it just piles up, you know?" He looked at her.

"Yeah, I know." Melissa looked down at her fingers holding the edge of the basket. Did she really want to leave this peaceful world behind? Going up with Hugh had left her troubles down on the ground. She suspended the real world and focused on the last shades of purple on the horizon. To never see another sunset, to never feel the wind in her hair, she wasn't so sure about her list anymore. Perhaps when life below got too much to handle, she could recapture the peace she felt now, soaring with the clouds next to this rugged balloonist who saw things the way she did. For now, her disease seemed an obstacle she could overcome. She looked at Hugh and made a silent promise to herself, as she pulled on her coat. "#30. Make a list of things to live for." She knew just what the first entry would be. Tomorrow.

George stepped inside the foyer and pulled off his overcoat, placing it by the pegs in the door. "Gracie?" he called to his wife. He had missed her today, needing her goodness to keep him steady, to keep him strong. He sniffed the air. The aroma of stewed tomatoes and oregano filled his head. "It smells delicious in here," he said quietly as he walked past the stairs and into the dining room. His wife came out of the kitchen wiping her hands against her dress.

"Hello, darling," she said and walked right into his arms.

"Hello, Grace."

"I waited for you tonight." And so she had. The dining table was set for two tonight, and she had brought out the candlesticks he bought her in Mexico on a business trip.

"What's the occasion?" he asked.

"I just wanted some company tonight. Want me to fix you a drink? "

"Love one." He went over to the couch to sit down, put up his feet. She was so good to him, she always seemed to know just what to do. The nights he wanted to take her out to eat, she made the reservations before he even told her. When he forgot his sister's birthday, a card was already in the mail. And when all the day's work and tensions were all knotted together tightly in his shoulders, she knew just how to knead them out, as if she were making bread for company. Like right now. She had handed him his gin and tonic to hold, and was rubbing his neck. She took the pads of her fingers and pressed deeply into his muscles. He couldn't help but let out an audible sigh. "How is she, George?"

"The same. She doesn't talk much. I hold her hand and talk about work, the weather, the news, you." He reached up his left hand to hold hers'. "I think I can let her go, Gracie. After I tell her I love her. I think I can let her go." Gracie knew the impact of his words and felt tears come to her eyes.

"George, you are a very special man. I can think of no one that is as selfless as you are." She put her arms around his neck, his chin in the crook of the soft skin underneath her elbows. "You're a good man, George Walker." George held her arms with his hands near his face.

"I love you, Gracie."

"Why, George, I love you, too." He could tell she was surprised at his emotion. He didn't often say the words that were always in his heart, but he knew they would always be true. And they would be true when he said them to his mother, in the hospital. "Now," George turned around to face Grace, "How about that dinner?" He got up and kissed her, and feeling renewed, went to help Gracie in the kitchen.

Carolyn V. Gregg

Dream of A Cicada Killer

On a calm summer night you can hear them
Beneath the traffic on the city two miles
away.

Beneath the sound of the dew dripping from
tall trees

But just above the hum of crickets in the
clover.

You can hear it.

Its mating call.

A shrill buzz followed by a click, click,
click.

Then it flew. Only it took a graceful
leap into the air before it started
to flap its monstrous wings.

Oh, huge wonder of the hornet family, come
try to wake me up.

Chris Grigsby

Untitled

Parked on the hopeless south side of the city, a mother and daughter sit in a car. The daughter is alone in the back seat; the mother sits in the front. Sparks fly from the tools of masked men in the welding plant beside them. Silently, the child tries hard to remember what she has done wrong, for her mother is angry. She figures it out: the love note.

(I love you! Please, mommy, stop yelling. Please stop. That won't happen. I won't end up like you. I'm not going to get pregnant. I want to do well. I'm doing well.)

"You're no good. You're worthless. I wish you were never born."

(Please, please, mommy, don't say that! Please stop saying that.)

"You screwed up my life. I probably wouldn't have ever been anything anyway, but you took away any chance at all, didn't you?"

(Mommy...)

"My life and yours you've screwed up. You're just like me. Useless. You'll grow up to be nothing but a whore. A whore."

(Please, God, make my mom stop saying this stuff. Please, God, please, please, please,...)

"Your grandma will hate you when I tell her, and I'm going to tell her. You've got her fooled right now. Just wait till she finds out what kind of slut you've turned in to. You'll break her heart. She'll hate you. She won't want anything to do with you. Neither do I."

(Jesus, please, God, make her stop. It's not true. None of it's true). "Please don't tell grandma!" A flurry of commotion shook the '79 Pinto station wagon. The smack left a weltd hand on the girl's cheek. "Don't you ever talk back to me." The mother's left eye twitched, her body twisted in an effort to reach into the back seat and grab the girl. Her face was but an inch from the girl's, and the breath escaped through her nostrils like that of an angry bull.

Turning back around in her seat, the mother said, "You're going to let a welfare bastard ruin your life. That

son-of-a-bitch Gary Cyrus is screwing up your entire life. His mom sits on her ass and collects welfare for a living. Well, I knew this would happen. You'll never amount to anything--except somebody's old lady. Just like me. How many other boys have you spread for? God, it's hard to tell."

"Dear Gary," the mother mimicked, "Do you like me better than Lara Dresbach, Oh, I love you Gary — sounds pretty goddamn stupid, doesn't it? Doesn't it!"

"I guess so," the girl whispered, crushed like a leaf under the weight of November rain. She had written the note neatly on a blank sheet from a pantyhose package. She had conceded to give it to him today, but lost her courage at the last second, hiding it under the microwave in the kitchen, where she thought no one but the roaches would find it.

"Fucking dirty little bastard..."

(Stop it. I can't, I can't, I can't stand it anymore. God please make her stop. I wish I was never born. I am a whore. I'm a whore. I'll never be anybody. Oh, God I'm so bad. Please, mommy, I'm sorry. Don't be mad. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please don't be sad, mommy. Oh, God, please, I'm sorry. Please forgive me, God. Oh please, please, ...)

"I give up."

(I give up. Oh, I hurt so bad. Why are you doing this to me? I wish I wasn't yours. I wish I belonged to someone else. I hate you). Then the tears that were cupped before inside glassy eyes spilled down the girl's cheeks and blotched her complexion. Anger sparked somewhere from a feeling of injustice, but it never caught fire that day. The years went by and the girl grew old. Some days she still stares into her looking glass and the face that stares back haunts her happiest moments, her sweetest pleasures; and at night, when the light is purple in her bedroom, she still thinks of the bruises and cries because of what she has become—a grown-up costume of that same little girl.

Katrina Seymour

In Response to "Marriage" by Gregory Corso

We are all afraid of
Growing old
-Alone

Even now
Even young
I know I must be
Independent
I am a cynic about
-Love

It's just not my thing
It's a big responsibility
I should just stick to
-Lust

It's easier
But then I'm called a slut
I just can't win
I wouldn't want a guy like me
(And I wouldn't want a movie star)
Who says there's got to be somebody?

Wasting time
While you grow old
Waiting for love is like
Waiting for Godot

Meighan Monroe

The American Truck Stop Freak Show

Bouncing neon
harpoons whales in eighteen wheelers.
Entering, they blubber over polyester waitresses.

Shirley, forty-three -years haggard
like a bloodhound after a coon run
takes orders, scrawling out an eighth grade education
on pink slips. Eyeing customers through eyes shot blood.
Her smoke-riddled uniform
asks unanswerable questions to her skeleton frame.
She takes tips after hours
as a back flipping acrobat in her trailer park home.

Diane, a gravy-filled belly
and a single mother voice, shrieks
about pocket change, and her economy.
On breaks she rifles lines up a nose
that runs like her nine children from a beating.
Her warted pug nose snorts laughter at flirting
cannibals that murder black roads with their headlights.

Lester, wheels through the mist of grease
that hangs over the kitchen, as fog in the San Francisco Bay.
Boils rise on his back, ripe strawberries
bursting with juice.
His opera ready voice howls out "Order Up."
On his break he muddles through the puddles of urine.
He strokes his accomplice in the lucky second stall
to pornography women whose pictures are pasted to the bath-
room walls. Orgasm in a world of stealing whores.

I rise, fixing my cowboy hat, laying down
\$3.86 and a handful of lint.
The parking lot rumbles, smokes an orangin volcano.
In my car motel, I flick off
the guitar strumming, southern, alcoholic, woman cheating,
heart-smashed station. I lean over, close my eyes and open my
legs to a truck stop whore draped in a Confederate flag.

Adam Ellis

Poetic Art

Blond beauty.
Little red-rimmed glasses
Looking logical.
Luscious labium
Crimson color.
Emanating eyes shoot
Fire forth into
My mind,
Making me
Sigh subconsciously.
Lady love.

Chris Grigsby

Life of the Party

I see your nipples bursting with excitement
A smile, so uncoyly poised on your overused lips.
A sway of the hips, eloquently contrived
To lure a glance, a smile, an identity.
You giggle so sweetly one might almost think you chaste
But after hours your belt comes off so willingly.
Your precious youth is painted flesh, over-hardened
 more than its years.
More sad than should be for one so fair,
 blessed with subtleties so appealing,
 to the eye of any beholder, or temporal possessor.
You gaze around smiling—the life of the moment,
For somebody, anybody, for tonight anyway.
A paper doll so stiff, so naked.

But you break open when no one watches
Like an egg cracked from within
And the tears like a stormed creek swell.

You catch before you let yourself out of your cage
Perk your offensive and sashay to the other
End, like a game-cat closing in on a meal.
A simple meal for hunger's sake, no
 roses.

I smile back, expectant, afraid of the next moment
As a balloon pops under the weight of a firm hip.
Too drunk to feel pain or life
You wander away upstairs, marking your prey
Trying desperately to conceal your paining process,
 the cycle of your ways.

The alcohol burns my chest, as a
Red nail arches over a spine
And the lights fade to ignorant bliss.
The twisting of consciousness sets like a cloud over my
 aching brain
And I hear your muffled cry, however brief,
and I feel a tear run down my back.

Brewer Stouffer

-War

What (Too
 much) is
 (not
enough) this
 (of)
madness?
 (God?)

Brian Few

Over-Analyzation

I sit here, sometimes, at night,
 and just think as I watch
 the yellow blaze of fire make
 love to the glossy wax.
My cigarette is lit, leaving cherry
 tracers to cut through my smoke
 rings that frame the now
 tranquil flame only to be disintegrated
 or seriously altered in form
 by wind or sudden movement.
It's so fragile, the flame, yet so
 wild and complex and on the verge
 of dying any moment.
And the gray rings are so simple
 and full of complications from a
 simple breath -- showing the true
 instability of being.
And me? I over analyze.
I don't wanna die. I certainly
don't want to live forever. And I
don't quite understand all the in-
between nor the before and after.
I can't help but think of tomorrow--
 that's all I do anymore. I've thought
 about tomorrow long enough to be
 living within it. And I'm scared that
 I might someday not have a tomorrow,
 only a recorded past
 and movement-less eyes..

Stephen C. Tobin

Hello, Good-bye and Whatever

I stood on the porch looking at the Lake of the Ozarks
as it sparkles as if it were embedded with diamonds.

It is 6:43 in the morning and breakfast is on the grill.

I'm lost in thought, the meal is nearly done.

It's the same routine and the same picturesque surroundings.

I shouldn't complain, this is closer to paradise.

Perhaps I should just relax and stop seeking change.

I return to the kitchen and serve the meal on two plates.

Hello Beloved Karen, had a good rest?

Good-bye Beloved Karen, I hope you drop dead!

Whatever Karen, I only meant it as a joke.

I always wanted to publish a short story in *The Atlantic Monthly*. I figured that if I mentioned the magazine's name at least once, my chances will improve.

I never meant to hurt you Karen.

I always meant to hurt you Karen.

After breakfast, I took a morning walk along the beach. There weren't any tides, the body of water seems to stay in one place. There was a slight chill to the air so I wore my windbreaker. Our house was made entirely from wood---a masterpiece in architecture. The beach stretched for several feet and then it turned to wild grass that I never bothered to mow.

In the center of the wild grass was a stone path back to the house. There was the sound of the neighbor's dog barking and rock music was flowing from Karen's study. She is a free-lance editor and I'm a semi-successful novelist. I'm not one of the biggest names, but I make enough to avoid minimum wage employment. At least, that's good enough for me.

I lit a Pall Mall cigarette as I walked along my private beach that lay alongside the Lake of the Ozarks. I lived in the

center of Missouri all my life and I never ever want to leave the Ozarks. This is my home.

Walking helps to keep me physically
fit before I start to write.

I don't want my body to decay from
my life as a semi-recluse.

It is said that writers become---a fate
I try to avoid.

When Karen and I first met six years ago, it wasn't love at first sight. We both hated each other's guts. We only got married because no one else was available at the time. Karen wanted children and I only wanted a nice steady blow job. We didn't get what we wanted in the end. Stupid Karen discovered that she was afraid to enjoy romance. Now she tells me.

It has been said that justice is blind.
In my case, justice is deaf, blind and stupid.

Karen and I met again for lunch. We didn't talk to each other between our meals. We don't talk much during our meals. We hardly talk to each other at all. Karen and I enjoyed lunch

before we went our separate ways until dinner. I spent most of my time in front of an IBM clone. I always wanted to get one of my stories published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. I don't care for the money. I already have plenty.

Maybe psychotherapy is the solution. Karen already is visiting a shrink. Maybe I should pay a visit and make it a threesome. Karen, the shrink and myself. An outing that Woody Allen would kill for. Not that I'm crazy or anything. Karen is the one on antidepressants.

Maybe I should never have married Karen.
Perhaps I got married much too quickly.
How the hell should I know?
I'm the one with rotten luck with women.

There are footsteps going up the stairs and Karen enters my office with a mug of coffee. Good old Karen. She isn't so bad after all. Let's share a romantic kiss between paragraphs.

Steven Post Hitchcock

Vice versa

War is about the poor against the rich, (and vice versa)
the minority against the majority, (and vice versa)
the hungry against the satisfied, (and vice versa)
the old against the new, (and vice versa)
War is about escape, advancement, freedom, love, and hate.
War is about the reversal of fortune and standing up for beliefs.
War is about pride and stubbornness and politics.
War is about taking orders, taking away, and taking care.
War is about Generals, Colonels, Lieutenants, Majors, Captains,
Corporals, Privates, Army soldiers, Marines, Navy
seamen, and Air Force pilots.
War is about gunfire, innocence, death, blood, bombs.
War is about possession and pain.
War is about cold, hot, wet, dry.
War is about fear of change, of no change, of anything different.
War is about being scared and sad.
War is about ignorance and prejudice.
War is about battles and hills and destruction.
War is about brokenness, dreams, hopes, loves.
War is about wide-eyed innocence turning into knowing.
War is about screaming bombs and screaming children.
War is about deception, deceit, destruction, defeat, denial.
War is about struggle.
War is about final endings and new beginnings.
War is about finding out who we are by realizing our faults.

Becky Ketron

Saigon Daydream

Soldiers bring
Pretty things,
Napalm blossoms and
American Green
Black sleek rifles
and tin can meals.
American princess
and Elizabeth Taylor
with pretty eyes.
Rock & roll and
Movie stars
Who take your side.
They take my mother for a ride.
I never see her again.
Someday they take me too
With their loud music and perfect skin
Shining white knights who fly
In giant green magic dragons with American flags
On the side
Ordering bacon and eggs,
meat and potatoes
reading menus printed in real English.

Bryan Worra

Abortion

There she quietly lay
Right down the alley's way

We found her—
Belly swollen like a
Starving child's,

—*Peace* on earth
And His mercy *mild*—

She gave us eyes
(that shone not like skies
but like rocks)
that begged us help

And, oh, we did

She sprung once for the clear
An unnerved cat
But her firstborn stopped her
Where she was at.

Unwanted, she was,
And so were they
But we took care of that.

Seven young came forth
In the alley that night
And seven were drowned
In the river despite.

Katrina Seymour

Artifacts

The old Walden house sat near the edge of town on a tall hill that overlooked absolutely nothing but a small creek that led out of town and a few treetops. It had quite a history; old man Walden went crazy after his wife died during childbirth, and never left the house since that terrible day. The child was a Mongoloid idiot whose only attributes were his physical size and strength. He was quite the handyman; the old Walden house seemed to grow in size as did the child. Old man Walden tried to teach his son the fundamentals in addition to building his body up. Food was delivered every month by the same delivery man from the same grocery. According to the delivery man, he could hear the son trying to read a couple of times, but it came out in a garble. Once, only once, the delivery man asked old man Walden what the child was reading and old man Walden answered, "It don't matter what he's trying to read, but what's important is that he's reading. He's reading his favorite book."

From time to time the delivery man could hear the son reading out loud, just assuming it was his favorite book, whatever it was.

Eventually deliveries stopped being ordered and no one ever went up there, except for the delivery man, who on one occasion became really curious as to why the deliveries stopped. He claimed that he could hear the son reading whatever he read, using a huge booming voice that rattled the delivery man. He was used to a quiet, but large voice, and the new voice scared him so bad he ran down the hill, never stopping to look back.

That was in 1929.

No one ever went up to the house, not even welfare workers coming up to check up on the son. Old man Walden was the richest man in the county, and after his wife died and he barricaded himself up and put "No Trespassing" signs all over his property, he became one of the county's biggest shames, and eventually one of the county's biggest secrets. Walden's wealth was kept in his house, so there was no out-

standing paperwork; there were deeds to the property, but those were well-hidden. The trees and undergrowth became so heavy that the house was impossible to see from the road, and the vegetation became sort of a guard dog for the house, not that anyone was brave enough to go up to old man Walden's house. Not with that son of his. In time retarded became psychotic, at least in the eyes of the people in town, and Walden's son became a cannibal maniac who ate his father and mother and anyone else he could capture.

But of course, no one could ever prove anything.

No one knows exactly who had the idea of tearing open the old Walden house. When it came right down to it, the county probably wanted the house torn down, but historical societies saved it. In any case, the university to the east of town wanted to purchase the land for its natural science classes, and the local historical society wanted whatever artifacts in the house for their own. In any event, two middle-aged gentlemen with the names of Burke and Hare, Burke from the university's history department and Hare from the science department, a member of the local historical preservation society, who was an elderly woman named Charlotte Muskie -- and the local sheriff, a large man named Hewett, and his deputies entered the house one nice October weekend.

The house, not surprisingly, showed the wear of time and the elements. Holes in the roof produced rotted timber and floorboards, vegetation grew on the walls unchecked. Mold filled the air. The house was empty, though. Completely cleaned out of its paintings, its statues, its valuables, its artifacts. Only when the basement and wine cellar were investigated did the truth show itself. Walls were torn out, the stone floor torn up and the earth beneath it dug through, the leftover stones used for makeshift steps. With the wine cellar and basement itself, there were four rooms in the basement all together; two of them being subbasements.

The first, in the basement itself, led down to a small room, the ceiling was only six foot high, with dirt floors. Clothes, jewelry, and pictures were laid out on the dirt floor and against the far wall was a long shape in what looked like a bed

sheet. When the sheet was torn from the shape the deputy who found the shape nearly threw up from the smell. It was the barely preserved body of a woman, more than likely Mrs. Walden. The skin was pulled so taut that it seemed to melt into her skull. In fact, her whole body looked like a skeleton shrink-wrapped in leather. Her mouth was sewn up and her eyes were black empty pits. She was wearing the remains of bedclothes and beside the body, also covered up were mason jars. Three of them, filled to the brim with what looked like off-colored jelly.

Burke and Hare, who took off to the wine cellar's sub-basement, found what appeared to be a walled-up door. Plaster of Paris seemed to be the material used for the wall, and really wasn't difficult to tear down. Once tearing down the wall and the door, a cloud of foul-smelling, fetid air laced with dust came through, gagging the professors. After the smell passed over them, they moved slowly down the cracked stone steps, hoping they wouldn't collapse halfway down. The flashlights illuminated the patterns of dust in the air better than they illuminated the room, but they served their purpose. Hare shined his flashlight around the perimeter of the room, discovering silverware and cups and statuettes that appeared to be made of silver and gold beneath their coats of dust. The artifacts were scattered along the floor and on top of boxes and crates that looked like a half-witted parody of furniture. In the back left side of the room was a rectangle-shaped box. The crate had at least six generations of dust and dirt on it. Any kind of stampings or markings on the box were long since buried. Burke and Hare made their way towards this crate, ducking slightly because of the low ceiling, when Sheriff Hewett showed up at the doorway with some news about the mummified body in the other room.

Hare looked at Burke, then at the rectangle crate. Then he smiled to himself. The smile lasted for quite awhile.

"Absolutely wonderful," Hare said as he looked inside the rectangle crate, which was transferred from the basement to the forensic lab in the county hospital, which was the basement level, of course. The crate sat on one of the hospital's three autopsy tables.

Inside the crate was a body, a haphazardly mummified body with three jars beside it, the same types of jars that were found by the first body. The contents of the jars, as Hare predicted, were internal organs, mashed up and stuffed tight into three mason jars per person. It was deemed virtually impossible to individually identify each particular organ; they were crushed and ruined. The body itself appeared to be in fair shape. There were fewer insects and arachnids making a home inside the body in the crate as opposed to the one under the blanket, but the skin was less preserved than the one under blanket. The skin had melted into the bone at some point. The eyes were still there, barely. They had deflated years ago. There was a huge seam cut into the torsos of both bodies, to remove the internal organs.

In the same thought, Hare figured that it looked like something a half-assed Egyptian would have pulled if he had run out of the right preservation materials. Burke would have agreed with Hare if he wasn't out front talking to Sheriff Hewett and that living corpse from the preservation society.

They were outside the forensic lab doors, drinking hospital coffee, and dispensing any pleasantries they had left over.

"What kind of guarantee do I have that whatever we found in there will go to my society?" Charlotte Muskie huffed.

Charlotte Muskie was an annoying bitch, admitted Burke to himself. A glance over to Sheriff Hewett's eyes confirmed it. He thought she was a bitch, too.

"This part of New England is full of eccentric myths and legends. We have just dispelled one. It is important that the artifacts found in the house find their way into some sort of museum collection. If not my society's, than the one over in Arkham Valley at the university. Isn't that where you're taking the bodies?"

Burke nodded indifferently. "We'll transfer them tomorrow morning after we get some basic stuff done now."

Sheriff Hewett misread Burke's indifference for the beginnings of hostility and decided that he could handle Muskie himself. Just give her some state double-talk and let everyone go back to their business.

"Dr. Burke, if you'd like to get back to your friend in there, I think I can handle Ms. Muskie's questions."

"It's Mrs. Muskie, please."

"Sorry, Misses Muskie."

Burke had nodded his thanks, patted the sheriff on the shoulder and walked through the lab doors by the time Mrs. Muskie started back up with her tirade about the artifacts.

Hare saw Burke come through the doors, "Come here, Burke, Quickly."

Burke walked over to Hare's side and peered into the crate. The first thing that struck Burke was the smell of the body. It probably didn't faze Hare, thought Burke, but the smell was sickening to him. Burke looked at what the corpse was wearing. It appeared to be the remains of pajamas and a robe. Both were probably silk, but were tattered and rotting.

"Cute. Just like the woman." Burke glanced over at the woman found in the other part of the basement. She was lying on the autopsy table beside the crate.

"Not quite. The one over there seems to have been well-preserved, fairly. Not quite well enough to totally hold up, but much better than if she were tossed in the ground. Which she practically was."

"This old boy doesn't look too different from her."

"He was probably done by someone else. I mean look at the quality of this." Hare cut open the restricting clothes on the body in the crate. Stuffing was coming out of the jagged incision in his chest. The stitches used to close the cut were ugly and huge. To Burke it looked like a blind man had done it strictly by guessing where he was cutting and sewing. Hare walked over to the woman, whose night gown was already cut open. Her incision was straight and clean, as were the stitches.

"My big question, Burke, would have to be, who would do this and why? Where's that historical society lady?"

"She's bothering the sheriff right now."

"Well, go outside and get her."

Burke shook his head. "Forget it. She'll waddle in here eventually anyway. I know some of what she'll tell us. The male is Montgomery Walden and the woman is his wife, Elizabeth. They had a son who was supposed to be retarded, but we found absolutely no trace of him."

"Why do you think they were mummified?"

"I don't know, exactly, but it looks like Montgomery tore

open his wife and mummified her as best he could, and I would guess his son tried the same with dad. But again, where's junior?"

"Do you want to go back out to the house and look some more before nightfall?"

Burke shook his head again. "Let's wait and get more people from the university tomorrow."

Hare nodded slowly.

"We'll do it tomorrow."

The bodies were locked up tight in the forensic lab. They were locked up in the freezer with the rest of the corpses. Three police guards were guarding the lab, two outside and one by the freezer. Plus there were more police in the area of the hospital, to discourage grave-robbers as it were. Indeed many of the workers and patients agreed that the hospital felt like a prison. Or at least a tomb.

That's why it was such a shock to find the freezer wide open in the morning. That's why it was such a shock to find the guards scattered about, unconscious and bleeding. That's why it was such a shock to find the two bodies gone without a trace.

The old Walden house received the rest of the police attention that night as well. Two deputies were always on guard on the top of the hill. Considering what happened at the hospital it didn't come as much more of a shock to find the two deputies on duty unconscious and leaning against a tree and to find the old Walden house burned nearly to the ground. When the guards came to, they gave the same story, that they were jumped and they never knew what hit them. The hospital guards had the exact same story, not surprisingly. The fire burned itself out by dawn, with little support from the county fire department.

Burke and Hare were there early in the morning, confused and a little pensive. Pensive because there were no witnesses, no suspects, no clues. Once the fire was out the firemen discovered two things that unnerved them, the first being two charred skeletons, lying side by side in the wine cellar. One female, one male. The second thing was the

discovery of a room behind one of the wine racks. Inside the room were the charred remains of a very large man, what appeared to be a dissection kit (scalpels, scissors, sutures), and a book. A very burned and rotted book. When Burke investigated the cover very closely and for a very long period of time, the title ended up saying, "Ancient Egypt: Its People and Traditions."

The book was in the charred man's lap, and his head was bent down. Like he was reading it.

Scott Lowry

The Last Anniversary

So we stood there.
Just trying to grasp
that it was the last
time we would celebrate
our beginning.

It was late at night
and a small breeze
tossed a lock of her hair
in such a way
that it made me sad.

I said something
about how
seeing other people
would be good for us.
But I would never
really believe it.

So we stood there.

Trying to make seconds
into eternity.

There was nothing
left.

So I turned to go.
I hoped that she would
reach out for me,
but she never moved.

At the bottom
of the stairs

I looked up at her
and promised to write.

Not knowing if
I really would.

Suddenly

I realized that

I was running back up the steps.
And she caught me.
And I caught her.

So we stood there.

Letting the pain out.
Not ashamed of our tears.
Clinging onto each other.
Trying to keep
the last anniversary
from disappearing
and hoping
that it wasn't really
the last one.

So we stood there.

Brian Few

Upon Meeting Your Mother

How we talked, your mother and I,
The two women in the world
Who love you more than life.
We talked of you, of course we did,
We knew we had that in common.
Sitting on the porch steps
Of the house where you live,
She couldn't help noticing
The twinkle in my eye,
(I noticed hers)
Searching mine:
Will she hurt him?
Is she right?
For it is I now
Who gazes upon her son's face,
At night,
And the morning after.
It is I who speak words of love
And smooths his hair when he sleeps.
There is no jealousy here,
Just a quiet understanding
Between the two women
Who love you most.

Carolyn V. Gregg

Untitled

I would like to write a love poem to myself, but I am not sure what to say exactly. Where to begin or end.

I would like to write a love poem to myself, but I am hindered by thoughts of egotism and humility. Naturalness.

I would like to write a love poem to myself, but I am unsure of how I love myself. I wonder if I can express it.

I would like to write a love poem to myself that the whole world could read and wish that they had written it because they loved themselves, too. Universal self-love and respect. And the world will keep turning while my head is spinning thinking these thoughts. And somewhere not so close and not so far away someone may be thinking my thoughts with me. Someone may be sharing my soul, and I don't know it because my head is filled by these thoughts and the world around me. The world is oblivious to me, it seems. I am sitting here speaking through my pen to what used to be a tree. I could sit here forever, not content, or sad, or happy, but writing on because so much needs to be said. Who knows why I feel and I ache when I hear beautiful music. Why I cry at imaginary pain. It seems I am losing my concept of reality at times, sliding in and out of what is called real life; I don't mind it as long as I am aware. Keeping my eyes open so I can see if I can make things happen. Blinking may let passivity sneak in. I effect a wide-eyed stare sometimes. I pretend I can see through the eyes into the soul, making up stories to fit the sadness in their eyes which may simply be a reflection of my own. Is it confusion and chaos, or do we invent sadness so we have something to feel instead of stillness and quiet. No one hears silence anymore. I believe it has become obsolete. We like to fill what is empty. Eagerness to act and accomplish. Excess energy. What will happen if I close my eyes to it all? I am on the fringes of something. I am walking on the edge of something that has not yet been named, but I am facing the future with all that I possess. I can still gaze ahead with wonder, though it surprises me. The cynicism comes and goes. It and I are hard to predict. Perhaps that is where I would begin a poem.

Perhaps I need to ponder for a few more years or lifetimes before I believe I understand myself. Rambling is like a Freudian game of free association. What do I chose to reveal to myself, who should really have nothing to hide from me. Once again, I battle time for the advantage which is so rare I doubt it exists, a myth to keep me running from myself. If I concentrate very hard, I may be able to listen to my soul. It doesn't speak; it sings. Sometimes when I walk alone, I am humming. My soul is trying to tell its secrets. Maybe I am too young and naive to understand all that I am searching for. I can't wait until I find it. The world will have such vivid color, unfading and rich, seducing my eyes, stunning my mind, freezing my lips so that I am speechless yet smiling. Such idealism. Here is where the cynicism leaves me. I can't discard the dreams which are a part of me. Poetry is a part of me, and music. Who knows where this begins or ends?

Meighan Monroe

Dreams of Earwigs

Do you want to know why I can't sleep at
night?

Every time I turn out the light in my bed,
I can feel them crawling on me.
I feel them fall on me
From the ceiling
And into my bed.
The big ones
With the pinchers on their butts.

On a rainy night
They're real bad.
Moisture under the rotting shingles on my
roof
Makes them literally come out of the
woodwork.

All I can think about
Is the time I went to work
And found centipedes everywhere.
Millions of them.
They were coming through
The Swiss cheese tile on the ceiling
And along the baseboards.
They fell on me as I walked around.

My boss made me run around all day
With the vacuum
And sweep the bastard nightmares up.

Now do you want to know why I can't sleep
at night?

Chris Grigsby

Little Feather on the Wind

"Tell us about Sarah, Grandpa," the boy child said.

"Yes, Grandpa, please, I want to hear about the legend!" The girl child walked to her grandfather's oak rocker and sat down on the floor at his feet. Her brother followed.

"Ah, children, it is late. You have school tomorrow. Let it be until another time."

"But I'll sleep better if you tell me! Please, grandpa, please, it's my favorite story in the whole world!" The look of love in his granddaughter's eyes finally got to his heart, and he lit his pipe and began to tell the story of the two children, the mountain, a river, and placed they all called home in South Dakota. It was at a time when the value of a white man's scalp was high, and the Indians were hated and killed like game by people in the tiny settlements that were their whole universe. The grandfather began: "Legend said that the first man to climb the nameless old mountain outside town would be granted the ability to fly by the great sky god. That damned mountain of rock was so high, it's hard to tell if the sky looked down on it or it looked down on the sky. Mamas and daddies had been telling their young-uns that story for generations, and I'll bet that everyone in that town had believed in it at one time in their lives or another. But the legend was like miracles and fairies and such; no one believed that sort of nonsense after they reached a certain age. No one did. And that mountain got smaller every year, if I remember right. They said the North River was eroding it away, but I think differently. I think that it was just getting humbled by the people who stopped believing in it. That would drive even a mountain to its knees, I'm sure."

The service started late that day in August. Maureen Harrison and little Sarah settled into their pews to listen to Pastor Thomas's sermon.

"TODAY, my friends, we will be STUDYING out of Deuteronomy, chapter 17. I will START with verse one." There exists in this world two kinds of preachers; the quiet, logical,

tempered kind, and the loud, spitfire, hell and brimstone-speaking preachers. Pastor Thomas belonged to the latter group. He drawled, ““You shall NOT sacrifice to the Lord our GOD a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for THAT is an abomination to the LORD your GOD. If there is FOUND among you, within any of your gates which the LORD your GOD gives you, a MAN or a WOMAN who has been WICKED in the sight of the LORD your GOD, in transgressing His covenant, who has gone and served...” Sarah had stopped listening. Instead she scratched a mosquito bite. It was swollen and teased her from under her white tights that bunched up at the ankles then settled uncomfortably into scuffed black patent-leather shoes. “Sit still,” her Aunt Maureen spat in her ear. She drew her closer and said, “The Lord Jesus loves an obedient child.” She left her gloved hand ringed tightly around Sarah’s elbow as a reminder of the Lord’s love while the choir sang “I’ll Fly Away” with more quantity than quality.

Pastor Thomas continued, “Then you shall bring out to your gates that MAN or WOMAN who has committed that WICKED thing, and shall STONE to death that MAN or WOMAN. Whoever is deserving of death SHALL be put to DEATH on the testimony of two or three WITNESSES...” Sarah could hardly sit still; that mosquito bite itched like hell! She said a silent prayer for forgiveness for thinking such thoughts, “Please Lord, forgive me for cursing like the town whore and please make it so my mosquito bite doesn’t itch so bad and I can sit still. In thy holy precious name I pray, Amen.” She saw Benjamin Jefferson’s blond head tucked neatly into his good Sunday suit two rows up. He watched his father intently as he preached at the podium. She wanted to whisper and ask him to meet her in the church yard, but her aunt’s grip let her know that it was a bad idea. Still, her arm had a mind of its own, wanting to get just one more good itch in on that bite. By the end of the ceremony, Maureen’s face was twisted into creases of anger and frustration. “Good day, Pastor Thomas,” she said to Benjamin Jefferson’s father as she jerked Sarah toward the door. Pastor Thomas did not wave back.

Sarah said nothing as they traveled by foot the way from the church to home. They only stopped to buy a six-cent loaf of bread at the general store in town.

Maureen lifted her skirts and heavily climbed the stairs into the store. Sweat beaded and rolled off her temple under her Sunday hat. She pushed a soaked strand of gray-streaked brown hair behind her ear. The bun knotted tightly at the nape of her neck was unraveling. "A loaf of white, a loaf of white, where was the white bread? Edward must think that everyone in all of South Dakota had changed their minds and were eating wheat these days," she said under her breath as she searched the store for a loaf of anything but dark, cracked wheat bread. Finally finding the loaf she wanted, she picked it up and squeezed it. "White bread." She turned and stared at the girl trailing behind her. She would be ten years old next month. Her jet hair hung in waves like a river running down her back. Her eyes were black as coal, but her skin, at least, was lily white. Or at least as white as she could keep it in the summer with the child always wanting to run around outside every day. The good Lord knows she tried to keep her inside, out of the curious, doubting, eyes of the town, but Sarah always managed to slip out the back door or take her Bible out under a tree to read during daily studies. She looked back at the girl and thought of her sister. Sarah's mother was always the pretty one; she was always the one in the spotlight. Even when she did something wrong, like breed with one of the Indian beasts from the forbidden territory east of the river, she got all the attention. "I always did the right thing, I always do things the Lord's way," Maureen thought to herself, bitterly. "And yet she got all the praise, all of mother and father's attention. Well, now she is gone, and I'm still the same. I still do things the way the Lord would have them." Maureen looked again at Sarah. Under the shadow of her sister, the features of the beast protruded through Sarah's eyes and face. The girl was forever bringing home animals, half-dead things, wanting to keep them. It must be her father in her, Maureen thought, then cringed.

"Aunt Maureen, look at how good these pastries look today, couldn't we buy one or two for after studies tonight?"

"No. It's time to go." Maureen realized she had continued to squeeze the bread until her skinny fingers had impressed long valleys into the loaf. Letting go, she pushed Sarah to the counter and then all the way home.

Benjamin Jefferson would be waiting for her by the river. Sarah ran out the back door, letting the screen door slam behind her. Aunt Maureen was asleep upstairs, no one worked on the Sabbath Day, but Sarah knew that she could make all the noise in the world and her aunt wouldn't wake from her Sunday afternoon nap. She snored so loud that Sarah wondered how she didn't wake herself up.

Sarah stepped into the white light after struggling out of the complicated dress that held her captive through the church service all morning. Clad in dungarees, Sarah stopped to smell the earth and cool her feet in the grass that spread across town and edged halfway up the old mountain.

She tumbled down the hill across the dirt way that pushed its way past her aunt's house only to dead end at a golden field. The wind blew through the apple trees that decorated her hill, their sweet scent catching and carrying through the valley. Their scarlet fruit jeweled the way down to the old North River and their leaves applauded her arrival. She smiled up at the sun, felt its heat sink into her thin body, and then broke into a run, pell-mell to the place where Benjamin Jefferson waited on her at the river bed.

He saw her coming and grinned his pleasure. "Hi Sarah! We going on up to the river?"

"Yes. Let's sing," Sarah told him, and together they broke into the chorus of "I'll Fly Away" still with them from the morning service. Their voices bounced off layers of mountain and rang through the trees, cracking the silence with its clear sound. Together, they walked crookedly up the mountain to the place where the thin old river's thread had worn its thinnest.

"So how did you get out of the house?" Sarah asked Benjamin.

"I told father that I was building something very special with you on the mountain. He said that it was Sunday and it was wrong to work, but I just explained to him that it was more like playing, anyhow. He said okay."

"He didn't ask any questions? You didn't tell him about the bridge, did you?"

"Of course not," Benjamin replied. "He just never asked me." Sarah was suspicious about this, but the two of them were quickly approaching their creation, and her worries promptly

disappeared. They stopped at their bridge.

"Sarah? Can you help me, please, with some of these rocks?"

"Sure. Here, set those right on top of that mud we packed the day before. I'll put mine on the other side of yours. Wait, wait! Make sure the big ones go on the bottom. Save the little ones for the top." The two children had met because they were two children in a dying town, and old town that had forgotten how to be young and full of the earth and proud. Sarah and Benjamin Jefferson had taken on as a project to build a bridge across the North River that summer. Time had worn away at the North River same as it had worn away at the old mountain forced to share its home. In the time of Sarah and Benjamin Jefferson, the old North River hadn't seen a good soaking in a long time. In the time of the children, it amounted to little more than a starving river bed, too stubborn to give up fighting itself down that mountain. What it needed was the rain to come and fill it up again, so it could be proud and full again.

"Okay, Sarah. How's that? Will it work like I did it?"

"It looks just perfect Benjamin Jefferson." Sarah sunk her whole hand into the mud and grabbed a good handful to cement the rocks together.

"Know what, Sarah? I think when this bridge is done we'll be famous. I bet they'll all come up here and want to see what it is we been doing and what we built here will become famous. That's what I like to pretend like is going to happen." He followed Sarah's example, watched her pack the mud between all the spaces in the rocks, and then with one eye still on her hands, he used his own to pack the mud and fill up the holes. "What do you pretend like it's going to be, Sarah?" Sarah wasn't listening. Her thoughts had taken a different direction.

"Benjamin Jefferson, why did your mama and daddy name you that? It's so awful long to say. Why don't they just call you Ben?" Benjamin Jefferson forgot his own question and stopped to answer Sarah's. He had heard his father tell the neighbors and other big people around that he was named after Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, and his father hoped that he went as far as they did. He told Sarah about how Benjamin Franklin was a great inventor and orator, and Thomas Jefferson, well, his name was on the paper that made everybody

free.

The two stopped working and stepped back to survey their progress. A fragile bridge of mud, twigs, leaves, rocks, and everything else they found lying around and looked like it would pack had been carefully stuck together by soft, careful, hands. They had both brought things from home, things they thought no one would miss, to add to the bridge. Benjamin had packed his father's old pair of britches and Sarah had thrown in the entire chapter of Deuteronomy because she said it hadn't made a whole lot of sense to her anyway. The bridge stretched about the length of two ten-year-old bodies across the river, and they walked across it single file just to feel the satisfaction of their hard work under their feet. It could be finished in another week if they worked hard.

"Sarah, you never did tell me. Why'd your mother and father name you, Sarah?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know? Nobody ever told you?"

"I guess not."

"C'mon, Sarah. What is it, a secret?"

"Sort of." Benjamin Jefferson's curiosity peaked at the mere mention of secrecy. An uncomfortable silence descended upon the two that was never there before. Of course, a secret had never been not shared between the children.

Finally Sarah relented. "Oh, Benjamin Jefferson, my mama didn't name me Sarah. My daddy never did either. Aunt Maureen gave me that name last year when I came to live with her because she said it was a good Christian name for a girl to grow up with. After mama died, no one called me by the name her and my daddy picked for me. Aunt Maureen never said so, but I know she thinks that my given name is an Injun name, and she won't even let me say it anymore. She thinks daddy was a beast. She said so."

"Your daddy is Injun? And your mama was a white woman? Did they kill him?"

"Benjamin Jefferson!" Sarah stared at the ground hard, and finally nodded. "They hanged him. Mama just got old after that. She died real soon afterwards, and Aunt Mo took me here to live. She said that I'm not to tell anyone about any of this,

Benjamin, so don't say a word, please. She'd whip me for it, I know." Sarah paused and stared up at the sky. "My mama and daddy are in heaven, Benjamin Jefferson. They look out for me from up there, I think."

Benjamin Jefferson interrupted. "So what is your name? What did your parents call you?"

"My daddy named me Sarafina, which means "Little Feather on the Wind." I remember mama saying it was because my hair was soft as down when I was born, and they wanted the wind to carry me far as I could go." Benjamin Jefferson didn't know exactly why, or even how he did it, but he moved his head towards Sarah's then and gently, quickly brushed her dark lips with a kiss. Neither child closed their eyes. Instead, they stared briefly into one another's blue and black pools of sight. For an instant, they saw themselves from the eyes of the other, the eyes of one child connected with the eyes of the other in a ceremony of wonder and wisdom.

Meanwhile, from the bushes down the mountain a ways, a man of God was watching Sarah and Benjamin that day. He thought of the Word and knew that his son was going against the wishes of God. He decided that he must spread the Word, just like the Bible says, and cast the sinner out from their midst, for she would otherwise contaminate his flock. He would not allow one inbred child to ruin the holiness of his boy or his town. He had big plans for his son. Someday, he wanted Benjamin Jefferson to follow the call of God and preach the Word to the next generation. He would continue in the legacy of his father. Someday.

The sun had journeyed high into the sky and started to come down behind the mountain. A strange silence hung over Sarah and Benjamin Jefferson as they finally made their way through the forest that surrounded the river and separated to go home, unaware that they were being watched. Benjamin Jefferson's heart felt like a lead weight in his chest, heavy with what Sarah told him at the bridge. He knew, he had heard the talk, he recognized the disapproving stares Sarah got from the old women at church and the icy eyes of his father's friends, and his own father, in town when she would follow her aunt to buy groceries. They said to one another that she was "the little mixed girl." They said this morning at the church that they

would like to visit the home of Maureen Harrison and take care of the situation. He did not understand their words and whispers until now. Even now he wasn't sure how he understood, and he didn't understand at all why he hadn't told Sarah anything. When Benjamin Jefferson Thomas got home, he was tired beyond his ten years, and couldn't look his father in the eye when he kissed him goodnight.

Maureen Harrison started her Monday afternoon with the sewing to be done. "Sarah, please come sit in your chair and help me get some of this sewing done. You're not moving an inch until you've done at least two zippers and half a dozen buttons." Maureen made her money sewing and knitting things, mainly for the people of the church. The two of them sewed all afternoon, and into the dusk. Maureen rose from her chair only long enough to light a candle. When Florence Happeny came over in a rush, Maureen assumed it was because her sewing was supposed to be done two days ago and she had yet to have it delivered.

"Florence, now just a minute, I have your sewing ready; Sarah is just finishing up that last little seam."

"Sister Harrison, send the girl to the kitchen — please —"

"What for?" A sickening feeling rose in Maureen's stomach. It was about the girl. She had been waiting for this moment; she realized it was inevitable. Maureen saw less and less of her sister's face in Sarah's every day. Everyday the beast in her forced its way through her features; the child was a symbol of the devil's work and she knew it. Now the town knew it. Pastor Thomas had known it all along; he preached his sermons and stared right through the sinful lie she had been keeping. The girl was the beast.

"Sarah, go to the kitchen."

"But this seam, it's not finished —"

"Take it with you." Forcing her off the chair, Maureen guided Sarah through the door and shoved her into the kitchen.

Florence Happeny fidgeted with her wedding ring. "The townsmen, Maureen, they're angry. They've seen the girl, they know what she is. Pastor Thomas says that she must leave our

town. He says that she is a symbol of the devil. The girl is an Injun, Maureen. She's wicked! Her kind drink the blood of their own and wear the hides of others as prizes on their backs! You know that a sinner in our midst makes sinners of us all, it says so right in the Bible! You can't let the whole town be damned because of her. It's your duty as a woman of God to do this. She has to go, Maureen. We all know." Florence paused. "It's what the Lord has called you to do, Sister Harrison. I've only come to warn you that they, that they're coming."

Maureen finally came back to her senses. "Coming? The townsmen are coming? Where? When?"

"Tonight, Maureen. They won't hurt you, they just want the girl. They're going to run her off."

"Will they kill her?" Maureen's face sacrificed no emotion. She had ceased to care either way.

"Just run her off, that's all they said. I heard it right outside the Thomases."

A commotion sounded outside. Lights of fire lit the growing darkness that was settling over the town as the sun disappeared behind the mountain outside of town. Florence and Maureen stepped out onto the porch and Florence left to seek shelter at her own home two houses down. Maureen watched the light in the distance grow brighter as the party made its way deliberately down the road to her house. She considered shutting up the house and resisting, but she knew they would burn it down. Instead Maureen just stood out on her front porch and watched the men come closer and closer. Her sister was dead. She had no obligations to her anymore. Maureen's heart turned to into a pillar of salt, and she erased the girl's existence from her memory. Her sister never bore a child, she told herself. She died young. She never married. She never conceived. Sarah never existed. She convinced herself.

"Step out of the way, Maureen. You know this is the right thing to do." Benjamin Jefferson's father held a torch and stood on the outside of the crowd. "Let's just do this the Lord's way."

Maureen backed up against her door, as if to block it, then slowly turned the knob instead and moved out of the way of the men. "She's in the kitchen. Please don't touch anything but the girl. Please leave my house alone."

The crowd pushed its way through the tiny house to the kitchen, but Sarah had already heard all she needed to hear. The wind blew the smell of apples across the room through the open screen door that led to the hill outside.

"This way!" someone shouted and the men headed down the hill and through the valley that led to the river. They followed the girl's fleeing figure to the base of the great mountain.

Little Feather on the Wind stopped just once to catch her breath. Her heart felt as if it were bursting from the effort to make it up the side of that mountain. She had dreamed of this place before; her mother told her the story of the mountain and how she could fly if she ever reached the top. She would fall asleep after that story and dream herself where she stood right now, on the side of the mountain, running up the river to the top where the sky god, her god, would grant her wings to fly away. She wondered why she always woke in fear.

The men were coming closer. Their torches glowed against the starless night, lighting up the forest with tongues of fire.

Her breath was coming faster now; her heart pounded hard against her ribs and she felt something like fear move its dead fingers up and down her spine. She closed her eyes.

"Mama, Daddy, where do I go? What do I do?"

The bridge. It could save her if she could make her way across and reach the top of the mountain. The sky god. The bridge. Her wings.

The little Indian girl stepped onto the bridge with a sure foot and hopeful heart. "I'm coming, mama. I'm coming, daddy. Thank you, Benjamin Jefferson, for helping me build this bridge. I'll tell mama and daddy all about you when I get my wings and fly to heaven to see them. I'll tell them all about you." She was going to fly. Behind her the faces of the men glowed with a light not their own in the night. The shouts mixed behind her: "What's she doing? It looks like she's just walking on top of the water! How in the..."

"Wait! I see it! She's on some kind of a dam or something." They had her cornered.

"I'm coming mama. Tell daddy I'm coming. I'll always love you, Benjamin Jefferson. Please don't forget me when I fly far away, far, far, away..."

The men stopped as they reached the bridge and listened. They saw the girl teetering and twirling on the bridge. "She's singing," one of them finally said, and, indeed, she was. The familiar chords of "I'll Fly Away" shook the forest quietly in the night from her clear, little, voice.

"...Oh glory, I'll — fly away — When I die, Hallelujah by and by-- I'll -- fly away..."

Her eyes were those of an owl's when she made the jump from where the bridge stopped to where the bank began on the other side. The top of the mountain lay right across the river where the bridge couldn't go. Sarafina hung in the thick air between the bridge's end and the other side for only a second before plunging into the rocky waters of the old North River. Scarlet life flowed from her temple, dissolved into the river water, and leaked onto the stones that marked her resting place. Her eyes were closed, her face was dark under the shallow river. She lay quite still.

The lusty men had watched her fly and her body crash crookedly onto the rocks below. The leader stepped onto the unfinished bridge, but it broke under his weight and separated itself as it flowed downstream. Little Feather on the Wind drowned in the Old North River that night, and the townsmen watched her bleed before they turned to go home to their wives and homes — and their children.

That's about the time that the rain started. It fell in torrents into the river, overflowing the dried banks and carrying the mountain's dirt with it. The men ran for their houses, their torches extinguished by the storm. Pastor Thomas went to bed that night without kissing his son goodnight, so he didn't know that his son wasn't in bed at all.

Benjamin Jefferson had gone down by the river. His heart swelled and burst as the rains came and washed his wounded soul. He cried his shame so hard that it mixed with the rain and soaked his face. He dropped to his lily white knees on the bank of the Old North River and cried with the earth all alone. And then Benjamin Jefferson Thomas let his mourning turn inside, and there on his knees by the old North River, he threw the first rock into the waters and watched it swirl and sink. When the sun came up on that old mountain the next morning, it shone on the curled, sleeping, body of a ten-year-old man by the river.

Both the children were asleep, just as they always were, by the time the Grandfather finished the story. They never knew that Sarah died, and he thought it best if it stayed that way for at least a little while longer. He stood from his rocker and gently lifted the boy and carried him to his bed. As he lifted the girl child, she opened her eyes and smiled. "Grandpa, what happened? How does the story end?" she asked, rubbing her dark eyes.

The grandfather's eyes filled, and he touched her long dark hair, that ran like a river down her back.

"Shh, time to sleep, little one." The girl had already dropped back off into her dreams. "There is no end to tell. As long as my body walks this earth, the story will live on, and after my death, you shall carry it on and add to it. This story is special, young one. It is a never-ending story." With that, he laid her down to sleep, moved his head close, and brushed her forehead lightly with a kiss. "Sweet dreams, my little bird. Sweet dreams."

Katrina Seymour

Voice Lessons with Whitman

The blades of grass cast shadows,
I sit watching the sun burn its construction orange.
Pictures of children in potato sack clothes, and old men
buried in business suits with their
shotguns confuse my mind. My head swings as a pendulum
counting the rhythms of my body and the song that I feel.

The familiar wood-flecked path crackles.
I stumble through darkness, ending at my car.
The ignition brings on its red lights about the seat belt,
an old man's wheeze squeezes out of my muffler.
The public station counts buffalo and says they're dying.

In my parking lot Joey Whipter, forty-three years
past hippie, screams the end of the world,
a sermon lasting six weeks and I'm not waiting for Jesus.
Seems the shadows are his congregation,
the empty wine bottle his microphone,
the empty cars his apostles.

My silver key jingles some tune about the door.
Her skin is bleached by the black shadows.
Her red hair and white skin on the black sheets
tell a story of a bloody virgin's death,
I understand that I killed her and lie down.
Rolling over I pick up the phone listen to the monotone hum
and decide not to tell her father I am high and
wrecking his daughter.

Guilt keeps tapping my eyelids
and I rise naked and go to the kitchen.
On the stove sits the coffeepot with coffee sixteen hours cold.
I fill up a mug and move to pluck out rhythm on my typewriter.
Outside Peeping Tom keeps checking up on me.
My grandmother calls at three in the morning,
says she's got bad news:
seems the furnace is broken and it's hot outside,
she's out of lemonade and I must come over.

I decide to go back to dreaming
and return to my bed.

When I wake up Walt Whitman is scrambling eggs
and tells me she's gone and I'm his angel now.
He calls my preaching father
and tells him we're headed to live under the Golden Gate
Bridge.

The Greyhound leaves for California at 4:56 PM
I am leaving with Whitman, off to find myself and learn to sing.

Adam Ellis

Contributors

Adam Ellis is a sophomore English major who ponders, "Maybe, we will find paradise, perhaps we'll always chase the horizon."

Brian Few is in his first year and is studying broadcasting. He believes poetry should be enjoyed like music. It should be read for the sheer purpose of enjoyment and expression.

Carolyn V. Gregg is a junior.

Chris Grigsby is a senior English major.

Steven Post Hitchcock is a psychology major and is finishing his second novel. Steven thinks of himself as a bearded, cappuccino-drinking intellectual.

E-mae Holmes now sighs.

Beth Honeycutt says, "My family has always encouraged and supported me, and that's been a big help to my writing."

Scott Lowry says, "He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."

Meighan Monroe is a senior public relations major. She was inspired by Allen Ginsberg's "Howl!"

Shannon Reed is a sophomore theatre major who really doesn't care much for country music.

Katrina Seymour is a junior English writing major. She claims college has taught her that Emerson was right when saying, "The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet."

Contributors continued

Gabe Smith is in his first year at Otterbein.

Heather Spessard is a junior with severe senioritis. Her major is visual art (illustration), and her pet peeves are PageMaker® and Macintosh® computers.

Brewer Stouffer is a junior with an individualized major in literature and culture. He has a passion for learning, reading, and writing. Visual art and pool come in close second.

Michael P. Tichy is in his first year and is studying English literature. This is his first time being published. "The blue monkey stew was always better on Tuesdays. But, then again, orange."

Stephen C. Tobin is a junior English writing major. He observed, "Dias no existe. Todo es mentira"-- Subway graffiti.

Bryan Worra is a junior who currently is making his own major much to the consternation of the curriculum committee. He believes "the truth can be found in the littlest things. A cup of wisdom is a draught too rare, as rare as the winter rose by the river of souls."



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1994 Q&Q Writing Contest Winners

Short Story Contest

First Place

Carolyn V. Gregg, "Tomorrow"

Second Place

Scott Lowry, "Eternity"

Personal Essay Contest

First Place

Heather Spessard, "I Wanna Be Retired"

Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

First Place

Adam Ellis, "Paradise Road Blues Section 43"

Second Place

Bryan Worra, "Golem"

Third Place

Shannon Reed, "Gone by Now"

Honorable Mention

Kate Visconti, "Geranium"

Poetry Contest

First Place

Bryan Worra, "Epiphany"

Second Place

Adam Ellis, "Voice Lessons with Whitman"

Third Place

Bryan Worra, "Saigon Daydream"

Honorable Mention

Meighan Monroe, "In Response to 'Marriage' . . ."

Honorable Mention

Shannon Reed, "Typical Thursday Night"

Contest Winners continued

Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

First Place

Katrina Seymour

Second Place

Michael McCoy

Third Place

Heather Rutz

Walter Lowre Barnes Short Story Contest

First Place

Bryan Worra, "Brothers"

1994 Judges

Poetry and Religious

Doug Gray has just had his first book of poems published and teaches at The Pontifical College of Josephium.

Essays

Robert Pringle writes poetry and has been published in various literary magazines.

Short Stories

Candace Barnes has published many short stories of her own and also has taught fiction writing at The Ohio State University.

Newspaper Articles

Ruth Hanley is an assistant city editor for the *Columbus Dispatch*. Previously she was a reporter who covered county government and education.

