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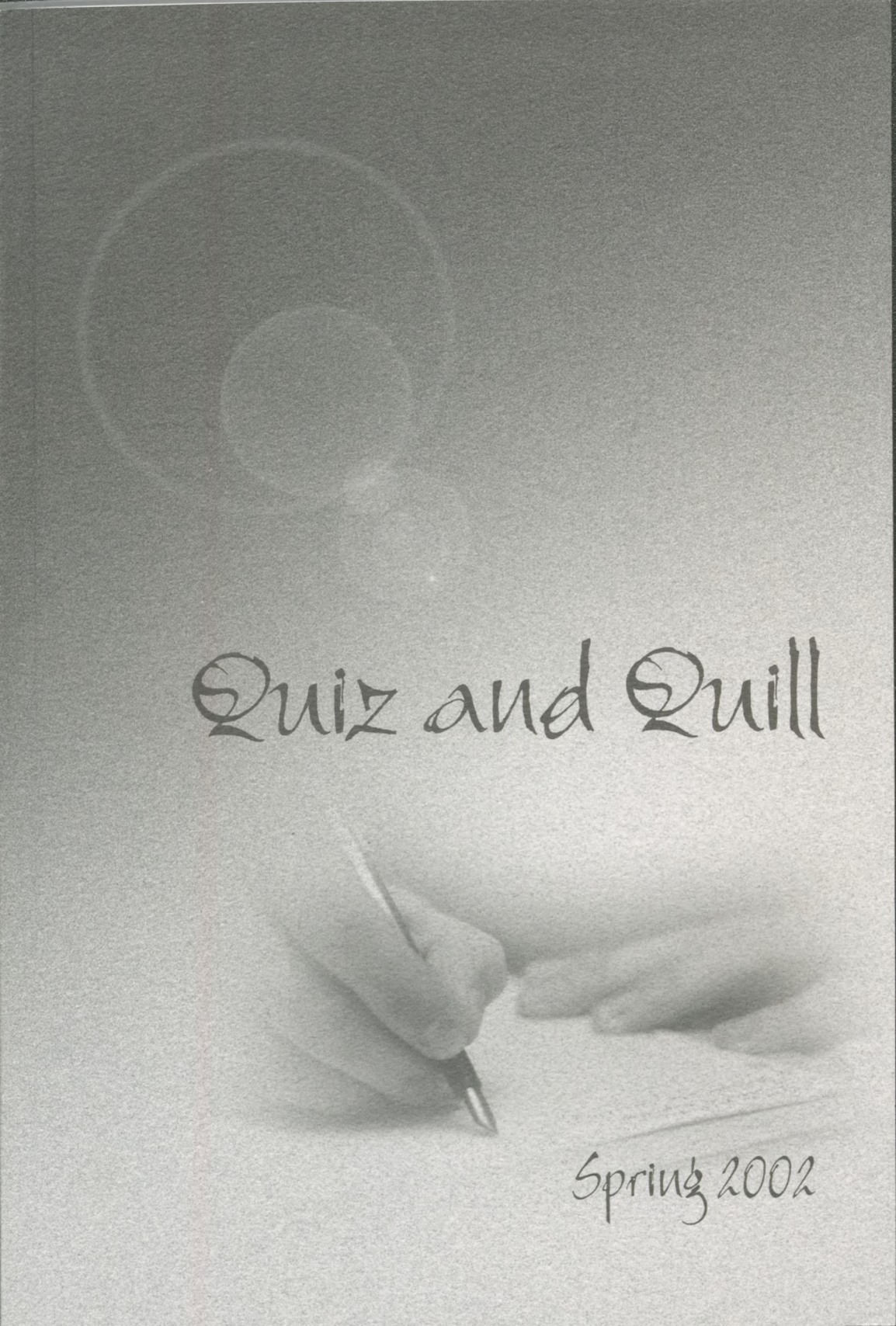


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Quiz and Quill

Spring 2002

Quiz and Quill

Otterbein College
Westerville, Ohio

Spring 2002

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Editor's Note

Top Five Reasons Why I Am Having Difficulty Writing An Editor's Note:

5. Someone is talking on a cell-phone in the computer lab.
4. Dr. Bailey didn't buy me Schneider's cookies for the occasion.
3. Matt Glaviano thanked his goldfish last year in the editor's note.
2. There is much better writing in here that you should hurry up and get to instead of sitting there reading a run-on sentence by the magazine's editor.
1. Have you ever tried?

At any rate, *voilà!* The Quiz and Quill 2002! Thank you to the staff for working so hard—for putting their hearts ("and other organs") into this year's edition. Thank you to Dr. Bailey, who did not sport his feather boa once this year, but who did indeed buy us cookies, doughnuts and pizza to fuel us throughout the long hours of reading the submissions. Thank you to Jenny Hill for helping put the finished magazine together and to Roger Routson for designing the cover. Thank you to semicolons everywhere (even though I did not get a chance to use one in this note), and to you ... because you're cute.

2002 Quiz and Quill Writing Contest Winners

Poetry Contest

First Place	<i>Finding the Sex of a Caterpillar</i> by Vincent Xexaviar
Second Place	<i>Watching You</i> by Allison Barrett
Third Place	<i>To Speak</i> by A. Noelle Phillips

Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

First Place	<i>Eden Renewed</i> by Kimberly Lowe
Second Place	<i>A Round with God</i> by Vincent Xexaviar
Third Place	<i>Artistry</i> by Nathan Ericson

Short Story Contest

First Place	<i>Of Our Own Device</i> by Jordan Lowe
Second Place	<i>The Ghost Stallion</i> by Kristin Kauffman
Third Place	<i>Merry Christmas, Guys</i> by Kara McCoy

Personal Essay Contest

First Place	<i>The Gift</i> by Becky O'Neil
Second Place	<i>Photographic Memories of Nathaniel</i> by Ellen Beversluis
Third Place	<i>On a Lake with a Sister Nobody Wants</i> by Stacy Campbell

Playwriting Contest

First Place	<i>Someday</i> by Hope Wells
Second Place	<i>Grin and Bear It</i> by Jen LaConte
Third Place	<i>Corporate Machine</i> by Ryan Parrish

Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

First Place	Evan Struble
Second Place	Katie Crabtree
Third Place	Beth Pilawski

Writing Contest Judges

Poetry and Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contests

Ed Karshner teaches at Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio. He is a 1991 graduate of Otterbein College and a 1997 winner of the Academy of American Poets Prize.

Short Story Contest

Annabel Thomas has published two novels, *Stone Man Mountain* (2002) and *Blood Feud* (1998). She has also published two short story collections, *Knucklebones* and *The Phototropic Woman*. She lives and writes in Ashley, Ohio.

Personal Essay Contest

David Kimmel is an associate professor of English at Heidelberg College, where he teaches writing, computer mediated communication, and American literature. He is a 1985 graduate of Otterbein College and earned his Ph.D. from Ohio State University in 1991.

Playwriting Contest

Johnrick Hole has had several plays produced by local companies: *Roadkill by Moonlight* by Madlab Theatre Company, *Queen of Satin* by Reality Theatre Company, and *Everyone Needs a Personal Chef, Or Put on Your Hipwaders and Let an Umbrella Be Your Tomato* by Red Herring Ensemble. Most recently, his *Reason for Living* was part of the Theatre Roulette new plays festival in May 2002.

Louise GleimWilliams Newswriting Contest

Sarah Mills Bacha is a free-lance writer and communications consultant, and president of her own consulting firm, SMB Communications Ltd. She previously was a business reporter at *The Columbus Dispatch* and comment page editor at *The Journal-Gazette* in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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untitled three*by Jeni Kettering*

i woke up, pouring out of my mother in an amniotic flood
i blinked into existence
one immense contraction thrust me from a deep red universe
into the shrill fluorescence of a sterile room
you woke me from a dream that began in the REM of your sex
i am finally here
i am all nerves
i am tired
i am yours
rock your baby to sleep
wrap me up in white sheets and lay me down

i woke up, in the thrusts of love
blinking into your fierce existence
you crawled into my womb
you drew me out of shivering sleep and threw me into this burning
this violent universe of yourself
you are a red dream that melts me every time i move
you are sex and fire
i am finally here
i am all nerves
i am tired
i am yours
rock your baby to sleep
wrap me up in white sheets and lay me down

i woke up, in the foreshadow of my death
i blinked the light out of my eyes
there was no flood
there was no fire
i woke, from the strange dream of my life
pushed out of existence by the deep contractions of this final sex
i opened my eyes and you were holding me
i am finally here
i am all nerves
i am tired
i am yours
goodbye, to all that i have felt and loved and belonged to
goodnight, to all the hands that have rocked this baby to sleep
just wrap me up in white sheets
and lay me down
i am awake now

Finding the Sex of a Caterpillar*First Place, Poetry Contest**by Vincent Xexaviar*

With her mouth
Growing tight with blackberries,
She looks at me
And laughs,
Behind purple stained teeth
And clusters of nectar

She oozes syllables
That resemble in some respect
“Caterpillar penis”
Between giggles
And geysers of
Premature wine

The frothy laughter
Overcomes us both,
As the fuzzy blades of grass
Catch us
In soft humor

The giggles slow
And I taste
The honeyed wonder
Of her smile,
The dark coils of her hair,
And the floral wind
Who carried her request
For a napkin
To dab away
That sweet reward
Of the summer flavor.

What I Remember Most From New Year's

by Julie Kirsch

Is that I don't remember much at all.

Dawn's promise

yawned through blinds.

My head screamed with remembering.

Those social drinks

spun the room tilty, blurry,

gotta watch those social drinks—they're bitches.

You carried me I was so sick.

Flashy scarlet shirt, new diamond ring, pretty makeup, curly hair
heaved nachos, vodka, wine—what a mess;

I hadn't thrown up since I was two.

I hated you seeing me but loved you for staying.

You laid towels on the bathroom floor;

held my hair away from my face and talked

because I was afraid

and you knew it.

Teary, trembling "I don't want to die young,"

you laughed—sounded silvery, soothing

I shivered and you wrapped me

in a hug and every blanket in the house.

Curled around a trash can—chewed gum, talked,

Remember snatches of a conversation that

you know but never mention.

I know I said I loved you, and you said I was drunk.

I needed you completely, for the first time

in the three months I'd known you.

That night shines like the ball I never saw drop

because what I remember most from New Year's

Is you.

Nightly Rituals

by Krista Lively

The TV blares
as she turns off the light
in the bedroom.
Her face glows in the blue of the couple
locked in carnal embrace.

The dog stands by the door
waiting for someone to enter...
she smiles,
in a way,
at his canine innocence,
And then proceeds to lock the bedroom door.
Twice.

She sits on the waterbed
Brown comforter, soft cotton sheets to match
thinks about what kind of bed she should
buy when she sells this one.

She realizes she forgot to
brush her teeth.
A habit they had to share the sink—
spit
one after the other.
Then looking at the metal holder attached to the wall
she sees her pink one
—and his green one—
“honey, you forgot your...”

She replaces hers after she
spits.
and wonders whose sink he'll be using
now.

Looking for Stars in August

by Michelle Casto

Legs arched against steel hood and
 I collect beads of sweat
 where shoulder blades bond to glass.
 Garcia emerges from the stereo and
 you hum along, softer than wind.
 No stars tonight; neon sign
 bathes us in electric reds and blues,
 free advertising on bare limbs.
 Night swallows bright youth,
 leaving only black sky and
 artificial color.

In the Bathroom at Motel 8

by Stacy Campbell

Thick
 rich crimson
 droplets
 would spill and splatter
 staining
 stern white
 of crisp
 linoleum.

A goddess
 of her action—
 statuesque
 and magnificent
 she towered
 defiantly
 with
 blazing razor
 in hand.

In the
 unfaltering flick
 of the wrist
 she would
 fall
 into the
 stark pitiless
 vacancy.

Eden Renewed

First Place, Burkhart Poetry Contest

by Kimberly M. Lowe

The sin of Eve has supposedly been
passed down through generations.
Her stumble rests heavily on my shoulders
as I yearn to commit the one unforgivable sin
in this magical place –
a garden, no less.

Anywhere else,
choose any of this same fruit;
just not here.

Oh, to pluck one flower from its stem,
relieve the full tree of its ripe, heady fruit –
never to recover Innocence.

I wish I could purge myself,
eliminate my desires
in the cleansing ice
that flows in sculptures here.

Instead, I must do my best with the air.
Crisp breeze brings a fresh sting
as I lift away all coverings
and bare my soul
to ancestors long dead.

Slow

by Kristin Kauffman

you said,
let's take it slow.
it took you a week to call me,
a month to kiss me,
a summer to say i love you,
a year to say i need you.

And five minutes
to crush my heart.

Life With Her*by Ryan Parrish*

Moon pale in littered sky
 hears wind
 sigh with the room.
 Five hundred and sixty-three days
 and we still do this:
 separated by sheet
 cloth
 cover
 in bed;
 invisible lines dividing.

It was bright at noon –
 thirteen hours before this parting
 (cloth
 covers) –
 sun on curtains
 green with envy
 at not being us.
 Television one-channel
 plays repetitious news for two
 lying stacked
 on a couch sized for twelve,
 and they
 (we)
 kiss.
 Thick “I love you,
 you love me” lips part,
 breathing.

Television one-channel
 moves in sync with green envy curtains.

Time livens.

Well worded talk
 pervades the space between
 and we giggle at ourselves –
 each other –
 noting the
 flaws
 faults
 of one another
 in faultless canter,
 ‘till something is said
 that quiets the prattle.

Green envy curtains rest.

Time stills.

Cleaning supplants text,
 healthy
 (unhealthy)
 distractions
 get in the way
 of apologies
 meant to be said;
 we stand
 sit
 opposite one another
 speaking volumes in silence.
 Quiet-continuous drinks the day,
 sunset enters
 exits,
 mute war waged
 morning to night.

We lie –
 pale moon glow
 on bed –
 separated by sheet
 cloth
 cover,
 thirteen hours from noon.

Faint tears kiss cheeks.

Eager-to-mend hands
 touch skin smooth at night,
 helping stop wet grief.

Quiet whispers
 break the still;
 we talk,
 you and I,
 delicate words
 tripping to make her
 (you)

smile.
 You laugh,
 kissing my skin
 across the neck,
 fingers move
 palm to palm;
 eyes close.

We kiss.

Lips again
 "I love you
 you love me"
 move on one another
 forgetting argument past,
 feel new under moon.

Day breaks
 six hours from noon.

Sheet
 cloth
 cover
 pulled tight to neck;
 bodies close,
 breathing steady;
 as one.

Life with her
 (you):

The Conversation Between Me & The Mirror Continues On...
Or Who Will Blink First

by Matthew Wolfe

...and maybe loneliness is not being without;

maybe loneliness is having too much

9:47 a.m.

by Michelle Casto

Awake enough
to catch sunlight dancing
through parted shades.
Naked limbs glow
in the golden haze embrace.
On soft, pale sheets,
velvet skin is blush, alive
in summer's sweat.
Although half-awake,
I know this moment
is mine.

Medusa Stone*by Patrick Reidel*

Sweet, green Medusa,
 with wild, reptilian hair,
 change me into frigid stone,
 a gift, my eternal stare.

I want to be imprisoned
 by each animated strand;
 to sacrifice all movement
 just to hold your freezing hand
 in mine.

I need not receptive eyes
 to see your cold beauty.
 Through my skin of solid rock,
 you fill up what was empty.
 Turn my frozen eyes to your direction
 for me.

Watching You*Second Place, Poetry Contest**by Allison Barrett*

I see that you are deep in thought.
 Your eyebrows are dark
 and furrowed,
 like plowed earth.
 The spilled ink of your hair
 drips onto your face,
 irritating you.
 Impatiently,
 your brush it aside,
 and the smudged charcoal intensity
 of your brow
 lifts quizzically,
 leaving your eyes a little helpless –
 two blue mittens lost in the snow.

Melted Snow*by Julie Kirsch*

Snow sunk in sulky waves;
tree branches pouted and crackled under silver ice.
With nothing to do, we slid to your truck
and just drove,
our tire tracks the only sign a car passed that way.
The snow folded its arms around like a mama
holding a feverish child – in a frozen world our heat made us special.

Slowly, the roads discouraging us,
you drove to the best part of town to show me the Christmas lights,
brick houses with graceful pillars,
stucco houses with delicately arched doorways
cleansed by brilliant snow
and lit with the best lights
money could buy.
Silent because the snow smothered noise,
and dark because the moon huddled behind clouds and the stars
were too afraid of freezing to join us that night.

I enjoyed your admiration of those houses,
your quiet determination to someday live there,
when I would never want to,
and the fact
that for an hour,
we were alone in the world.
That snow melted,
daylight glaring harshly on houses
big and drafty, their fake brick and empty flowerbeds
reminders that money cannot buy the seasons,
that there is much that money cannot buy.

The same daylight that shows your love grew
from the fear of being alone,
and I was just snow sent to hold you
and then melt away
in the light.

The Gift

First Place, Personal Essay Contest

by Becky O'Neil

I'm not sure when I first figured out that Lavaughn Gift was not a normal babysitter. Even at the age of five, I could tell she was not even the kind of grown-up I was used to. I'd never known anyone with a gravel driveway, a microwave, three different cats, and a flower garden that out-bloomed the entire block. I found myself hoping right away that my mother would approve of her; she'd been chosen after a long sequence of strange at-home nannies. One was Betty, a grandmother with the thickest ankles I'd ever seen. She spent her hours knitting at an endless gray scarf without taking an eye from "The Price Is Right." Her favorite expression was "Life's tough, isn't it?" and truth be told, I didn't really have a comeback to it. Another was Grace, an older lady who announced her arrival by knocking "shave-and-a-haircut" as if she was trying to break down the back door, and who wore tinted glasses and a fading gold perm. She also washed paper plates—real paper, not Styrofoam—and left them in the drainer where they slowly curled dry. My mother fired her the day she cut my sister Laura's bangs nearly to her scalp. Evidently, they were getting "just too long" for Grace. All in all, it was not without a little trepidation on everyone's part that Laura and I began spending Mondays and Wednesdays at Lavaughn's house.

* * *

Lavaughn was thin, fair-skinned, and quick-moving; she claimed that her German heritage gave her "the blue eyes, blond hair, and straight nose," and she always pointed out her son Robert as "the little tow-headed one" amidst her half-dozen daycare kids. She wore shorts, t-shirts, gold jewelry, and no shoes; I was shocked at the nonchalance with which she regarded baby drool, baby snot, and baby spit-up—all things which I was glad my sister was learning to control. I practiced every week until I could spell Lavaughn's exotic-sounding name, L-A-V-A-U-G-H-N, which was actually her middle name. "Whatever you do, don't call me Laverne," she admonished, as I finally mastered the silent "gh." She later confided, to my horror, that her real first name was Gertrude. It couldn't be true; Gertrude was a knitter, a paper-plate-washer, a teacher brandishing a ruler. But Lavaughn's smile was wide and quick, and her laugh was a statement unto itself: *see what a strange world we live in; stop and laugh about it with me*. If I ever remembered Betty's voice saying, "Life's tough, isn't it?" I could imagine Lavaughn responding, "Oh, but it's so *funny*! Don't you think so? I mean, isn't that just the most ridiculous thing you've ever *heard*? I'm telling you, adults do *not* have it figured out. You always think they do, but I'm telling you, it's *just not true*." Her monologues made more sense to me as I grew older. Laura and I, as meek newcomers to her household, were wholly awestruck.

When Lavaughn first began running a small daycare, no one could say where the daycare left off and her house began. I was overcome with the wonder

of spending so much time in someone else's home. My house had carpet on all the floors, even the kitchen; her kitchen was tiled in gray linoleum and there was dark, shiny hardwood under her dining-room furniture. Above her table was a small chandelier festooned with drops of faceted glass. My mother kept a few plants in the light of our living room; every window in Lavaughn's house was crammed with cactuses. "Cactuses are great," she liked to say, "because no one messes with them and they never need water." I couldn't resist touching them, however, and spent many rueful moments hoping no one would see me plucking prickles from my fingertips.

We had no pets, but Lavaughn had three cats: the ancient and omnipresent White Kitty, who meowed like a creaking chair and couldn't hear a thing; Fozzy, brown and good-natured and independent; and Little Darling, whose shyness was so great that it was weeks before I caught a glimpse of her and actually believed she existed. Lavaughn even used different toilet paper—quilted—and her bathroom sink had plastic crystal knobs like I'd only seen in the hardware store. My world was expanding.

Most importantly, there was The Pantry. Although it was really just a little alcove for the back door, it was a room that my house lacked, and its shelves were an infinite source of creative inspiration and good things to eat. Lavaughn was a ruthless coupon-clipper, and she saved them not in an envelope, but in a shoebox that grew round and bulgy toward the week's end; when certain foods went on sale, she'd extract relevant clippings by the stack, and venture to the grocery store to stock up on Post cereal or Swanson dinners. She filled her cart fuller than anyone I knew; she laughed at my embarrassment as she deposited armload upon armload of soup cans or paper bags of goldfish crackers and I pretended not to know her.

Under her influence, I learned the joyful art of appeasing a sweet tooth and baking with abandon. She ate ice cream straight out of the carton and frozen peas, cold and crunchy, by the handful. "They taste just like candy when they're still frozen," she assured me earnestly. "Try them! Who says you have to cook them?" I only really believed her when it came to chocolate, which was, according to her, deserving of worship. However, only the darkest dark chocolate was worth the trouble. We loved to tease her about this.

"Do you like *milk* chocolate, Lavaughn?"

"No! It's yucky. Too sweet."

"Do you like *mint*?"

"No way! Makes me sick."

We brought out the killer question. "What about VANILLA?"

She would squint her eyes in disgust, and if there was chocolate nearby, she'd eat it with flair to banish the thought. "Vanilla is *poison*," she'd intone in a dramatic whisper, and we'd shiver with delight.

Baking with her was a highly exhilarating experience. I was completely at a loss the first time she made cookies with us. Where were her recipes, her measuring cups, her teaspoons? She pulled a bowl out of the cupboard, amused at my confusion. "There's spoons in that drawer if you really want them," she

said. "But we don't need them." She shook some salt into her palm, cracked an egg into the batter with a single flick of her hand, and threw in a couple fistfuls of flour, waving away the white cloud that rose from the bowl. "Go and look for chocolate chips," she ordered, since my mouth was hanging open, and I dutifully went to The Pantry. Bags of butterscotch chips, peanut butter chips, white chocolate chips, dark chocolate chips, semi-sweet chocolate chips, milk chocolate chips, M & Ms, and mini chocolate chips were stacked against a dozen or so boxes of fruit snacks. Who'd ever heard of mini chocolate chips? "Why did you buy all these chips?" I shouted. Lavaughn stuck her head in the pantry, hands suspended and dripping cookie batter. She grinned. "Nestle sale," she explained happily.

Sometimes, if she was feeling generous, she'd set a big bowl on the back porch and let us kids concoct our own treats. These hardly ever made it to the oven, tending to be mostly flour, sugar, and the odd handful of Skittles, but either way, we crunched through them with glee. Lavaughn's son Robert, who was just Laura's age, treated mixing much as a sandbox operation, with bulldozer sound effects and the occasional buried G.I. Joe toy. Thankfully, Joe was always rescued by Wonder Woman before any baking occurred. Waiting for the oven was the boring part; we could usually be found leaping from chairs, steps and swings to the others' encouraging shouts of "SUPERMAN!" while our concoctions set off the smoke detector.

Lunch was a daily event that was equally exciting, with two other foods that were never found at my house: Wonder bread and Skippy peanut butter. I quickly learned, however, that Lavaughn made terrible sandwiches. Two slices of bread glued together by a dab of peanut butter and jelly in their dead center might have been well and good for the babies, but I already hated crusts, and soon proved that I could spread my own peanut butter with more attentiveness to the bread. Sometimes I volunteered to make the babies' sandwiches, too, out of pity, but I don't think they really knew the difference. We usually drank water or milk—she kept Diet Cokes in the door of the fridge, but they were hers and hers alone. I fell for her chocolate milk trick for years. "Can we have *chocolate* milk today, Lavaughn? Pleeeeeeeease?" She would consent, reluctantly, and add a few drops of chocolate syrup to a full gallon of milk—just enough to alter the color—and shake it up. I'm sure the taste was unchanged, but we all gulped that milk like it was the last thing we'd ever drink, thinking how cool and lucky we were to have chocolate milk in such quantities.

Even if we weren't baking or lunching, The Pantry and the kitchen offered plenty of snacks for the forager. One of my favorites was a caramel apple kit—you took round sheets of caramel, pressed them over an apple, and quickly microwaved the whole thing. Of course, the apples weren't included, so we munched the caramel straight out of the package. I learned to use the microwave to make Spaghetti-O's and macaroni and cheese, and Swiss Miss hot chocolate on winter afternoons after grade school. We hardboiled eggs even when it wasn't Easter, and threw the yolks to White Kitty, who scarfed them down and licked her lips. Summertime was an ice cream paradise, with the

basement freezer packed with Popsicles, creamsicles, fudgesicles, ice cream bars, pudding pops, and Lavaughn's famous bucket of Graeter's ice cream. It really did look like a bucket, the same size as you'd buy at a hardware store, and it was, she claimed, the only way to get her Dark Chocolate With Dark Chocolate Chips in sufficient quantity. This was a superhero ice cream—it froze so hard that it bent normal kitchen spoons as easily as rubber—and so she had to use a giant thick spoon that we swore was really some type of small garden shovel. She'd lug the whole assembly out of the basement and pay us no mind as we sang, "There's Lavaughn, eating ice cream out of a bucket with a shovel!" The babies' mothers always clicked their tongues and marveled that Lavaughn kept such habits and never seemed to put on any weight.

* * *

She would often talk to me in the quiet spells while the babies napped. I liked to follow her as she made her house spotless for the umpteenth time that day, pressing her finger to crumbs on the floor, tipping the pooled water out of the dish drainer, wiping down the counter and draping the rag over the faucet. When she sat, I joined her on the couch, picking at the loosening brown upholstery as she combed her fingers through her wavy perm and explained how she was going to have her house paid off sooner than anybody else, because she always paid the highest monthly amount and in that way avoided too much interest. She explained that most necessities could be found at garage sales. Her hands moved apart and together as she shaped new money-saving ideas in the air. She never painted her nails, I noticed, but she had a pretty wedding ring, a gold tiger bracelet, and diamond and ruby studs in her ears. "They're too precious to take out," she once told me. "I even shower with them in." We held our palms together and compared size. "You're catching up!" she'd exclaim. She had long fingers and very long toes; she went barefoot as soon as the snow melted, so that by summertime the soles of her feet were dark and tough. I abandoned my shoes in hopes of acquiring feet like hers. She could walk lazily across hot asphalt that I had to vault over, and I winced and hopped as she strolled down her gravel driveway with me. Her house was surrounded on three sides with flowers, and she would check their progress, fingering the petals and pulling thistles bare-handed, while I searched the gravel for treasures. I loved to amaze her with my nearly-microscopic findings of shiny quartz and granite, as exciting to me as diamonds among the gray limestone. I even found fool's gold once; I bit it when she wasn't looking, because I'd learned in school that real gold is soft enough to show a tooth mark. How surprised she would be to know that there was real gold in her driveway.

We all grew older. Lavaughn's second son, Michael, was born. We marveled at his dark newborn hair. I learned to hold his bottle for him, and waited impatiently for the day he was old enough to talk. I pictured him awakening one day with a full vocabulary, and I had so much I could tell him about; he would learn that his house was a very fun place to live. Robert and

Laura and the other kids rode their plastic Big Wheels tricycles thundering over the sidewalk in front of the house; I practiced my handwriting to the ticking and chiming of the grandfather clock in the green-and-gold gloom of the dining room. Usually, my willpower was too weak, and I'd join Lavaughn on the screened-in front porch, where she sat with a good view of the kids, a pitcher of water, a bag of chocolate chips, and a few Redbook magazines. We made the warm air thick and sweet with magazine perfume. We read about lust and lipstick and failing marriages. I'd pick at the red paint of her porch furniture and scuff my sneakers on the Astroturf, and she'd ask me if any of my friends had started talking about boys. "I mean, kids are starting so early these days—CHILDREN, GET OFF THE OW GRASS!" Our conversations were usually punctured with admonitions—Ow Grass was the name for the part of the yard between the sidewalk and the curb, which was too close to the street for playing. For years, I pictured a steady stream of traffic leaping the curb at me if my toe so much as brushed the Ow Grass. If, during a game or a bike race, an argument reached fever pitch, she'd walk down and advise, "Listen to the child's words!" before rejoining our porch conversation.

The thump of her footsteps was a sound almost as evocative as the clock chimes or the creak-slam of the back door. Lavaughn was a person constantly in motion. Her phone rang often, usually with callers for Bliss College, whose number was a digit different from hers. "Learn to dial a phone before you go to college," she'd taunt after she hung up in disgust. Her kitchen phone's cord—a relic from the pre-cordless days—was so long and well-stretched that it coiled on the floor; at its full length, it allowed her to survey the backyard, change a diaper in the den, or zigzag to the living room so as not to miss any important soap opera scenes. She paced constantly on the phone, absently lifting the cord to let children under or through. Even in face-to-face conversation, she was rocking and bouncing with her words.

* * *

I moved through grade school; I read more and baked less. Laura and Robert rode two-wheelers to the park, bequeathing their Big Wheels sidewalk days to new children, and Lavaughn sometimes put Vaseline on her cheeks, "to ward off wrinkles," she explained. After school, Michael would fill us in on the happenings of Mighty Mouse, Thundercats, the Ninja Turtles, and My Little Pony, but we usually started right in on spelling homework to the soundtrack of Lavaughn's "Guiding Light" and "Oprah." Robert stopped trying to fly by jumping off chairs. Sometimes Laura and I would walk ourselves home, so that we would be the last kids to leave, still looking for the remains of our school stuff in the slanted evening light of the living room. The house echoed eerily with the absence of running and shouting. Lavaughn would come down the stairs in tight jeans and a sweater, carrying her shoes, which always went on at the last second. We rarely knew what her plans were, but this evening transformation seemed essential. If she was in a good mood, she'd play Sunny 95 or

Carly Simon while she perched on the couch, humming and applying mascara in a hand mirror.

* * *

When I was very small, she'd told me her theory that everyone has a gift, a talent to share with the world and make it better for people. This was a new idea to me.

"Do *you* have a gift?" I'd asked. I wriggled with impatience; I suddenly knew the answer and I couldn't wait to tell her. She'd be so tickled.

"Yes, I think I do," she answered. "I think my gift is helping people understand *their* gifts. You have gifts, too—I can tell already that you can draw and write and understand things."

"And see, you *are* Gift!" I burst out. "It's your name! Gift! It's you!" I was practically jumping up and down at this connection which had revealed itself to me. She'd smiled.

"See? That was a very smart thing to understand. Even though you're not a grown-up, you can still understand a lot of things grown-ups don't. That's very important, remember that."

* * *

I found myself thinking of it often on those evenings we shouldered our backpacks to go home. And we'd thought she was only a babysitter.

"Bye Lavaughn! Thank you for the cookies! See you later!"

"Bye girls," she'd chirp, closing her door with a smile. "See you."

Sunspots*by Ashar Foley*

If you exploded
 and your particles came shooting towards me
 through 93 million miles of complete void,
 I would catch them,
 entrap you in my magnetic field,
 and lead you to the very centers
 of my polar activity
 where you would ionize my life-giving molecules
 and, then, my ambient love,
 we would make beautiful life together.

White Panties in a Blue Sunrise*by Vincent Xexaviar*

You told me
 Your daddy can't stand eggs,
 Never made 'em in the morning,
 Just toast and juice

And I never felt bad for ya
 Until they told me
 About your mother,
 How she died
 When you were
 Too young
 To cook them
 For yourself

How does one
 Fall asleep
 Without a lullaby
 Or kiss?

It's no wonder you press so close
 At night
 Never letting the sheet
 Slip between us

And smile so early
 Standing in your underwear
 Watching me cook breakfast

Listen to Ones Who Know*by A. Noelle Phillips*

Listen!

One must take care to live,
for in some places
the dying comes too easily.

Far up the coast,
where white bears, nanuq,
cover black noses with paws,
blending into snow..
Where even whales die
trapped beneath iced breathing holes...
Here you must listen!

Listen to ones who know!
The ones who have sailed in
black umiak skin boats
past whirlpools not on maps and
come out again—losing no one.

Listen to the voices
that tell of haunted places in the cliffs.
Of the lone girl, on a walk,
left behind with crying child
when her village was buried by rockslide.

Hear these hunters
who know the snow prints of fox, bear, caribou.
Who read their eyes, their ears!
Who know when to speak,
and who understand the silences.

Heed those who know!
For there are places in this world
where the dying is too easy;
where the ever-night can drive a man mad,

and has,

and will again.

Smoke

by Anna Damico

I can still taste the stale filth of the cigarette that burned away my tears.
 Your hands, which once soothed them away, were busy with another.
 So my hands felt empty, and I knew the menthol would keep them from shaking.
 Ironic that hands should feel better frozen in vice than warmed by an old lover's touch.

Prejudice: because you like blondes

by Julie Kirsch

in filmy morning muddiness
 murky light shows my hair too dark
 for you to even glance
 my way

paused and felt
 rough wool of your
 coat as you shouldered by
 took the slap of

downcast eyes
 which would not spark
 so much as a
 hello

bastard am i only blond enough
 to kiss on new year's
 golden only
 one damn day a year

concrete nails dug shards
 slivered into milky palms
 bloody streams shone that i wanted to
 smear into avoiding eyes

and make every girl you see
 a fucking redhead.

Kindergarten Martians

by Brian Phillips

You died a few weeks ago and there's so much left undone.
Buddy keeps looking at me
with his brown eyes

 then pushes an empty bowl around with his nose –
Dishes have strange growths on them,
and the dishwasher doesn't work –
 Even when I talk dirty to it.

I dress Laura for Kindergarten
like she's a Martian heading for home.
I know she thinks you dress her better,
 but she just smiles with your eyes the whole time.

When the big yellow bus comes back
her eyes still look for you –
 I guess my tears don't tell enough truth.

I get lost because the bedroom makes no sense
because it's *not* a wreck
 flooded by your inside-out socks.

I get mad now because I *got* mad while you
explained away every
 bizarre womanly thing you did.

The smell of the bed sheets is too clean,
and the ways you got me
to smile, especially when I didn't want to,
 now make me frown.

I remember how the socks got tossed
into oblivion, and I remember
breaking your bra because
 I'm a man and I suck at making out.

But most I remember your face,
 and how we made love with our eyes open.

Sometimes I feel like
the puzzle sitting on the kitchen table,
 that could only be put together by you.
Now pieces are missing and it just sits there
 alone.

I never touch it now
So I'm going to put it away,
stuff it tight, into the attic,
safe and away from everyone else.
But I promise I'll keep it with me –
 You'll just have to wait until I see you again.

Philimbthropy I

by Jen LaConte

It took twelve years after college for her painting talent to be recognized, but Nevada Randall had become a rich woman in a short time, thanks to some other wealthy people who didn't understand that they had paid thousands of dollars for thirty dollars worth of paint. It had seemed for a while that nobody would ever care about her artworks. For twelve years before, Nevada had painted, and sculpted, and sweated, and cried. She stared at her lava lamp and clawed at her hair. She eventually took a job at the local pharmacy, stocking the shelves and cashiering. That's not even a word, she thought, but art seemed to be going nowhere. She tried every medium she could find, but nothing worked, not her, not her art, and she was beginning to think that maybe the art teacher at Red Cliffs Senior High School had been sorely mistaken, and that nobody in college had been paying enough attention or was too kind to tell her it wasn't going to work, honey, with a pat on the hand.

She kept submitting, though, and month after month the slim manila file folder consumed and preserved more and more kindly letters that began, "Dear Ms. Randall, we appreciate your interest in the fill-in-the-blank Art Exhibition. We received many excellent entries, and regret to inform. . ." The letters multiplied in the file, spawning Post-It notes of spite and memos dripping with bitterness and humiliation. The file folder yawned mockingly every morning, along with Nevada, as she donned her blue Rite Drug smock, dotted not with yellow ochre #5 but with patches proclaiming, "Ask Me!" and "Rite Drug—The Rite Way to Shop!" The file waited every night for her to come home, disheveled and dusty, wad of envelopes in hand, to feed new and uncreative excuses into the now gaping and pregnant folder. Pretty soon, I'll need a new rejection file, she thought. The folder silently settled in approval. On this day, however, something different happened. The file folder waited patiently to be fed, and it was, but one piece of paper was held back . . . held up. . . danced with. The other form letters were unceremoniously jammed into the file and the drawer flicked shut with two fingers. From the darkness of the cabinet, the file could hear Nevada's joyful dancing and slightly tinny voice. "Oh yeah. Uh huh. I'm awesome. I'm awesome." Nevada shimmied past her kitchen table, to the mirror, and looked at her narrow, beaming face and disheveled hair. "This is it, baby girl," she whispered. "We are gonna make some fuckin' cash!!" The last few words became a shout and she would have continued if not for the neighbors downstairs throwing a shoe at their ceiling. She ducked briefly at the sound, realizing the ruckus she was making, and then froze for a moment in thought. "I deserve this," she thought. "Screw them." The rejection file in the drawer settled in amongst the canceled checks. It would be dozing there for quite some time.

Months later, Nevada received, with a trembling palm, the final set of checks from Rodriguez, owner and operator of the 125th Street Gallery of Modern Art. Lumps of hardening cheese and cracker crumbs dotted the

elegantly sculpted white resin tables as Rodriguez said, "Well, that's all of it. Minus my fees, of course. Congratulations, baby, I think this may have done it for you. Of course, you must exhibit here again. After all, I discovered you!" With a loud chuckle, Rodriguez put his arm around Nevada. His armpit was wet, and she could feel the relief and body odor emanating from his grip.

She slid out from under his talon, nodding and smiling. "We'll definitely be in touch. Call me as soon as you have any opening in any show. I'll be there."

At home, a file with sharp corners and a new, clean label reading "my shows" occupied a place on the desk. From the desk, the file watched Nevada's gaze shift from ceiling to floor and wall to wall. She was seeing the room in a whole new way; it was hollow, empty, gutted. She had sold every piece of art she had. It exhilarated and terrified her to be starting over with nothing, like finding a plane ticket on the sidewalk and hopping onto a jet that day with no plans and no way back. She swallowed six multivitamins, and called in sick to work. She didn't need that stupid job anymore anyway; she had what she needed.

"Rite Drug, the Rite Way to Shop! This is Judy, How Can I Help You?"

"Hi, Judy," Nevada muttered. Judy was the last manager she'd have chosen to answer the phone. "I need to call in sick today."

"Well, Nee-vaa-da," Judy pronounced her name like it was spelled 'Kneevaada.'

"Nee-vaa-da, it shows here that you don't have any more sick days. Now how on earth would that have happened?"

"Well Jew-deee, I guess I used them all, so now I'm calling in dead, I suppose," Nevada chirped as sweetly as possible. "Go ahead and mark me down as deceased. Thanks, you're a peach, bye!" Nevada could hear shrill porcine noises as the phone left her ear and rejoined its cradle. "Okay," she thought. "Here we go."

She put on some Rolling Stones and began the business of art, the canvas -stretching and easel -setting and paint -inventory business. She smiled at the expanse of bleached canvas, pulled taut like a facelift, begging her to perform her newly acclaimed magic. She held a brush gently, folding the paint onto the sable tip, and leaned in for the first stroke of her brand new series.

Nothing happened.

She couldn't do it.

Her first instinct drew her hand to her hair. An unspeakably abominable sense of panic coursed through her body, manifesting itself in trembles as she stood in front of the canvas, brush drooping, tiny droplets of paint splooting onto the hardwood, newspaper covered floor. Her body stood there for an infinity, shaking with tension and self-doubt. Calm down, silly, she thought, but her heart was not in the mood to negotiate. She pulled a cigarette from the pack in her shirt pocket without looking, smoked it, and reached for another and another until she was grasping nothing but crinkly cellophane. She sank to the floor, sitting in a small pile of green paint, but she barely noticed. She

stayed there all night.

The next several days proved to be an agonizing trial for Nevada and her new canvas. The canvas wanted so badly to be her friend, but it became a mocking tribute to her inability to think of anything that would be beautiful enough, shocking enough, something enough to put on there. She remembered being very good at still life in college, and tried some of those. She painted nearly everything that didn't move in her apartment. She tried and tried, and smoked and smoked, until both her palette and her carton was empty. It's time for a Camels and paint run, she thought

Falling into her old Buick, she heard the shocks moan with the strain of her frustration. Old Reliable chugged along to the gas station for a new carton of cigarettes, then to the art supply store. Nevada chose her paints carelessly, knowing that materials alone do not a painting make.

The effeminate, slim male cashier—Italian ribbed sweater covered by a red canvas vest (not unlike Nevada's own prison uniform)—slid the paint tubes over the scanner while looking over his shoulder, determined not to end his conversation with a heavyset woman who was making lavender ribbon bows with astonishing speed. He slung the tubes from hand to hand, one by one, millimeters from the scanner glass with ease that belied months of repetition. His fingers were tapered and delicate. His fingernails were perfect ovals, longer than most men's, but not uncomfortably long. The nails were as pink as the inside of a conch shell and well buffed, too. In the moment that it took him to scan fifteen tubes of paint and sigh "Fifty-four-eighty-six," Nevada noticed these things about his hands. Something about his hands startled her, their unusualness, and how different they were from her own. He clicked his tongue impatiently and Nevada tensed, realizing she had lost herself in this thought. She dug out her credit card and watched the hands slide it through the card reader. She wanted to reach forward and touch his fingers, just to make sure they were real. They seemed unnatural. She held her breath as the hand held out a pen and the receipt and, in a blur of embarrassment and desire, she signed, grabbed the bag roughly, and muttered a quick "thanks" before shuffling out, paints clutched to her chest.

She went home and painted hands. Hands holding, reaching, grasping. Clenched in fear and spread in ecstasy. Her pictures became hands grabbing, clutching, hands smoothing over unidentified slopes, hands with nails the color of the inside of a conch shell.

In the morning, there was a big smear in the shape of a shoulder near the left side of the canvas where Nevada fell asleep in the midst of 'just resting her eyes.' One painting was ruined, but as her eyes began to focus, she realized what had happened last night. She had something. She must have painted three things the night before and she couldn't wait to go back and look at them and laugh. She had something! She sat up and, looking at last night's efforts, pursed her lips and shook her head, one sharp shake. They weren't right. The hands weren't just right. She couldn't place it, exactly, but it was a nagging incorrectness that she knew only she would see. She stood up, sniffed her

armpits, and decided to at least change clothes before she went back to the store.

Nevada lurked around the aisles of the art supply store, secretly hoping that some turn would lead her to Hands Boy, as she had started to think of him. Aisle 5 is oils, aisle 6 is film, aisle 7 is Hands Boy? Nevada turned a sharp corner and saw him kneeling in the photography supplies, stacking boxes of black and white film cartridges. She resisted the urge to back into another aisle and casually sweated her way down the lane of camera accessories. She suddenly thought of a phrase from junior high, "Take a picture, it'll last longer," and her nervousness exploded. She snickered uncontrollably, staring intensely into a display rack of darkroom light bulbs.

"Can I help you, miss?" She froze. Her last snicker felt like a burr stuck in her throat. He doesn't know, she thought. It's okay. Just turn around and say no thanks. Do it! Now! "Uhh, no, thank you," she stammered.

"Oh my God, I know who you are!" His hand flew to his mouth in surprise and both of them gasped for air. "Aren't you Nevada Randall? The Expansive Pinhole exhibit at 125th Street? Oh my God, you are amazing! Let me shake your hand!" Without pausing, he clasped her right hand in both of his, pumping her arm in tiny motions. His skin was cool and slightly dry from the dusty boxes, but to her wet palms his skin felt like a banquet of refreshment, sponging her shame and nervousness away. "We need to go out for drinks or something," he said, and Nevada nodded. Already she was trying to think of a way to immortalize the feeling of his precious palms. She knew that this formal, harried touch would not satiate her curiosity about this lean man with svelte, mysterious fingers.

He followed her around the store as she gathered her purchases. She grabbed random items off of the shelves, almost buying a needlepoint kit. He chatted with her about paint, art, the city, but all she could do was nod mutely and watch his fingers gesture and fly in what seemed to be a ballet of sensuousness.

She was out on the sidewalk in moments with his telephone number written on the receipt, and her interest in reworking some of last night's pieces renewed. Upon arriving home, however, she found that efforts to paint were completely useless. She felt insecure; she needed a much closer look. That evening, she lifted the telephone receiver with two fingers and held it as if it might self-destruct in her hand. She pressed each number on the keypad slowly and lightly, and the telephone rang six times before he picked up.

"Hello? It's Nevada. Randall? From the store today."

"Nevada! Hey! I'm happy to hear from you so soon! Can you hang on a second?"

Nevada replied and he put the receiver down. She could hear barking in the background, and Hands Boy was talking to someone. Momentarily he returned. "Sorry about that. My dog can't stand it when he is trapped in his crate while I'm home. Oh hey, buddy! Heh heh. He's up in my lap. So anyway, Nevada, you and. . . Ouch! Bad dog!"

"What happened? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Van Gogh just bit me."

"Your dog's name is Van Gogh?"

"Yep. I'm fine, he just nipped my finger. No big deal."

Nevada felt the crown of her head heating up and the wave of panic and heat rippled down her body. He's so careless! He has no idea! She composed herself and listened as he told her a story about Van Gogh. It was a random and pointless anecdote, but it gave Nevada a chance to formulate a plan. She cut him off near the end of the story.

"Hey, look, I'd like to get that drink soon. Would you like to continue this conversation in person?"

"I'd like nothing more."

"Great!" Nevada replied. "I have a few quick errands to run, but I'll meet you at Belmont's at ten. How's that?"

"I will be there. See you soon."

Nevada got dressed in her gallery opening outfit. She curled her hair and put on some vixenish makeup. One of the good things about being a painter, she thought, is the ability to put on makeup. She stepped into the Buick with her Rite Drug smock over her arm and drove down to the store. She walked in confidently and casually clicked her way back to the pharmacy. At this time of night, only Lou, the pharmacist, would be in the store.

"I came to turn this in, and I, uh, have a few things in the break room that I need to pick up."

Lou unlocked the door to the pharmacy and allowed Nevada back behind the counter. The time had come for Nevada to start her plan. "I know you're here all alone all night, Lou. Do you want a quick smoke break while I'm here? If anyone comes in, I'll come get you."

Lou agreed and walked out toward the back alley. As soon as he was out of sight, Nevada began rifling through the large prescription bottles that lined the shelves. She found what she wanted, emptied it into her pocket, and, snatching several packages of "The Herbal Solution" off of the counter, refilled the bottle with decoys. She barely had time to drop a few of the stolen pills into each of Lou's coat pockets before he entered, smelling of fresh nicotine.

"Thanks, 'Vada. Sorry we had to lose you, but I always thought you were a good artist." Before a pang of guilt could strike, Nevada waved a kind goodbye to Lou and walked out of the store.

Even though Belmont's was crowded, Nevada was seated quickly as a local celebrity. She ordered a Pepsi in a highball glass and stirred it quickly to remove the carbonation. He was almost twenty minutes late to their date. He ran in, flashed her an 'I'm a bad boy' grin, and walked to the bar. Moments later, his left hand gently cradling a martini glass, he sat down across from Nevada, who was halfway through her 'whiskey sour.' They chatted about art and music, aspirations and the weather. Nevada's rejection file, if it could have witnessed this scene, would never have imagined the woman in the short dress and dark red lipstick to be the Nevada who had worked at Rite Drug. Nevada

knew quite well that her lips and legs were having an effect on the young man who, for all his sophistication, was not hiding the effects of his martini very well. Nevada purred, pushed her watered-down Pepsi aside, and murmured, "Let me read your palm."

He grinned sloppily, then, remembering his composure, placed his hand six inches from hers. She reached forward and grabbed his hand, and he snuck a peek down her dress. Both thought, "Jackpot!" Nevada pretended to read his palm, but if he hadn't been engaged otherwise, he might have noticed that her other hand slid surreptitiously over the top of his glass and deposited a powdered pill from the stash in her pocket. Just as her grip was getting too firm and her lip was being bitten to the blood, he looked up. "So, what do you say? What's my future?" With some difficulty, she let go and smiled lazily. "I think you are in for a lucky streak very very soon." His eyes briefly widened, and he pulled back for another drink. Making sure that she was watching, he poured back the rest of his martini in a display of machismo; on the way back to the table, however, the glass tilted and broke, slivering in his lap and sliding onto the floor. Both leapt up (one more easily than the other) and at this point Nevada's sharp eye saw a trickle of blood on his hand. She felt her skin flush and her teeth clenched against each other. Stupid clumsy jerk, she thought. He'll ruin them if he's not careful. It's not fair. . . I didn't want to have to up the stakes. I didn't want to cause any trouble, but if he's not responsible enough to care for those treasures, then something has to be done.

Nevada could barely get the keys in the lock before the door swung open with the weight of the two bodies, and they tumbled to the floor. His breath was pungent with olives and Grey Goose vodka, and it made Nevada heave when he tried to kiss her. He misinterpreted that as a thrust and held her tighter. I have to do this. This is the only way. Don't wuss out. She jammed her mouth to his and she felt a surge of hardness press her stomach. She slithered out from under him and led him to her bed. He fumbled with his own clothes, not looking down because Nevada herself was undressing slowly and methodically. He looked around, noticing in his grogginess that for a painter, she had a lot of hardware. Maybe she's becoming a sculptor.

"Do you want to play a little?" Nevada asked, and when she said the word play her bra hit the floor with an almost imperceptible thump. His head whipped to face her and he nodded, smiling crookedly. She licked her lips, crouched to the floor for a moment, and then crawled onto the bed with a bundle of fabric in her hands. "Lie back," she commanded, and she undressed him completely, down to the watch and all. She tied a scarf over his eyes and he murmured. She looked down his torso, toward the foot of the bed, and noted his approval. His skin jumped at the feeling of the cold metal, but in just a moment the handcuffs were secure and Nevada had her prisoner. "You had to cut them, didn't you? I wanted to just keep you for awhile. But you're too careless, I can't trust you with them. Don't worry, you won't feel anything. Your martinis were more drug than vodka. Obviously you don't have a taste for liquor. I expect that might change after tonight. You'll be glad that you won't remember it

either. Thank Rite Drug for that.”

The sunlight slammed on his eyelids, forcing his brain to wake him up. His wrists hurt like hell and his head did too.

“Where am I? Am I lying in some kind of puddle? What did I do last night, go out?” he thought, and as he tried to rub his head with his hands, he felt something rough and scratchy touch his forehead. His eyes flew open and his stumps waggled in front of his eyes like disjointed puppets. He waved one wrist, then the other, expecting to see his fingers draped back or hidden or something. Hands don’t just go away. He huddled in the alley for more than two hours, rubbing his painful and charred nubs on his forearms, chanting, “This is not happening. This is not happening. This is not happening.”

Across town, Nevada hadn’t slept yet and she didn’t expect to anytime soon. She dumped the last pillowcase of her sheet set into the incinerator, followed by three remaining pills from her raid on Rite Drug, and marched upstairs with the song “Yellow Submarine” in her head. She entered her apartment and flinched as the smell hit her nostrils. “It smells like meat and butane in here,” she thought, then laughed at herself for the idea. “Of course it does. But I have what I want, right? And now I can begin my new series. Philimbthropy. . . I.” She giggled uncontrollably at her wittiness and hummed as she propped the works of art up in a bowl of ice.

They were singed at the bottom from cauterization, but the color wasn’t ruined, and she could eliminate last night’s glass cut and the dog’s nip too. In fact, she was more than confident that she could finally replicate what she wanted. “In the towwwwwwwn, where I was boooooorrrrrrn. . .” Her plane tickets were lying on top of the ‘my shows’ folder, and her duffel bag was ready to go also, but she had to get a sketch or two of these beauties on canvas before she traveled halfway around the world with the precious cargo in ice underneath her seat. She could almost taste the salted peanuts and hear the pleasant accent of the pilot as he announces “We are now descending into New Zealand, and we of Air Kiwi hope you enjoy the land down under.” I’m sure we will, Nevada thought as she zipped the soft-side cooler closed.

He, on the other hand, eventually stumbled out onto 125th Street and stood on the sidewalk in front of an art gallery, being bumped by jaded pedestrians that were not paying attention to his manic screaming. He would never remember.

No In-between*by Ellen Beversluis*

Dare to mix mashed potatoes in with your peas
Pull money down from the trees
where it grows
Go ahead,
say what everybody knows

Wear many colors
inside and Out There
Wear lipstick with flair
Grow out your hair
or shave it all
There is no in-between
to Art

Write your name in the snow
using a stick
or your prick
Pierce or tattoo your skin
Art is never
a sin
Don't let society win

Learn to bring magic out of a hat
to sing when your voice is flat
and embrace your fat
It's just more of it to share
Your body is rare

Dare to be Woman
or Male
Dare to fail
at the stale
perceptions of gender
Laugh at the lender
of false information
of false standards
for you to uphold
Dare to be
bold

Dare to be a Dyke or a Fag
Yes, ain't it a drag
to carry a rainbow flag
when everyone around you prefers
Black
and White
Fight
to be who you are

Dare to express
Be a mess
Second-guess

Create a constellation
a consolation
in the dark skies
while your eyes
move from star
to star

Can you look that far?

Come with me. Come with me.

by Hope Wells

I'm sorry that I say hi to people I don't really know

—You hate pretense and rounded numbers

because that's not exactly how much money it cost me to buy that ugly tight cheap outfit
you would never wear.

and he would hate

Let's go see a movie! I think Meg Ryan's on, and she's normal; you like her, remember?
(Except for she smokes in that one with Russell Crowe. And she cheated on her
husband.)

I'm not saying you would ever, but

We could go downtown! And dress up—I'll wear my red dress and you can wear that
black one—yeah, the one without sleeves and with the jagged hemline that shows off
your legs.

I think you're so pretty

Let's just be together. You don't ever want to hang out with me and tell me funny things
that happened in class or what paper you have to write for tomorrow or how it feels when
you wake up in the early morning and he holds you and you pray for nine more minutes
together on the snooze.

anymore

come with me anyway. come.

Puddle Jumping*by Stacy Campbell*

Outside
the sky is falling
in tiny diamond
water crystals.

I taste the tears
with thirsty tongue
refreshing in the birth
of the new night.

Each sparkling droplet
forms a tiny hole
in the sweating snow.

It is cold and January
but I do not care.

With five year old
senses, I throw
boots and socks
behind
letting crystals
adorn my feet
tickling toes.

The mudhole bites
stinging
splashing feet
but the squishing
soothes the ache.

I run and jump
in the night sky
cradled by the storm
shielded by the stars.

This night
I am a puddle jumper
dizzy from mud puddle
cartwheels, sick on
the stinging splash.

Only When I Play

by Brian Phillips

Half art and half science
 But all spirit
 Rasping voice
 Choking on the chords and
 Plucking within the seams.
 Strumming with passion
 But lacking direction
 And lyrical satisfaction
 Finger tips sustain calluses that
 Breed their own calluses.
 Then they start to bleed.
 But play on I will until all is said
 And nothing is done.

Within the chords
 Past demons dance
 While future demons pace between the gaps.
 Play and play until
 Expression becomes
 Dedication and
 Dedication becomes
 Obsession.
 I'm never satisfied
 But forever willing
 To criticize the best efforts
 And turn gold to muck.
 Often too scared to play
 In honesty,
 And too bold to
 Play for myself.
 But on stage I find myself again.

Somewhere a drive
 Stays forever alive for the moment
 Where eyes see and
 Hearts meet – a
 Second where we
 See the shared truth
 And hide quickly away.
 But for once you see
 As I see, and I'm not
 So scared to see me.
 An expression in
 Total dedication saturated
 By engulfing obsession.
 Just me and my guitar.

Me*by Beth Pilawski*

I am all heart and terror
wanting to crush his skull like a porcelain orange
letting juice and blood and pulp
run over my open lips
chipping my teeth on seeds and bone
burning is the best way to get rid of bodies

blue and black dont match bitch
except when dad puts it under skin and adds yellow
right in front of fish puking up popcorn
better clean that up or momll yell
he doesnt know everyones sorry

pretended it was ok
when i sat on the plastic hole
and watched my childhood drip into shit
to be sucked out by a honey-dipper
with blue eyes smoking a cigarette
twenty-four-seven

now im wedged suffocated
socks and cliffs stuck in my exhaust
used up gored my body
pureed to spread on thin crackers

still I must
run to the nearest theater
pound on life
loose fingernails scratching fate to death
keep my head above time and

never never sleep because
theyre all watching me
ready to take the controls

A Round With God
Second Place, Burkhart Poetry Contest
by Vincent Xexaviar

I was contemplating freedom, anarchy, and the certainty of man, when I met God

He was sitting on a fence post smoking a wooden pipe
 Singing about liberty and Bastille Day

He puffed on his pipe and gazed into forever, took a deep breath and asked
 "Why don't you believe in Me?"

I could not respond

We sat and watched the sun as it sank deep into the night

Again He asked, "Why don't you believe in Me?"
 Again I could not reply

Together we drifted a bit

"Are you immortal?" I asked
 "I don't know" said He

"Where did You come from?" I asked
 "I can't remember," He said, "It has been too long"

"Why don't you believe in Me?" He asked again

He banged His pipe against His boot, cleared His throat, and sighed

"Let's go for a walk" He said
 He lit his pipe again and we walked

A silent, lucid, black terror engulfed me as I walked to town with God
 "Are we walking in the valley of the shadow of death" I asked

"No," He said, "this is Kansas"

We walked into a saloon and God ordered two beers
 When the bartender returned I asked

"Do you believe in God?"
 "Yes," he said, "of course"

"Would you believe me if I told you
That He was here" I asked
"Yes," he said, "God is everywhere."

"I'm God" said God

"Whatever you say, man" smirked the bartender

"God," I asked, "Why doesn't he believe in You"

"I don't know" He replied

God turned and watched the television,
He cheered loudly as Notre Dame scored a touchdown

"Is Notre Dame your favorite team?" I asked

"Yes" He said

"Because they are Catholic?" I asked

"No," He said, "because I'm Irish"

God grinned and took a long drink

"Why did you come here?" I asked

"To see the game" He said

"But why did you come to me?" I asked

"Because I knew you would buy me a drink" said God

"You must answer me this time. Why don't you believe in me?"

I took a long drink and said,
"Because man has distorted Your image."

"I know that, but I'm still here" He said

His green eyes sparkled as He said this

It was at that point, I knew

Winter in the City*by Becky O'Neil*

You woke me in the dawn to say
it's happening again—
homesick for places you've never been.

You'd felt it in your sleep, familiar:

a mystery
a minor key

dark and dripping jungles
sighing in the heat.

Again? I said.
I turned to the window
and touched my wrist
where the skin was thin and warm;

I said, You seek the whole
but it's within you
splitting invisibly—
can't you see?

When light is splintered by your prism eyes,
beauty surrounds you in fragments.

You followed my gaze,
and I held my breath, hoping this year
you might see more
than the stone sky
and the pavement choked with salt.

Of Our Own Device
First Place, Short Story Contest
by Jordan Lowe

The guard tapped his nightstick on the bars of the old man's cell. The metallic echo pierced the darkness, each rap coldly climbing the length of his spine.

"You awake?"

Yes, sir. I've just been watching that sparrow that was outside the window. He's gone now, though."

"Yeah, well, uh... I got somebody for you to meet."

The old man switched on a lamp and stood up from his bed. He appeared to be at least eighty, but was not frail or stooped. Only the deep creases around his eyes betrayed his age.

A young man in a prison-issued jumpsuit stood in the hallway with the guard. He was tall and muscular. The guard removed his handcuffs and opened the cell door.

"Got any smokes, constable?"

"I've got some smokes," the guard said dully. He reached into his breast pocket and handed the young prisoner half a pack of cigarettes.

The young man nodded and walked into the cell. "You better be on your way."

"I better be on my way," said the guard, shutting the door behind him. "Hope that's, uh... yeah." He shuffled down the hall, rubbing the back of his neck trying to ease the headache that had suddenly seized him, humming a *Rolling Stones* song he'd heard on that day's commute.

"Hello," said the old man with wide, pleasant eyes. "Welcome."

"Please allow me to introduce myself," the young prisoner said. "I'm a man of wealth and taste."

The old man smiled. "Pardon?"

"Oh, yeah. Sorry. Too easy? Clichéd, even? It's just, 'Sympathy' was running through that guy's head the whole way down the hall. *Woo-oo! Woo-oo!* Right? Used to like it, back when it was first out. Played, though. Way over. You get nostalgic is all. It still rocks, I guess."

"I'm afraid I'm not following."

The young man cocked his head and looked at his new cell mate with disgust. Then he shrugged his shoulders and clicked his tongue dismissively. "Keep forgetting how long you been in here. Time has flown. You never even heard of the *Stones*. Damn, man, what was the last music you even remember, that Big Band crap?"

"I prefer the older music."

"Lemme guess. You still get off on that 'worship me worship me' shit. Mozart and Handel and junk?"

"Older."

A flash of light crossed the young prisoner's squinted eyes and he smiled

deviously. "I hear ya. The 'Choir Invisi-bule' and all that. Ever gonna get over yourself? Just curious."

"I wondered when you'd come," said the old man. "Honestly, I didn't think it would take this long." He sat down on the edge of his bed. The young man leaned his back against the wall across from him and slid down to the floor, his legs pulled up in front of his chest.

"Yeah. Been busy. You know how it is."

"Yes, I do." He leaned forward, reaching out his thin hand, and patted the young man's knee. "Would you believe me if I said that I've actually missed you?"

"S'pose. What, you gonna lie? That's my gig."

"I mean it. I wouldn't have believed it myself back then, but there it is. All the rest of it..." He gestured toward the window. It was quite dark. He recalled the sparrow that had flown away. "The attachment has grown less and less."

"You hate 'em yet?" The young man chewed on a fingernail.

"Oh, no. I could never hate them. I'm their father, after all."

"A bit sexist, ain't it? Some say you're 'mother,' too. 'Course, some of 'em say you're in the rocks and streams... in science... in themselves. Still, lots more of 'em don't say word one to you unless they're pissed off. God damn 'em..." He smiled, showing bright white teeth. "I know I would hate them."

"You cannot fool me. I'm your father, too."

"Don't friggin' remind me."

"You don't hate them either. You love this old world more than anyone."

"More than you?"

The old man pondered for a while. "Yes, I suppose. Even more than me. But I cannot hate them. It's just... the attachment. Lessens. I don't miss them so terribly."

"Miss them?" The young prisoner's laughter was harsh and it filled the cramped cell. "You missed them? Why'd you leave then? Wasn't it to get away from them? From all their nagging and self-importance? Their whining? Their weakness? Their lack of faith and *unending* ungrateful attitude? Now, I can see why you'd leave... but why would you miss all that? They've never missed you."

"Oh," the old man mused, "I suppose you've come to judge my actions? Take me to task? I forget myself. What is it you wish to know?"

"Know? There's nothing I need to know. I just came to chat."

"Your chats have always been a bit one-sided."

"Fine," the young man said. "Yeah, okay. I wanted to hear it from your mouth. To get it from the source. Finally. You quit? You give up the fight? The war over?"

"War? I've never considered it war. A battle perhaps, in some abstract sense... but some... mystical contest to the end between good and evil? Never. It is simply choice. Choices that, sadly, were never ours to make."

"Ah! So you're jealous. I think we finally found it..."

"I am not jealous."

"Of course you are." The young man lifted a cigarette to his lips. His eyes glowed orange and the tobacco flared. He took a long drag, blowing the smoke out of the corner of his mouth. It filled the old prisoner's nose with a warm, acrid tang he hadn't smelled in decades. It hung in a cloud above his head, then dissipated with a wave of his hand. "You gotta be jealous," the young man continued. "The jerk-offs got free will. *Free friggin' will.* The ability to choose. Okay, so their choices are a bit more limited than ours, but come on. Wouldn't you give anything to be able to pick? One way or another. Right or wrong. Wouldn't it rule? Sure, sure, consequences, repercussions, karma and the like... but still." He filled his lungs with smoke once more then crushed the cigarette between his fingers and dropped it to the floor. "Humans."

"Yes," the old prisoner said with a deep sigh. "Humans." He rubbed his palms together lightly and looked down at the slippers on his feet. "I wasn't jealous, you know. I was lonely." He looked up at the younger man and smiled weakly. "That's why I... well."

The young prisoner rolled his eyes. "You, uh, locked yourself up in this little stone room for, like, sixty-some years... just you, the bugs and a dirty little window... 'cause you were lonely? Forgive my blasphemy... but you're a senile son of a bitch."

"It is the loneliest man that in a crowd stands silent."

"What's that? New Testament?"

"No. I just thought of it."

"Oh. That's not bad."

"Thank you."

"Yeah. Mind if I..."

"Use it to further defile? Twist it to serve your own devilish ends?"

"Uh... yeah. That cool?"

"You realize, it was not an easy decision. I did not reach it lightly. It was perhaps the hardest thing I've ever done. I don't ask your clemency, or theirs... but you *must understand*. How many chances had I given them? How many blessings had I bestowed? *How many promises were kept...* yet doubt remained. I couldn't understand. Even after I sent a messiah for some... to die and live again... prophets for others... to heed. Signs and portent, miracles and magic, life, death, and forgiveness... I couldn't... couldn't grasp. Why? They were made in my image. It wasn't supposed to stop there. They were supposed to understand. They were supposed to... follow. I gave them everything. All I had. And then I fled. I saw where they were headed... what they were becoming... and I left them."

"Well, truth to tell, they left you first."

The old prisoner lifted his eyes to his guest. They were heavy and moist. "Was that kindness? Are you trying to make me feel better?"

The young man coughed. "Yeah, well... just saying they never did you any favors is all."

"Many glorious works have been done in my name. Some never forgot."

"Do those couple of things outweigh everything else though? The other

crap. Crusades. Inquisition. Terrorism. Jihad. That band *Creed*. Racism. Abortion clinic bombers."

"Clinics?"

"Oh, yeah. Great place to work. All the passion and drama! Birth, decay, conception, destruction. It's outstanding. By the by, between us... what's your opinion on that whole deal?"

"You first."

"Oh, I'm pro-life," the young prisoner said without a pause.

"Really?" asked the old man.

"Of course. Otherwise it's too easy. Takes all the fun out of unwanted pregnancy and I get no shot at 'em later on down the road. Sucks away the tension. You?"

He slowly rubbed the tip of his nose with a knuckle. "This is why I left it up to them."

"Major cop-out, man. Whatever. I know you. You're pro accountability, that's what you are. On everything. All for independence. Emancipation. 'Let my people go' and shit."

"But they do not see that."

"Nope." The young man stood and stretched. "You ask me, it all started when you cut 'em loose. ..stopped comin' down and dropping the hammer yourself. You left it up to them."

"But then how could they grow? Frightened of my wrath... sacrificing things... waiting for me to swoop down and tell them exactly how to act and who to smite... That's what faith was for. 'The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'"

"You just make that up?"

"No. New Testament. *Hebrews*."

"Damn."

"You used to know the Bible backwards and forwards."

"It actually reads better backwards." He smirked and continued. "But yeah, I used to. Back when it mattered. When it was tougher to get around. When it was law and gospel and not just rhetoric and convenient soundbites."

"The book never changed."

"People did, though." He lit another cigarette. "But not as much as you'd think."

"I entered here in 1939," said the old prisoner, half to himself.

"That long huh? Wow. I guess that's about what I heard."

"What did you hear?"

"Oh, you know, the usual. About the time Hitler goose-stepped through Europe, you packed it in, hitched the wagons and split. You put on this pathetic little sad sack flesh-suit and crawled down into the deepest, darkest hole you could find."

"And how, exactly, did you come by this information?"

"Certain underlings, evil spirits... secretaries of secretaries and other assorted minions... The Internet, mostly. You did a good job, though. Took me

this long to find you. Bravo, sir."

The old man tilted his head back. "Internet? What's that? For fishermen?"

"Something like that, yeah. For fishers of information. Man, you should see it! The damn thing makes *me* shudder. It's part of this little idea... switching it up. Like, you know TV? A while back these blowhards get all riled up about the sex and violence they were showing on the old tube. So they get this rating system. Solves everything, right? But, see, what's brilliant is these ratings just made it worse. Slap a 'mature audience' label on and shows can do whatever they damn well please. Just filth. It's beautiful. More skin... more blood... more vulgarity than would have ever been possible without the censorship. Internet's the same thing. It's set up, supposedly, for the good of all mankind. Sharing information and communications with the whole world... Now all it does is keep evil flowin' down the phone lines twenty-four hours a day. Theft and porn and fraud and slander... I don't even... I don't even have to do anything. Just sit there and let the corrupted corrupt. Make life... you know. Makes it, like..." He threw down the cigarette with a sharp snap of the fingers and sparks sprayed up from the cold concrete floor. "I'm so damn bored!"

The young prisoner crossed the room and sat down beside the old man. He rubbed his face with the palms of his hands and breathed in sharply. "I'm so sick of it all," he said.

The old man placed a hand on his shoulder. "I am glad you came to talk to me."

"Yeah, well, who else, you know?"

"Indeed." The old prisoner clasped his hands together and laid them in his lap. "The truth is, like you, I guess I was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. Afraid I'd lost them forever. And without them, who are we? I... I felt worthless. Like a failure. Wickedness and affliction were everywhere and I hadn't done enough..."

"What about the whole infallibility thing? The plan or whatever?"

"That is precisely it. I felt like I had failed. But the plan cannot fail. The plan... I began to despise it. It caused such pain among the people I loved so very much. I wanted to end it. But... I couldn't. Somewhere, somehow, I knew it was right. 'All things work together for good...' But...I..."

"You began to hate yourself."

The old man did not answer. He just turned with pained eyes, waiting for the young man to finish. "You made the mold," the young prisoner said. "You set 'em out. You did it all for the ungrateful bastards... What did you get in return? Anguish. All you got was grief. People did nothin' but question you... accuse you. All the crap in the world... you got the blame. When somethin' good happened? Not the same. You weren't even mentioned. It was all 'triumph of man' and shit. Must have gnawed at you. Eaten away at that love you say you had. I mean, who could blame you?"

"Nobody but myself."

"So you left."

"I left. Before... I had been surrounded at all times. Petitioned. Worshipped. Sworn at or to. A constant stream of human consciousness enveloped me. I didn't mind, of course. I enjoyed hearing it all. The victories... the failings... the whole struggle. It was a constant reminder of why it was all created in the first place."

"Which was?"

The old man paused. Then he blinked and continued as if he hadn't been interrupted. "I was surrounded... but I was alone. There was no other soul in which I could..."

That's where I come in, huh? Arch-nemesis? Other side of the coin? Polar opposite ideological construct? Lex Luthor to your Superman?"

"I couldn't even enjoy the things I had given them. Where was my love? Who did I turn to in times of strife? I gave it all away... and I loathe my selfishness, but what of it? I felt like a prisoner, held against my will by little more than a belief. I dreamed of it all ending... being forgotten. So I could in turn forget my obligation and move on."

"To what?"

"Pardon?"

"Move on to what? What else is there?"

"What could be?"

"Don't... don't get all heavy on me, man. Drop that philosophical crap. I just been asking some straight questions, looking for straight answers."

"Have I forsaken them?"

"For starters..."

The old prisoner stared out the window. The sparrow he had been watching would soon return with dawn. "No. I have not. I will not. Their destiny was not mine to construct... or lament. Mistakes will be made. But I will never cease being the shepherd. All I ask is a moment... every now and again... for myself."

"And a little sympathy?"

"I do not even ask that much."

"Don't then. You got mine already." The young man sighed and shrugged his shoulders. He stood and approached the window. "So the war's not off then, huh? Maybe I should just join you in here. This cage ain't that different from the one out there. You talk about choices... Really... what do we got? I mean, we started the whole thing, but who says we gotta finish it? Them? They're more than able. I think they'd love the chance. Probably go all..." His voice faded. He lowered his chin, lost for a moment in unfathomable depths, then raised his head back up strongly. "Well shit. Look at that. It's morning already."

"We spoke all night."

"Yep."

"It... was not unpleasant."

"No. Guess it wasn't."

"You know," said the old prisoner, joining his acquaintance at the window

and pointing at the heavens, "from up there... out there... wherever... you can't really see any sunrises. What I mean is, you witness it all, but it's not the same. You see it at once, from every angle. You see through the eyes of a billion children... but you cannot see it as we do now. A single perspective... one frozen instant beheld through a tiny hole in a great wall. It is magnificent."

"Yeah. You never see sunsets from down there, neither," the young man said, tapping the floor with the tip of his shoe. "It's just always dark." He plunged his hands into his pockets and rocked on his heels. "Jealousy is one of the seven deadly, ain't it?"

"Envy, yes. It is."

"Sweet. Add it to my list. I'm pretty damn envious."

The two men stood staring out the window. The sun rose to fullness, casting barred shadows across their pensive faces. Finally, the young prisoner let out a lengthy yawn and scratched the back of his head. He yelled for the guard and soon footsteps neared the cell.

"Guess I'll be going," he said, as the guard appeared at the door. "I'm free to go."

The guard put a key in the lock and swung the bars open. "Okee-dokie," he said, "you're free to go."

"Well?" The young man paused, just outside the cell. "Feel like coming with?"

"Perhaps," the old prisoner said with a widening smile. "Perhaps soon."

"Cool." He turned to go. "Damn it! Now lug-nut here's been listening to *The Eagles*. It's gonna be stuck in my head 'till friggin' Judgment Day."

"As she stood in the doorway, I heard the mission bell ..." he sang as the guard escorted him down the long, drab hallway past hundreds of similar cell doors.

"Come on then," he chided, "I can't get that harmony going by myself..."

The guard continued the lyrics. "*And I was thinking to myself, this could be heaven or this could be hell... Mirrors on the ceiling, pink champagne on ice...*"

"*We are all just prisoners here, of our own device.*" The young man snapped his fingers, listening to his words echo. "Everybody now!"

On his command, a chorus erupted from every cell within earshot. "*Welcome to the Hotel California... Such a lovely place, such a lovely place... Livin' it up at the Hotel California... Such a lovely place, such a lovely place...*"

The old man listened amusedly to the sudden outburst, but did not turn. He kept his eyes on the spot where the sparrow would return, the morning sun catching its feathers, to hop dutifully through the fallen leaves littering the ground outside his dusty window.

Rites of Intoxication*by Stacy Campbell*

Come
my brothers and sisters
dance with me
in the glittering
light of gold
and silver

Bodies
slithering to muted beat
of slurred song
swaying a sweet seduction
of tangled arms, legs,
intoxicated breath

Whiskey
stirs and seeps
from pores
in the power to reinvent
ourselves for
one night

Tonight
we dance and laugh and love
concealed behind the mask
when gold retires
we'll wake from sleep
hung-over from hiding.

(The Little Girl Dreams of)*by Allison Barrett*

carousel horses
 stiff as popsicle sticks,
 their varnished bodies impaled
 on shiny bronze posts.
 Mirrors crazily reflect
 the chaos of flashing lights,
 gilt hooves, gaudy saddles.

*(She sees the one she wants and races to beat the others.
 She pushes another little girl.)*

'Round and 'round the horses go
 in frozen determination,
 necks straining,
 calm painted eyes out of place,
 chunks of glossy mane
 blown permanently backward
 in the imaginary breeze.

(She squeezes her knees into the unyielding belly, leans forward and squints.)

Arched with yearning,
 the jewel-encrusted horses
 can move only in circles,
 up and down
 to the eerie moans
 of the carnival organ,
 hordes of children on their backs,
 gleefully going nowhere.

*(Her muscles are tense as her teeth grind in the darkness.
 Her small, greedy arms grasp through the tangled sheets for the brass ring.)*

Artistry*Third Place, Burkhart Poetry Contest**by Nathan Ericson*

Archaic images of the Tree,

2000 years old.

I see my Father's actual blood dripping.

His sweat being the oil coloring the canvas.

All I know is this.

I have seen minimal transformation.

I have felt great movements inside of me,

But something only seen in glimpses.

A smattering here and there

Intermingled amongst new age audacities.

The pinnacles of our past generations have passed on.

Room 14*by Erin Detrick*

Nell is surrounded by talk show noise,

orderlies, soft vegetables and apple sauce,

engulfed by order and completely untouched by it.

She stares out the window

at pavement and parked cars and

bored nurses, smoking carelessly

on breaks from the decay they minister to.

A strange person breathes noisily in the next bed,

nothing like the soft snores

she used to wander off to sleep with,

his head resting against hers.

Her frail body fights a heaviness,

a stillness, a restlessness that ties her to her small home.

She sits quietly, watching the bare trees

and cold sun, her bent hand against the glass.

the purple miles home

by Jeni Kettering

you came out kicking the car like it was my body. oh the power of a man.
your mouth once warm and wet with desire, turns sour and dry with rage.
your words hit me like spit. your body once folding and unfolding in the
motion of love, now twisted and fisted. your flesh is a weapon. did it
feel good to make me feel your pain, because i did, because i did. and i
stood outside choking down the rain, like it washed anything away, like
it washed this night away. but i am stained. mascara rivers still erode
my face and flow with the gravity of your rage. these oceans of sin
crash upon a shore of skin. i absorbed you like black ink upon a dampened
page. painful poetry is drawn all over me. your fingers left a trail on
my flesh like the purple miles home. you drove me. saying only o my god o
my god. and i wished you would not take his name in vain, because he
loves me more than you. and o my love o my love, with you i come, my
skin glowing, but i leave you like a shadow.

Hymnal

by Krista Lively

Number 214—

“How Great Thou Art”

I tell him it’s a classic,

Everybody knows that one.

“Yeah, it’s ok. Let’s see what else is there.”

We peruse through the green book

Yellowed with age and flipped

Each Sunday by holy fingers.

Song after song of crosses and

Jesus

And the love we’re promised—

“Standing On The Promises”

How about that one? It’s nice.

“I like that. Put it down.”

I let him search while

I gaze outside.

How could today be so beautiful?

How I would love for us

To be out there

In God’s green world—

“Number 175. I love that one!”

“Here I am, Lord”

I put number 175 on the list.

He smiles

Content with our findings.

I fold up the list and place it in the

Hymnal.

Dad lies back again to rest,

I breathe the familiar prayer I speak each moment now

“Not today, God. Please not today.”

Who’d have thought I’d be sitting by the bed

Of my father.

And who’d have thought

His baby girl

Would plan his final celebration.

“Here I Am, Lord.”

If the Afterlife Is Like the Phone Company
by Jen LaConte

Please stay on the line.
 Your call is important to us.
 We appreciate your business.
 All of our agents are presently occupied.
 Please have your notarized certificate,
 All of your extremities
 And your code number when you call.
 The average wait is between one
 And eighty years.
 All calls will be answered
 In the order in which they were received.
 Please stay on the line.

Tarrytown
by Erin Detrick

I sweated under August spears of sunshine
 and watched you disappear

down a stained esophagus of glass
 to a train,

which led to a city,
 that swallowed you piece by piece.

Your mind, so melded with mine, became garbled
 by garish lights, car horns and old friends.

On the cusp of our last kiss,
 why couldn't I tell my hands

they were finished with gliding
 through your warm, dusky brown hair

when the tunnel closed its cold countenance against me,
 and sent you somewhere I would not

could not follow.

To Speak

Third Place, Poetry Contest

by A. Noelle Phillips

I talk to Jerry in Chukotka,
his trailer store full of baleen
and baskets and books.

I flip through the dictionary full of words
I wish to know, cannot say.
I speak them badly.

iri,
irrak,
qivianaqpak? *

"Words," says Jerry,
"are the same everywhere.
They just go through time.
With technology now,
Words are even more the same."

I look up from the pages,
digging for comprehension
in his bald head, dark eyes.

"It's like this," and he waves his arm
toward the iced ocean.

"Russia is very close. I go there
twice a year. I speak very little Russian,
but enough to get by.
People do not understand that
you can talk, even if you don't know the language."

Here I nod, understanding at that moment his arm;
Lucille's grin, Wilfred's drawings, Mary's eyes.

"You know what they call boat motors in Siberia?"
I shake my head no.

"ehvinrude."

*eye, two eyes/his eyes, will they turn and look

Emily

by Anna Damico

I watched a leaf fall to the earth,
And I saw you dancing in the autumn sun,
Your long copper hair glinting in the fading light.

I watched a creek flow past me whispering,
And I heard your soft breath as you slept in your bed,
Your chest rising and falling as you dreamt of unknown fantasies.

I saw a spider weaving its web,
And I watched you do your high school homework,
Your mind waking slowly to the world around you.

I watched a mother scold her child,
And I saw our mother cradling you in her arms,
Your limp body free of the pain it knew moments before.

I watched a sunset alone,
And I thought I felt you kiss my heart.

I lived my life,
And I thought I felt you beside me all the while.

As They Pass
by Ellen Beversluis

"I can't remember all the times I've tried to tell myself to hold on to these moments as they pass."—Counting Crows

"Il y a du courrier pour moi aujourd'hui?" I ask Andre, the night guard, on my way through the hall. He smiles, turns his head to the side and says, "B316?" I grin and nod, pretending to be astounded yet again that he knows every student's mailbox number by heart. He searches through the bin marked "B," and shakes his head sympathetically. I sigh dramatically and he laughs: our nightly routine. I turn from the counter and walk toward the pop machines into the lounge.

The lower level of the Foyer International d'Etudiants is just a large room with maroon walls, potted plants, fluorescent lights and huge windows. Cigarettes are strewn carelessly on the once-white floor. There are tables and booths set out everywhere, and a small cafeteria so that the room can be transformed to a restaurant during mealtimes. In the daytime it remains relatively empty. At night, however, the room is 5th Avenue—the place to be. I have grown used to the sights and sounds of the building that has been my home for months now, but tonight I force myself to stop, struck by how soon I will be leaving here and retiring these details to memory. I lean against the pop machine that is always out of Coke, and watch life as I know it happening around me.

People have come from all over the world to attend the French language program at the Universite de Bourgogne, and we all live here in the Foyer together. In the far corner, groups of ten or eleven Tunisians and Moroccans are crammed into several booths, shuffling cards and bottles of alcohol. They speak loudly in Arabic and in French, laughing and teasing each other. Every few minutes one of the guys will leave the table and stroll around the room. He'll stop and listen to a conversation, put his two cents in, and then laugh loudly at himself. At the next table he'll flirt relentlessly with a girl in tight clothes until she responds, and then move on. Zaki sees me standing here and holds my gaze, brown eyes intent on staring me down and reducing me to giggles. I raise an eyebrow at him and deliberately look away.

In front of me the Chinese and Japanese kids are sitting at a table, glasses resting on noses, hard at work with books spread out in front of them. I often wonder how they can study in this room, but they never seem to notice the noise and commotion going on around them. Jian Ping coughs and looks around awkwardly before returning to his calculator and notebook.

All of a sudden, a cackle resounds from the back corner. I casually turn my head and look to the couches where the "other" Americans, as they have come to be known, are draped. They drink loudly, talk loudly, laugh loudly, and some dance to loud American music from a boom box. Everyone in the room pretends they are not there. This is the way it has been from the start. Acknowledge; move on.

"How aren't you?" a vivacious voice calls out. I turn back to the middle of the room where Simo has just spotted Margy, his American buddy. She gives him a hug, and he quickly returns to strumming his guitar and arguing with Blake over chords. As the night wears on, after Andre turns out the light, a small crowd will gather around them, requesting songs, and everyone will sing until exhaustion chases them off to bed.

My eyes rest finally on the Scandinavians. Normally they like to sit upstairs in one of their rooms with lit candles and soft music, but tonight they are here in black pants and classy sweaters, sitting up straight, talking quietly and sipping their glasses of wine. Britta throws her head back in a familiar laugh, and I grin. From upside down, she sees me and calls out, "Come here darlin'!" waving me over. I take a deep breath and walk towards her. She pulls me into her lap, wrapping her arms around my stomach, and planting a kiss on my cheek. The others greet me warmly, handing me a glass of wine and offering cigarettes. Zaki comes over and tries to flirt, but is shooed away, and I sit there on Britta's lap, feeling her chin on my shoulder. Oskar is telling a story, and he starts over in English for my benefit. I am soon drawn into the laughter and warmth of my life here, and when we toast to forever, I believe, forgetting to remember how quickly this moment will be gone.

