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2006 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

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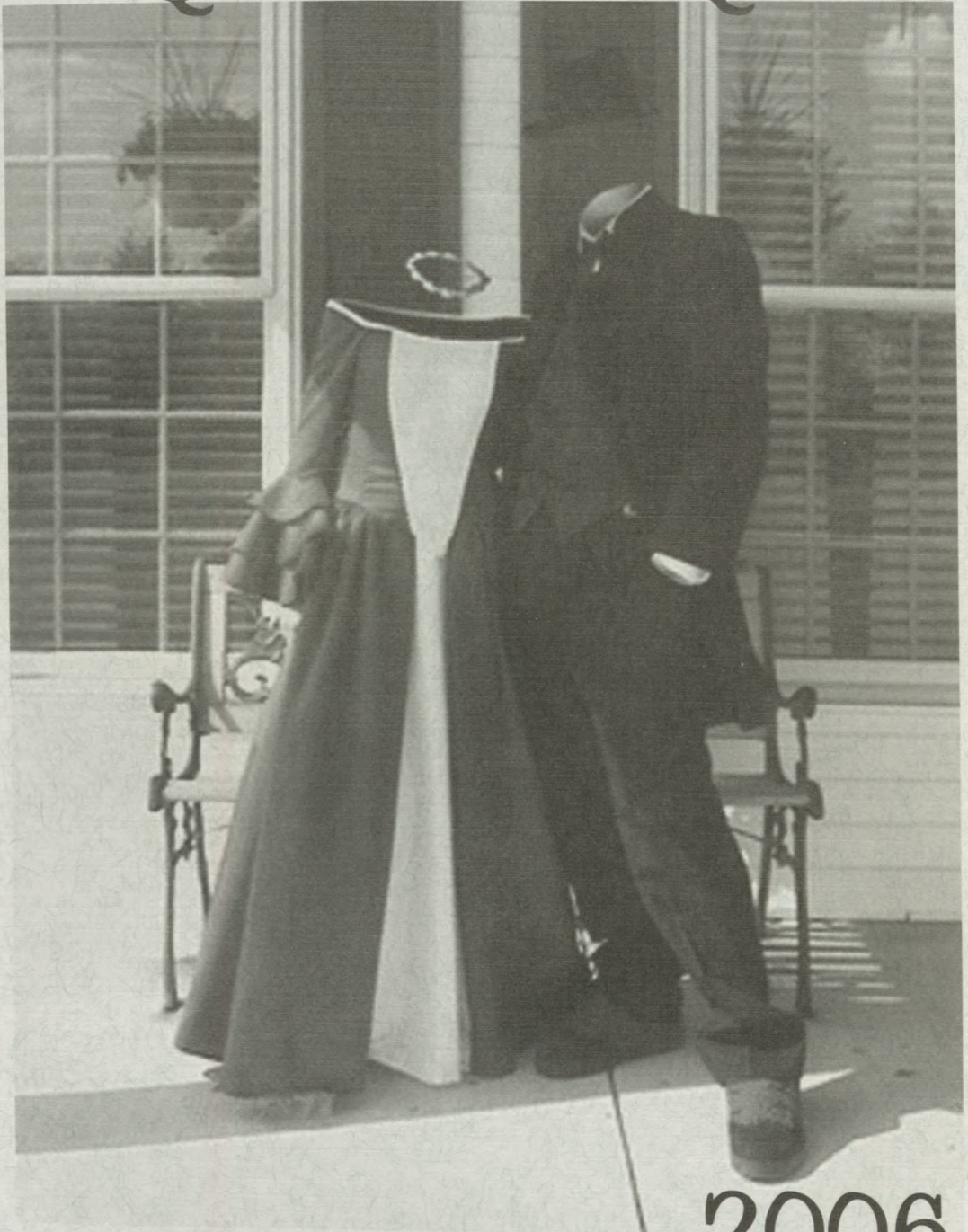
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Quiz and Quill



2006



This magazine is dedicated to
the life and memory of

~Dr. Rebecca Bowman~

Quiz and Quill

Spring 2006

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Westerville, Ohio

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Editor's Note

Looking back through a rough draft of this year's spring magazine, one used for proofreading, I feel around and look for what to say about it. With any luck, you have already read most, if not all, of the magazine and are performing the same task. If not, skip this note and return to it later. But having read the magazine, are you not struck by the facets? I am rather dumbfounded by the diversity of both voices and content. As I think further back over the process of selecting these pieces, the memory of variety still lingers. The selection process was not easy. The members of Quiz and Quill have spent almost all of winter quarter and two-thirds of spring quarter deciding which pieces would be published. I thank each person who was involved in that process, at any moment. I thank everyone who submitted their work, for they give us the challenge of making these difficult decisions and the joy of reading such a range of literature. You allow Quiz and Quill to exist, demonstrate such high quality, and be considered more than a lovely idea or academic tradition. Finally, I ask everyone to thank Dr. Shannon Lakanen. Without her, we'd be handing out this journal on napkins held together by chewing gum. That is the simple truth. Well, enough of my blathering, please reread, think, and feel something other than ink and paper.

2006 Writing Awards

Fiction

- First Place "The Indistinguishable Line" by Christeen Stridsberg
 Second Place "Lunch" by Josh Bradley
 Third Place "Mall Job" by Jen Knox

Nonfiction

- First Place "What Lies Beneath" by Christeen Stridsberg
 Second Place "Mona Lisa" by Jen Knox
 Third Place "Astumphobia" by Amber Robertson

Poetry

- First Place "Psychoanalysis" by Mary Teaford
 Second Place "I Dreamed you Into Existence" by Jen Roberts
 Third Place "Toast" by Allison Bradley

Religious Poetry

- First Place "Buddhist Monk" by Mac McGowan
 Second Place "Crusaders on the March to Antioch"
 by Mac McGowan
 Third Place "Unyielding Saint" by Kevin Crafton

Playwriting

- First Place "Boeto" by Jen Roberts
 Second Place "A Round in Rhetoric" by Dayna Hannah

Louise Gleim Williams Prize

- "What Lies Beneath" by Christeen Stridsberg

Contest Judges

Fiction Judge

Robert Olmstead, Director of Creative Writing at Ohio Wesleyan University, is author of a collection of short stories and five novels, including *Coal Black Horses*, which will be published in fall 2006. His work has appeared in *Mid-American Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Greensboro Review*, *Writers Digest*, and others. He has received several awards and honors including: the *Black Warrior Review* Fiction Award, National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Fellowship, a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, a Pennsylvania Council on the Senior Arts Literature Fellowship, and an Ohio Council for the Arts Literature Fellowship.

Nonfiction Judge

Michelle Disler is a doctoral candidate in creative nonfiction at Ohio University where she has received the Virginia Woolf Prize in the Essay and the AWP Intro Award in Nonfiction. Most recently, she received the nonfiction prize for 2006 from *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, and she has publications forthcoming in both *Columbia* and *North Dakota Quarterly*.

Poetry/Religious Poetry Judge

Steve Abbott is a tenured professor at Columbus State Community College, where he teaches composition and poetry and advises *Spring Street*, the college's annual literary/visual arts magazine. He is a founding member of The Poetry Forum at Larry's, which is one of the Midwest's outstanding poetry venues. He has published two chapbooks of poems, and is an associate editor of *Pudding: The International Journal of Applied Poetry*. With poet Rose M. Smith, he is compiling an anthology of Columbus-area poets.

Playwriting Judge

Doreen Dunn, director of the Eastland Performing Arts Program and is on the summer faculty of the ArtsGenesis Institute for Multiple Intelligences and the Arts in NYC, has won two Ohio Arts Council Playwrighting Fellowships, a Mary Anderson Center for the Arts Fellowship, *The Columbus Dispatch's* Short Play Contest, and the Attic Theatre Center's National Playwrighting competition. Productions of her plays are performed throughout the country. Her children's play, *UGLY DUCKLING +2*, was produced as part of the 2004 Otterbein College season.

Louise Gleim Williams Prize

Stuart Lishan is an Associate Professor of English at The Ohio State University, where he teaches courses in creative and critical writing and the literature of the fantastic. His poems, fiction, and creative nonfiction have appeared recently in *Bellingham Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Brevity*, *ForPoetry.com*, *Kenyon Review*, *The National Poetry Review*, *Versedaily*, and others. He recently collaborated with Professor Terry Hermesen on the "Poetry Appreciation" chapter of the forthcoming *Handbook for Research in Arts Education* (Springer).

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Adam Cottrel



The Distant Pale

Stacie Walulik

I am suspended within my dreams this night
hovering over a gray, lifeless body.
And just as the dull sky opens
and pours its acid tears—
So my thoughts remain
distant and embodying fears.
Here is where my odyssey commences
To the abstruse and evanescent—
The pen never leaves the hand
and the ink never dries—
in these pages of my mind.
The chapters keep on passing
as the novel unfolds in front of me.
But there are no beginnings—
and never an end.
My world is constantly revolving—
but I can never feel the spin.
Until the sun broke through the distant pale
and my storybook ending came—
Finally, my feet are on the ground again.

Lists

Matt Dunham

Ask about the lists I make,
 I make them for completeness' sake
 To save on all the time it takes when
 Something's left behind:

A grocery list
 A waiting list
 A guest list
 A staff list
 A cast list
 A "best of" list

The top ten
 The bottom ten
 Ten reasons why
 And ten new tips for effective parenting.

A list of complaints
 A list of demands
 A list of suspects
 A list of ingredients.

A list of genealogy, chronology, taxonomy,
 Bibliography

Alphabetized, Standardized,
 Numerated, Overrated,
 Capable, Inescapable,
 Periodic Table,

Printed up,
 Boxed up,
 Filed up,
 Added up,
 Handed down,
 Sanded down,

Completely practical
 And practically enough.

Fernandez

Mac McGowan

"Santa Maria, madre de Dios..."

He tried to say the prayer he'd learned in Puerto Rico.
In the hour of his death, he sought to summon her.

He lay beside the road as the medic and I
fought to save him.

I remember the warm, red blood that
stained his caramel skin,
and the way he prayed until
his lips made only bubbles.
I saw his jaw go slack, and his eyes
stare up at heaven.

The medevac we called for finally came.
In fluttering rotor wings it landed.
We carried him to the chopper
but he was miles away,
above the clouds,
beyond our help forever.

I hope *Santa Maria* walked among those clouds with him.

They sent his body back to Puerto Rico.

The Penance of a Beleaguered Runner: Who Knew Alaska Could Be So Hot?

Jen Roberts

"No two marathons are alike." – Coach Vince

My dry, swollen lips formed nonsensical words that seemed highly philosophical to me. I bowed my head, eyeing every crack and variation of the cement path, letting the tears drip off my cheeks and onto my twisted, shuffling feet. I hadn't the strength to lift my head any more, and with each attempt to do so I would lose my balance and veer sideways from my path. There was throbbing just behind my eyes, a headache maybe. But to me, it was the beat of my heart, the telltale heart, its thunderous voice ministering fire and brimstone admonishment like a Southern Baptist preacher:

You have been led astray by temptation! You have turned a blind eye, forsaken those who have supported you! You have ignored the warnings and instead taken the hand of Satan thinking he would lead you to victory! Fool! You must repent! You must ask forgiveness! Do I hear an Amen? Hallelujah, sister!

The voice reverberated in my head; it blurred my vision and made me dizzy. I was defiant, alternately laughing out loud in delirium and crying out in pain and confusion. My stomach cramped with sour heat. He was right, the preacher man. I had forsaken my coach and was lackadaisical about my training. I had been prideful. I had run this marathon before. *How hard can it be to do it again?*

Race day. I stand in a small crowd of runners behind the start line. The Marines are hyped and energized; they practice their cadence chants and slap high-fives. I eye their shoes, regulation boots, and silently laugh; I will pass them around mile 12 for sure. It is a cool June Alaskan morning, but the forecast calls for temperatures in the mid-eighties. I stretch my legs, adjust my water belt, and check my supplies. I have just eight ounces of electrolytes, but my husband will replenish me along the marathon route. I have to avoid the sponsored drink of the Mayor's Midnight Run because the mixture of two different electrolyte drinks tends to make one vomit.

I feel the slow creep of anxiety settle deep in my knees, my joints. *This is normal*, I tell myself. My bones always feel heavy with a dull ache before the start of any race. *It doesn't mean anything*. My heart beats a little faster as the runners take their mark. I check my watch. My left wrist is empty. A hasty search of the water belt comes up short—my watch is at the hotel. The gun fires, the crowd cheers, and I look around frantically for someone I might know who might have a watch, and with whom I can run beside. Heads are bobbing up and down, reminding me of goose necks. I see no one. I am alone. *This is not a sign*.

Within the first mile, I realize I am in trouble. My pace is off, my stomach is cramped, and my legs are weak. Actually, I had known the night before, laying out my clothes on the bed, that I was unprepared for the race. This was my second marathon in Alaska, and since the first one had gone so well I

had been a little cocky and lazy about my training for this one. *I've done this before. I've got it covered*, I'd think when I had to miss a workout because of my long work hours. *How hard can it be?* Doug had settled my nerves last night and said he'd be there the whole way. He knew I wasn't in the best shape for the race, but people were counting on me, and we would get through it together.

Doug wasn't at mile 4. My Ultima drink was getting low, so I took in sips of water at each water stop, trying to preserve as much of the electrolyte drink as I could until the next scheduled rendezvous at mile 11. Doug wasn't at mile 11. Again, I gulped down water, my lips chapped and dry, my throat parched. Someone handed me Advil when they saw the pain on my face. My legs were untrained, the weather was twenty degrees hotter than last year's race, and I was out of electrolytes with 15 miles to go. *What have I done?* Nothing about this race was like the last time. Where was Doug?

We had planned our final meeting for mile 22. Mile 22 is also where Coach would be to help run me through, pump me up, and root me on. It was the final ego-boost to motivate me the last 4.2 miles. I had always loved mile 22. It is the most critical mile. It is the mile where you see no hope, no end of the tunnel, and you want to quit. But then, like Zeus and Thor rising from the clouds, Coach and Doug come into sight. They envelop me with magical words, fill me with inspiration, and I am able to run on pride and adrenaline for another mile or two. Only this time, something was seriously wrong. I had become dizzy with each step. Mile 17 saw me having crying fits, tears spilling over my sunburned cheeks, onlookers calling out my name, which was written across my jersey, "Are you okay, Jen?" I wasn't. But, I held up a feeble hand, barely able to give it a flick to wave off their concern.

The stretch between mile 17 and mile 20 was highway, so supporters were few. I felt the familiar burn of vomit rise in my chest and into my throat. Every time I held up my head, I'd run sideways. My feet were merely shuffling across the pavement. Cars honked and people yelled. I cried harder. At once I was filled with anger, sadness, and fear. I felt vulnerable and disappointed. I heard voices in my head that weren't my own. My vision blurred occasionally and at times I laughed maniacally. Mostly, I cried.

Mile 22 was approaching and I was ready to quit. I had planned it all out. Doug would say, "You can do it, honey," and I would simply look him in the eye, vomit at his feet and reply, "Put me in the car." I was embarrassed and knew that when the Coach saw me, he would be furious and pull me off the course. I had betrayed his training by taking it so lightly. I would be admonished for half-killing myself. Worse, I would be a disappointment to everyone who had supported me. I heard my sister say, *I knew it. The first one was a fluke*. I heard myself say, *You're a failure, Jen. Just roll over, right here on this patch of moose-poop-stained grass and die, die, die*.

Doug wasn't at mile 22. Coach wasn't there, either. I had no choice but to forge ahead. My vision was getting worse, and I could no longer run a straight line. I couldn't rely on walking to the finish; my muscles were far past being able to work under any capacity, walking, running or crawling. I would stop running and move into a walk that made me look a lot like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. The pain would ease for only a few seconds before my legs and hips cramped under the stress of *walking*. So, I would shuffle my feet, willing

them back into a haphazard jog, all the while cursing Doug, Coach, and myself. In a few seconds, the pain would return and I would switch back to walking. Through it all, the vomit was there, tickling and taunting beyond my tonsils, threatening to soil my purple jersey and my reputation.

I repeated the transition from shuffle-jogging to limp-walking to shuffle-jogging to limp-walking for the last couple of miles, always accompanied by tears. It was at the 26-mile marker that I had an increasing feeling of alarm. I had only consumed eight ounces of electrolytes and a whole lot of water. I was going to die of Hyponatremia—overhydration. I was going to die. I looked around for a medic, my eyes growing to the size of walnuts. I could hear distant voices. I could see contorted faces and arms stretching in my direction. I could see Doug. As soon as our eyes met, my fears released and I began to bawl, loudly and like a baby. I had somehow crossed the line. I had somehow made it the last .2 miles. I must've, because I have the medal that says "Finisher."

Oliver Wright Writes

Matt Dunham

Learning to read and write
Was a challenge for Oliver Wright.
He didn't do well when he had to spell,
And his test scores were always a fright.

Once annually,
Came the spelling bee,
Which was mandatory
(They charged a small fee).

And poor Oliver Wright
Was asked to spell "rite,"
And spelled it
"W-R-I-G-H-T."

"Incorrect!" said the teacher,
And quite filled with glee,
Spelled it for Oliver "R-I-T-E."

Then Oliver asked her,
"Ma'am, how can it be,
That you can expect
A student like me
To know rite with an E
From the one with a T?
Wright is my name,
So I spelled it the same,
And it's wrong and unfair
To penalize me."

"Now listen up here, Mister Oliver Wright,"
Said the teacher, "If you'd like to put up a fight,
We will soon fix your spelling plight.
Step up to the board, Mister Wright, and write.

Write rite, Mister Wright.
And it had better be right.
Write it a hundred times, Mister Wright.
Hold the chalk in your hand, not your left but your right.

When you write rite right, right up on the board,
Write, write, write, until you are bored,
You'll find writing itself is its own reward
And be able to spell words like *xebec* and *fford*."

Oliver soon learned that writing's a gift,
And everyone read all the things he had writ.
He wrote many books, and they sold very well,
Especially one titled, *My Teacher Smells*.

Life in a Box

Colleen Tappel



What The Bathtub Gave Me

Jen Roberts

Inspired by the Painting "What The Bathtub Gave Me" by Kiersty Long

For some, it calms.
To be immersed in its
wet-warmth,
to feel it glide, ripple
over their fleshy thighs;
even the
goosh
sound of water as it
purges and spills over
pruned toes that
peek and
wiggle
against the sensation.

It does not calm me.
For me, it reminds of
cold days,
cold water,
cold
memory.

"Third in line, the water's fine."

It waits—muddy.
Corroded water
heater burps up
flakes of metal
skin surround me.
It wants to rest.
But
its job is not done:
I am not clean.

The Eye

Alec Volpe

This eye
Wandering through time
Is my soul
There are no windows
The eye is me
It explains me
It reveals me
It betrays me
It makes me

Is it any wonder
That when I am dead
My eye will leave this body
It becomes hollow
Nothing but a white glazed ball
Like a marble in my skull

My eye leaves that shell
My soul transcends existence
It wanders where it pleases
My soul chooses to be reborn
My soul chooses to explore what can never be *seen*

This eye
It is me
It is my soul
My spirit
My star that lights the night sky
My star which burns with the beauty of a universe
In the midst of a vast twilight

Lex Talionis

Michelle Yost

His eyes never blink. This is because if he closes them, his mind will replace the visible world with one of his nightmares, one of blood. So those hard, dead-gray eyes are veined and wild, surrounded by the crust of dried tears he never let slip. His hands shake as he cocks the old revolver – bought from a jittery crack head behind the post office – then slowly lowers the hammer back into place. Now is not the time. He has to be careful, though, because he might shoot himself in the foot and frighten away his quarry, a Thief-of-Lives that he has hunted for a year. He rehearses his line: “My name is James Roth. Do you know why I am here?”

The very first laws humans made for themselves were based upon *lex talionis*, the Roman simplification of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, an arm for an arm, a life for a life.” Thousands of years of recorded history have demonstrated the destructive nature of disproportionate vengeance; modern governments, though, have turned the “proportional response” into a fine-tuned equation of dollars and lives.

In the eighth century A.D., Islam raced across the world, coming as far into Europe as Tours, France before being pushed back into Spain, where Muslims remained for another seven hundred years, until the armies of Isabel and Ferdinand finally drove them out. During that time they helped translate ancient texts for the Renaissance, introduced the Arabic numerals still used today, and had the most sophisticated medical knowledge in Europe.

By the eleventh century, Muslims had been occupying Jerusalem for four hundred years and were harassing the Byzantine Empire, who appealed to Pope Urban II for help. In 1095, the monarchs of Europe “took up the cross” and sent their soldiers across an entire continent to liberate the Holy Lands. It was, for the most part, an unmitigated disaster.

Around his neck, on an old dog-tag chain, there is a small vial containing a few grams of the parents James loved, the parents he lost. Nervously he shakes it; his father had always joked, “When your mother and I die, put us in the same coffee can together and give it a good shake every now and then, so I can get a little ash.” Once James had possessed the same humor as his parents, but that had gone away. For a time his friends had tried everything to get him to laugh, and when he would not, they got angry, accused James of being “selfish to wallow in his own pity,” and then they had left him. But he did not mind.

James looks down at his watch; it is a quarter to one in the morning and the Thief is running late. His favorite stripper must be working tonight and he is getting an extra lap dance. Even though James knows the name of the Thief, he will not say it, because the Thief does not deserve to have his name remembered. “Michael and Lillian Roth. Do you know them?”

In 1099, the Crusaders did indeed succeed in finally capturing Jerusalem, but whatever piousness they acted under was decimated by their wholesale slaughter of Jews and Muslims who inhabited the city. And in the end, their control over the Holy Lands was only temporary. By the Third Crusade of 1187, Saladin had retaken Jerusalem, though he allowed most of the inhabitants to live and be ransomed off.

Five more Crusades ordered by various Popes (and one led by children) tried to take the Holy lands and failed. Christians and Muslims slaughtered each other, and the unfortunate Jews were caught in the middle. Christians even turned on one another, as the West ransacked Constantinople, a city they had once aided. While interest in the Crusades waned, there was never a comfortable peace between Christianity and Islam. The turning point came in the failed Muslim siege of Vienna in 1683, when the West gained the upper hand and Islam ceased to be a threat, for a time.

A stray cat knocks a rum bottle over as it jumps from a dumpster. James turns and pulls the trigger before he can stop himself. The rapport of the Saturday Night Special is so loud he thinks he is deaf, the ringing in his ears fighting to be heard over the beating of his own heart. James pukes a little bile as his body tried to compensate for the stress, then hides behind a row of trash cans, waiting for the inevitably curious passer-by who will come investigate. But after five minutes, no one has come, and his breathing slowly returns to normal. James realizes his wrist hurts from the gun's recoil and flexes it slowly.

Something in the alley smells horrible, and his nose begins to itch. But James cannot sneeze because he will not close his eyes, and eventually the urge passes. He has become strong in so many ways over the last year---not just physically, but in his mental ability to ignore his body's own discomfort from lack of food or sleep, or the muscle cramps from huddling in doorways while he tried to find the Thief. Part of him is proud of his own self-denial. James knows that no other kid at NYU could have endured what he had. They would have chosen to forget about the crime, to let the court system handle the death of their parents. But not James. He knows he is different because of the injustice done to him, to his parents' memory. He knows he has changed into a creature capable of doing what must be done no matter what the hardship.

Industrialization required something that the Middle East had: oil. Once-powerful kingdoms under Muslim rule found themselves subjects of European colonial governments. After the World Wars, they faced the great indignity of being carved up into new countries at the discretion of the British and the United Nations. But they continued to sell their oil to the west, because they had nothing else to sell. And when they did not cooperate with the West, they were punished with economic sanctions, threatened, and sometimes even invaded. Deals were made at the top, which kept those at the bottom without a voice or hope.

Actions were taken---by governments, by individuals---but death was always the result, though it was never the endgame. No one could let go of the past.

The wind kicks grime into his wide eyes, and James reaches up to scratch them, but the gunpowder on his hands only makes it worse. The dark alley is smeared away in a blur of white flashes as James desperately tries to clear his vision. But it is too late, and the memory world comes to replace the real; he sees his parents pulling away from the curb in their Rav 4. It was an uneconomical vehicle they had traded in their hybrid for so that they could move James more easily in and out of his dorm each year.

From the window, James saw his mother lean out to wave, her auburn hair billowing wildly. James could also see the Ryder truck, moving quickly down the street, but he thought nothing of it. Even when the white truck swerved into on-coming traffic, James did not believe anything would happen. But suddenly there were tires squealing, and the green Rav 4 was trying to get off the road. James watched as the moving truck rolled up *over* his parents' car, sheering off the top and coming to a rest straddling the Rav 4, its tires still spinning. James did not know he was running toward the accident---he thought it was actually coming toward him---until he tripped over something lying on the grass. It was a severed arm, though which of his parents it belonged to he could not tell.

Stifling a scream with his teeth clenched, James forces his eyes to refocus on the alley and banish That Day. He needs to stay alert for the Thief. "My name is James Roth, you son of a bitch."

On September 11, 2001, nine hundred years since the first Crusade, 19 members of the Muslim faith hijacked four U.S. passenger jets and used them to destroy the World Trade Center in New York and part of the Pentagon. The President called for a "new crusade," which was met with immediate revulsion by the Muslim community. Apologies were made, then bombs were launched and wars started. *Lex talionis*, the Law of Revenge, demands equal and direct retribution. Its purpose is to limit the spread of violent retribution by limiting targets to those who perpetrate crimes and spare those in proximity.

Legend has it that Saladin looked across the battlefield and saw that Richard the Lionheart's horse had been killed, so Saladin sent a stable across with two fresh horses. Peace and understanding come between men far more easily than between nations: Men can sometimes be reasonable, but the mob cannot. Men might ask for fairness, but the mob will not be sated until their enemy has been hit twice as hard.

There is laughter. The Thief is coming. He has not one, but two women on his arms. He looks happy. James does not want him to die happy. But his nerves are failing him. James wants to move out into the alley, say what he needs to say...but

his legs will not cooperate. The Thief continues walking past, and James closes his eyes, bringing back That Day.

James tried to pull his mother's body from the smoldering wreckage of the Rav 4, but she was pinned beneath the undercarriage of the Ryder truck. Only a bloody piece of her paisley shirt came away. He whispered her name, holding the tattered cloth to his mouth. That was when he heard the slurred curses, and saw the Thief who had stolen his parents, the inebriated second-year senior in his NYU sweatshirt who came stumbling out of the truck cab.

Biting down on his cheek until it bleeds, James opens his eyes and sees again the familiar dirty blond hair, broad shoulders and drunken swagger. Rising, James hurries down the alley to catch up with the Thief, raising the revolver. "M-my name is James." That is all he can get out before he can no longer restrain the urge and pulls the trigger.

The bullet strikes in the upper back, just beneath the left scapula. The girls scream and run into the night, not sparing a thought for their friend or John, whatever the Thief was to them. James does not care that they have gone, or even if they saw his face. He is not here to kill them. The Law of Revenge only allows him equal and direct retribution; killing the girls would have been against The Law.

The Thief keeps his feet under him, though, the booze probably speeding along his shock so that he does not fully recognize what is happening. He turns and just stands there, a little blood oozing from the corner of his mouth, regarding James with cloudy brown eyes. James is angry now, that the Thief is so drunk he cannot see death coming. But James has words he needs to say. "Do you know why I am here? Michael and Lillian Roth? Do you know them?" The Thief says nothing, just stands there drooling red. His face registers surprise, but not fear. "You killed my parents." James can stand it no longer, and he shoots away that dopey face in rapid succession, using the last three bullets, though he keeps pulling the trigger, pointing it at the corpse lying in a puddle of sewage. "One ... year! You killed my parents ... and they gave you one year in a state hospital!"

Sirens interrupt James' tirade. He looks down at his feet, sees the results of his vengeance, and smiles. A calm he has not known in a year comes over him. They say that violence breeds violence, but James does not care what retribution comes upon him; he knows that the killer of his parents will not be given the gift of continued existence.

"A life for a life, asshole." James kicks the corpse and walks into darkness.

Adam Cottrel

A Sideways Glance

Jen Knox

The wind pushes and pulls at the trees outside.
Beyond his graying head, I watch
the leaves shift and swirl in smooth, graceful whips.
His eyes are flapping, shifty,
probably from allergies.
His sickness,
I think.
I relish in the aptness
of my clear, unaffected vision.
He tells me I am ill and
positions my pain into a pattern.
A trail leading farther back than,
I would have guessed.
I watch a globe of wet form at the
corner of his reddening eye.
His thin lashes sweep at it twice,
releasing it to roam down a plump cheek.
For a fleeting moment I imagine that
he shed that tear for me.
And I reach for his hand.

Matt Dunham

Dear Reader:

By the time you've read this poem,

Approached it softly and
Then, after scrutiny,
Plucked it from the tender page
And torn the husk away,

Sunken tooth into the
Type-set
Word-meat
And picked the flesh from under nail,

I'll have done my time in our kitchen,
And retired to my own supper.

Buddhist Monk, Saigon 1963

Mac McGowan

He burns for justice like a candle.
He does not see anything.
He does not smell the gasoline and burning flesh,
only the lotus floating on a pond of dreams.

The flames,
like lovers' tongues
devour him.

He is burning in my memory.

He is burning still.

Colleen Tappel



Cannibalism (or "The Villainous Villanelle")

Michelle Yost

Never a friend so true
Always there for me
Tasty and sweet were you.

Locked in a room of blue
Like an endless sea
Never a friend so true.

And as the hunger grew
I saw your pink knee
Tasty and sweet were you.

Oh, the tantrum you threw
Trying to escape me
Never a friend so true.

Down to the final chew
And your right knee
Tasty and sweet were you.

Jailed after my rescue
I told them on TV
Never a friend so true
Tasty and sweet were you.

A Round in Rhetoric

Dayna Hannah

(Lights come up on a stage that is very bare. To the left is a lavish throne. The KING sits in it authoritatively wearing a black and blue uniform while he smokes a cigar, which he ashes in a tall gold ashtray downstage of the chair. To the right is the PLAYER wearing the same black and blue uniform standing by a stool as though she has just abruptly stood up from it.)

King:

Therefore and thus, as I am king and you are not, I have henceforth sentenced you to an everlasting death from which there is no defense.

Player:

Might I not save myself?

King:

To which there is no defense.

Player:

Surely I might save myself.

King:

To which there is no defense.

Player:

I will save myself.

King:

Ah, she speaks. I thought you were mute. What did you say?

Player:

Perhaps I shall save myself?

King:

What?

Player:

Let me play you a tune.

King:

A tune? Shall you play me a tune?

Player:

Do you want me to play you a tune?

King:

If you play me the tune I wish to hear.

Player:

What tune is it you wish to hear?

King:

The tune I wish to hear.

Player:

Shall I play your tune?

King:

Do you play?

Player:

Naturally I do not, I have no instrument.

King:

Then you shall play a tune. Bring on the instrument! *(A SERVANT wearing the same uniform carries a double bass onto the stage from stage right and throws it to the PLAYER without ever stopping. SERVANT exits stage left.)*

Player:

Might I have a bow?

King:

Why a bow?

Player:

So I may play for you.

King:

Do you not have a bow?

Player:

I do but I do not wish to use it.

King:

Is your bow not worthy?

Player:

Naturally it is worthy but I do not wish to use it.

King:

Then you will pluck.

Player:

Then let me use my bow.

King:

Then you will play.

Player:

The stool, the stool.

King:

The what?

Player:

Might I not sit on that stool?

King:

Of course you may not sit on that stool.

Player:

Surely I can sit on that stool.

King:

Of course you may not sit on that stool.

Player:

I will sit on that stool.

King:

Of course you will sit on that stool. (*She sits on the stool holding the bass.*)

Player:

What shall I do with this instrument?

King:

Were you not going to therefore and thus put it away?

Player:

Perhaps I shall, shall I burn it?

King:

Of course not, burning would mean fire and I don't like fire.

Player:

Fire keeps me warm.

King:

I do not like fire. Play me a tune instead.

Player:

What tune shall you hear?

King:

The tune you will play.

Player:

What tune do you wish to hear?

King:

The tune I wish to hear. Therefore and thus you have your information and you will play.

Player:

I shall, I shall play a round.

King:

How will you play a round when you are the only one playing?

Player:

Does the silence in the room have no voice?

King:

How can one have a voice when no one can hear him?

Player:

We hear only sound and sound is only vibrations one interprets. Can you not interpret silence?

King:

I cannot interpret something I cannot hear.

Player:

But you have interpreted silence as something you cannot hear, did you not?

King:

Did I?

Player:

Silence is something you cannot hear, that is what you said. But you have interpreted silence as something you cannot hear. Hearing is interpreting. You can hear silence.

King:

I can't hear silence when you are talking.

Player:

Then hear it when I pause for breath.

King:

You do not pause for breath.

Player:

I do not? Then how am I alive?

King:

You do not need breath for life. You were told that when you were a child and you believe it, therefore and thus you have breathed all your life.

Player:

Who told you such a thing?

King:

My father. (*Places cigar in ashtray*) Will you play me a tune?

Player:

What tune shall you hear?

King:

The tune you will play.

Player:

What tune do you wish to hear?

King:

The tune I wish to hear. Therefore and thus you have your information and you will play. (*She plays*) I have heard this one already, play another tune. (*She plays another tune*) You have messed up already, play it again. (*She plays another tune*) You are not playing the same tune as before.

Player:

Oh, but I am.

King:

It does not sound the same as before.

Player:

Oh, but it did.

King:

Truly? And how may you prove this?

Player:

How may I not prove this? It is the tune I played before. You say it must not be because you remember wrong.

King:

I never remember wrong, therefore and thus I am king.

Player:

You have no means of proof. There are no servants, there is no recorder, there is no camera, only you and me. I say you remember wrong because I am saying the truth and you have nothing to argue against it except yourself. Can you trust yourself? (*PLAYER sets down double bass and SERVANT collects it.*)

King:

Can I trust you?

Player:

You can.

King:

Therefore and thus I shall not trust myself for I always fool myself into false dispositions. Eating habits and law making decisions and religions and what to wear are all just things I trick myself into believing. Therefore and thus I trust that you are telling me the truth.

Player:

You have believed me as blind as you believe yourself.

King:

What was that?

Player:

I come in a criminal, a savage, sentenced to death while you sit atop a throne. I wish to play an instrument I have never played and you provide me such a thing.

I have followed your instructions on which tune is to reach your ears and you enjoy every moment of it, though you really should not.

King:

I suppose not, I suppose one must never enjoy being made a fool of as you seem to make me one quite well. Everyone who comes here for an argument likes me to feel as though I were inferior so that I may eventually pardon them in some stupor. You have started to do so, but you have done something else: You are trying to bribe me by pleasing me. You act as though I should simply let you go because you feel in some way you are smarter than the average criminal, but you are not. As I said before, you began to play games with my mind. There is no defense against this. You were born into this world knowing of this war between the races and classes. You know you must choose a side and fight with all your might. You know you must conform to a social group and learn who your allies and enemies are. You must know who you are if you want to survive. You may think you're too young, but there are younger people than you fighting this war. You did not choose a side; therefore and thus, you are sentenced to death just as the law states. However, I am curious to know why you haven't chosen a side, why you feel you are so above this war.

Player:

Ever since I was born, I have seen nothing but rampage and refuse. I have seen the cows leaving patties for the mothers to slip on, the chickens dropping eggs on the scientists until they passed out, the garbage men polluting the water so the fish would die, the lamps shocking the kangaroos. All of them fighting each other and all of them beckoning me to join their side. I could not choose. I could not say I was a woman and fight with the women because am I not also a girl? But I could not join the girls because I am also American...should I have fought with the Americans? But am I also not a player? I could not join the women because I am a girl, nor the girls because I am American, nor the Americans because I am a player, but I could no sooner join the players because I was once a student. Should I have joined the students? I've been living in a world where I could never belong. But those out there, they know what they are and what they are able to do. They know where they stand and who are their allies and who are their enemies. They fight and fight blindly until the day they die. I, on the other hand, do not wish to die fighting an endless battle for a class's survival; rather, I want to live out my days calmly fighting for *my* survival. Is it too much to ask to be left alone? Is it too much to ask not to choose? Is it too much for one person to be different? I suppose it must be so, for you have sentenced me to death because of the law which someone else wrote. I have not chosen a path and so I shall die. What is ironic about my situation is that you also have not chosen your path.

King:

Am I not a king?

Player:

Are you a king?

King:

I hope I am a king. I am sitting in his chair.

Player:

You are sitting in a king's chair but it is a chair that does not belong to you.

King:

Which chair belongs to me?

Player:

That is a question I cannot answer.

King:

I want to know the truth. I want my question answered.

Player:

The truth is there is no answer. I cannot tell you who you are except that you are a king.

King:

Then I am a king?

Player:

You are a king because you sit in a king's chair.

King:

Were I in a stool would I be a player?

Player:

Perhaps.

King:

Then shall I sit on the stool?

Player:

Perhaps.

King:

Surely I can sit on a stool.

Player:

Perhaps.

King:

I will sit on the stool.

Player:

And so you shall just as I will sit in the king's chair.

King:

And so you may. *(They switch seats. PLAYER takes KING's cigar and smokes it, lighting it if necessary.)* I feel as though I am a player, but was I not a king a moment ago?

Player:

No, you were never a king. You have no proof except for your memory, which is false, which has fooled you. You are no more a king than I am a player. I am a king. Now which side of this war shall you fight?

King:

(Stands quickly) How can I make that decision so quickly?

Player:

It must be done but the opportunity has passed. Therefore and thus, as I am king and you are not, I have henceforth sentenced you to an everlasting death to which there is no defense.

King:

Might I not save myself?

Player:

To which there is no defense.

King:

But surely I might save myself.

Player:

To which there is no defense.

(They continue to do the play over again switching parts.)

Psychoanalysis

Mary Teaford

"If it's taller than it is wide, it's a penis. If it's wider than it is tall, it's your mother."

--Doctor Pepperell on Sigmund Freud

In the middle of the table sits a piebald cat,
curled up, one leg extended,
because I hate my father.

When he's finished washing he will rise.
We will leave together on a journey
through mountains
in dark tunnels
that stand for girls
who walk the street in scarlet.

We will take a train because I hate men.

Cat, train and I will weave our way
around the cues of baby prams
that line the street,
longing for pleasures
forbidden
to fall into their mouths.

He moistens up his paws
and prods
the places we don't think about.
I try to look away, of course,
because I hate my mother.

The cat tells me all women want a train.

When I am sick from traveling,
because of what my parents did,
we'll round a bend where women sit obsessed,
playing with needles and toy trains
their mothers never let them have.

Cat, train and I will fly between the rows of those
who wait to watch the train go by,
and wave, and cheer,
and fall behind.
It is the only pleasure
for those who love their mothers.

Adam Cottrel



Saying Goodbye

Julie Eaton

Joy reigned here,
until today,
until the proverbial fell.
Love dissipates,
melts like a dissolving tablet
placed on the tongue.
A pill full of "forever."
Is there such a thing as "forever"?
Can love be sustained infinitely?

Wanting never to hand over the hurt of the past,
gulps dig deep holes in the belly.
Absorbing guilt makes you feel full . . . satiated.
Words linger on the tongue,
refuse to release into the wild.
Their claws retract.
Tumbling, they dispel with
dull announcements.

Silence seeps into the once active space
like a jab at the mute button.
Echoes chide with white noise,
TV snow . . .
a sign-off has occurred.

Alec Volpe

There was once a girl...

The End

Is this all we have to say of our lives?

Did she not see her first birthday?

Balloons punctuating her sky,

And fawning adults crooning her name?

Was she revered by the young boys?

And reviled by the young girls she outshone?

I can see the crumbs from her bread she once ate.

Did she have so much as a name?

How is this not in her story?

Did she never know the naturally drunk forays into--

Onto, other people?

Clumsy, youthful, irrational emotions?

Did she never wish for death?

The bite of the grave upon her throat,

Or the taste of fresh blood upon her tongue?

The events of our lives fall upon the deaf ears of memory,

The ideas of normalcy bleed our biographies dry of our stories.

There was once a boy...

The End

My story shall refuse to be such

I have not lived all out,

But I refuse to stay within any longer.

I will make a name of myself if only for myself

My story is rich with life

Each countless moment its own chapter, volume, book!

I have run rampant in the face of order with William!

I have lain in my bed, exhausted, in the dark hours with Christine!

I have cried in my loneliness,

Ventured to the edge of life and shared grins with the Reaper!

Sat in the rain and waited for nothing.

So, there sits your story, how does it go?

There was once a...

Death to the Lady Bugs

Angela Hendershot

Without warning; crack-snap.
The rubber bands whiz by my head.
They're going lady bug hunting.
Two dancers in their graceful beauty bringing death
With the help of an ex-sailor.
He's still in love with the sea. Him and his tattoos.
Slowly all three raise their cocked hands
Letting the weapons fly towards the enemy;
The Nazi invaders.
The missiles rebound off the lights,
Hitting both sides and I don't like the familiarity of friendly fire.
But it doesn't matter what I think.
Their prey is twitching on the ground; dead.

Brad Shearrow

The Wrapping Paper

Greg McCleery

Christmas carols chirped brightly in the background as I spat my chewed-up gum out the car window and watched as it rolled across the pavement to disappear into an endless field of snow. Mom glared at me through the rearview mirror till I rolled the window up again, closing off the flow of cold, harsh air. I just shrugged, and smiled back at her.

Slumping deep into my seat, I contemplated what lay ahead. There were so many things I'd rather be doing right now than this: Jamming my dick into an electrical socket. Slitting my wrists to the music of the Spice Girls. Stapling my eyeballs to a T.V. screen that played nothing but Lifetime movies. Even my homework. (Well, let's not get carried away.) Almost anything, so long as I didn't have to suffer through another of the obligatory Christmas get-togethers at my grandparents' house.

It's not that I didn't like my grandparents. We'd gotten along well enough when I was a kid. It was just that we'd never become all that close or comfortable with each other. They belonged to a completely different world, a world of growling prop airplanes, corny black-and-white films, musty old churches, and Soviet spies hiding in every shadow, trying to steal the plans to our latest line of lawn mowers. My world was the world of the Internet, the world of condoms and "safe sex," the world of reality T.V., the world of fast food.

How could we find something in common with one another? It didn't seem possible to me. They were just the half-senile, small-minded couple that had happened to bring my father into being, and I was an ambitious, eager, young hotshot who couldn't wait to grow up and take on the world.

Hell, I suppose they must have been amusing enough in their own day. But now, all Grandma did was sit around and knit, and Grandpa, well...Gramps hadn't been the same since his stroke. Not quite a vegetable, but not quite human, either. I guess that might be a little blunt, but it gets my point across.

The car engine died as Mom parked us in the driveway of our dreaded destination. Then she gave me a look that said, "Wipe that look off your face right now, Gregory James, and at least pretend to be happy to see them!" Skilled through many long years of practice, I complied and shuffled up the sidewalk to the front of their house.

Mom knocked on the door, waiting patiently for my grandmother to open it, shivering in the cold. I could tell this was kind of a bittersweet moment for her. Unlike a lot of folks, she actually got along with her in-laws. Even after my dad divorced her a couple years back, she still calls Grandma on the phone, and drops in to pay visits. I can't really understand or explain it. If I were in her shoes, I'd run in the other direction as fast as I could. I guess she's just masochistic or something.

But that's cool. Whatever floats her boat, so long as it doesn't interfere with my own life. Which it always seems to do. Funny thing about mothers is they think they're entitled to screw around with every little thing that's going on in your life, just 'cause they squeezed you out of their uterus a while back.

Individual rights? Ha. Privacy? Not a chance. But, I guess that's how it works with most people. If they've got power over you, they usually don't question why that is, or what they're doing with it---they just use it.

Of course, we get revenge on them once they're old enough to go to the nursing home, so it's all good in the end.

So anyways, Grandma finally got to the door, and her face lit up like the Christmas tree over in the living room when she saw us. She and Mom hugged, before she turned to me and the two of us hugged, a little awkwardly. Seems strange to be that close to someone you're not having sex with, but we got it over with.

She still had that funny glow on her face. "So..." [this is where she begins the mandatory interrogation about what's going on in my life] "...what have you been up to lately, young man?"

I looked at the floor and shrugged. "Not much. The usual stuff. School, work, that kind of thing." There was a long, uncomfortable pause. She seemed to be waiting for something more. I cleared my throat. "So...uh, what's up in Seneca Falls? Anything happening?"

So then she went into some long, boring description about this one pastor who'd shown up and done a sermon for all the folks living in their retirement community. Something about how cellists can keep playing even if they only have a single string left, blah blah blah, keep playing the instrument of your life as long as you have a single string left, blah blah blah. I guess it must have been real inspirational, because it was two months since he'd come, and everyone was still talking about it. Either that, or maybe their lives were all so boring that something as inane as that was actually exciting to them. God, I'd rather have someone shoot me than let that happen.

So anyways, we got that over with, then sat down to dinner. Now, if there's any part of this trip that I can actually tolerate, this is it. Grandma may have forgotten everything else she ever knew, but she sure as hell knows how to cook. Mmm, mmm, mmm. It *almost* makes me want to kidnap her and take her home with us just so I don't have to eat that crap that Mom makes from a box anymore. Almost.

But just as soon as we were done eating, it was time for the part of the trip I'd been dreading ever since we got in the car. It was time to go see Grandpa.

This would be the first time I'd seen him in six months. Mom had gotten me out of school (score!!!) to go see him right after his stroke happened, and I guess he'd been stuck in the hospital ever since. He had just sort of laid there on the bed, mouth hanging open a bit, drool running down the side of his neck, all wispy-haired and decayed, like a zombie. I guess he used to be a big, healthy World War Two vet back when he was young. I'd even seen a few old pictures of him in his dress uniform once or twice. But he definitely didn't look like he could charge through a hail of bullets shooting Krauts these days. He looked more like a skeleton than anything else---a skeleton rolling down a seventy-five degree hill with a six-foot hole waiting at the bottom. I wasn't expecting him to look much better today.

So we walked into the big hospital building at the center of the retirement community, and started looking around for him. 'Cause of course, the

old guy couldn't just stay in his room where he belongs. Apparently, he was off exploring the hospital in his wheelchair, and running himself into other random old-timers as if he was a kid playing bumper cars. That's what he was doing when we found him. So after we got done apologizing to all the disgruntled old geezers and geezerettes he'd run into, we wheeled him back to his room before he could do any more damage.

Yeah, he looked more or less the same as the last time I'd seen him, 'cept a little worse. The skin around his right eye was all puffy and swollen, and drooped down around it so he could barely see. His jaw was slack and loose, like a goldfish's. His legs were shriveled up to the size of a kid's since he wasn't allowed to walk around anymore. Not that that stopped him from trying. They'd had to lock a tray table down around his lap so he couldn't get up. He didn't like that very much, though, so I guess that's why he kept on trying to bump into things. He was trying to get it off him, to get free. Too bad he didn't realize that even if he did get it off, he wouldn't make it two steps without somebody to help him.

Anyways, we all got to wait as Grandma fed him his Christmas dinner: a bunch of crappy-looking brown goop in a cup, some potato chips, and some other nasty-looking oozy stuff. "He doesn't have much control over his swallowing anymore," Grandma said. I guess I can sympathize. There was this one time, with this girl...wait, never mind. You don't want to hear that story.

Eventually we got through that ordeal, and Mom brought out the Christmas presents she'd bought for him, labeled: *From Lotus and Greg*. That kinda piqued my curiosity a bit. What the hell do you buy for a mostly senile eighty-year-old man who's confined to a wheelchair? Diapers?

It was about this time that he finally noticed my existence. His good eye squinted at me a little bit, and he leaned closer, then asked in a quavering voice, "Is that you, Jon?"

Jon was my father's name. "No, it's me, gramps, your grandson."

"I have a grandson??" he said, in a tone filled with baffled wonder.

"Well. Isn't that something..." he trailed off.

Grandma, who was holding on to the back of his chair so that he wouldn't start bumping into things again, leaned in and asked him in a loud voice (he was getting kind of deaf), "JAKE, DO YOU KNOW WHAT DAY IT IS?"

He shook his head slowly.

"IT'S DECEMBER 25th. DO YOU KNOW WHAT DAY THAT IS?"

He shook his head again.

"IT'S CHRISTMAS DAY, JAKE. WE'VE COME TO VISIT YOU FOR CHRISTMAS DAY."

"What??"

"IT'S CHRISTMAS DAY!"

"No need to yell, I'm not deaf," he said, with a placating tone.

Grandma went on with the regularly scheduled programming. "WE BROUGHT YOU SOME PRESENTS, JAKE."

"Presents?"

"Yes, that's what you get at Christmas time," I tossed in.

"Jon? Is that you, Jon?"

"No, it's your grandson," I repeated.

"Where's Jon?"

My mother grimaced. "He's in Elyria, with his fiancée." Heh. She still hasn't gotten over being tossed aside for another woman. Personally, I think it's kind of funny seeing her get all angsty and bitter, as if there's an actual human being under that motherly facade of hers.

"Huh. You look so much like him," observed Jake dreamily. There was an uncomfortable pause.

"Did I ever tell you the story of how I stormed Utah Beach?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, Grandpa, you have." About a thousand times.

He didn't seem to hear. "I was with the Fourth Infantry Division.

Almost 10,000 of us. The seas were rough, and..."

I tuned him out. The story always went the same way. Grandpa jumping out onto the beach. Charging up the beach till he found cover. Behind him, he saw his buddy take a bullet and go down. So Grandpa jumped up, ran through a hail of bullets, grabbed his arm, and pulled him back to safety. After that, they overran the bunkers and took the beachhead. "Never leave a man behind," he always finished. Never realizing that his audience had left him behind fifteen minutes ago.

It took Grandma's firm hand to steer things back on track once again. Grandpa's obligatory three Christmas presents magically appeared out of our shopping bags and onto the table before him. With clumsy, fumbling hands, he opened the first two over the course of five minutes, while we patiently waited. The first present was a pair of slippers, since he kept on wearing the soles out of his old pair by chasing other old people around the hospital. The second was a bingo set, so he and Grandma could play together, and a book of crossword puzzles, which he would probably never use. He attempted a weak smile of thanks at each.

But on the third present, something finally caught his eye. It was the bright, shiny, cherry red wrapping paper covering up the present, with bouncy little ribbons popping off the bow in the center. A strange, child-like grin spread across his weary face, and his hands stretched out carefully and touched it, like a pirate opening a treasure chest. Then, slowly, ever so slowly, he began to unravel the ribbon and separate the tape from the folds, taking the utmost care not to tear or damage the wrapping paper in any way. He looked as happy as any kid opening gifts on Christmas morning, except that the kids always rip the paper apart as fast as they can, toss it aside, and move straight on to the present. But after they've opened every last gift, the euphoria of the present-opening disappears, and the long, dreary wait for next year sets in. The cycle continues, year after year, each child looking forward to those few, brief moments of ecstasy, until they grow too old to be excited anymore. Then, they simply find new temporary pleasures to chase, like money, relationships, respect, sex. And in my opinion, if you're good enough at finding what makes you happy, you can live a pretty good life. For a while, at least.

But Jake, my grandpa that is, was savoring the moment. He lovingly unraveled the present piece by piece, and it opened to him like a flower opening its petals. He held on to that perfect moment for as long as he could, stretched it,

made it last for an eternity.

I could tell that my mom and grandma felt that it was taking an eternity, too, and not in a good way. Snapping us out of our reverie, Grandma said, "Jake, we don't need to save the paper."

Something deep inside my Grandpa's glassy eyes suddenly began to stir; long-dormant flames flared back to life. "You never know when you might need it!" he said defiantly. That was typical of him. Back when Grandma and Grandpa had owned their farm, he'd filled up an entire barn with random knick-knacks and junk. The man was a packrat: He never threw anything away, no matter how useless it seemed to be.

"Jake, we can always get a new one," my grandmother said sternly. Then, she ripped the shiny red wrapping paper from his hands, crumpled it into a tiny ball, and threw it in the trash can.

The light in my Grandfather's eyes started to fade and die. At Grandma's urging, he half-heartedly picked at the chocolate truffles which had been inside the wrapping paper, but he didn't seem to have much of an appetite left. I kept my mouth shut.

With the gift-giving session successfully concluded, Grandma wheeled him back toward his bed, and we prepared to say goodbye. But something desperate and primal was welling up inside Jake as we began to say our goodbyes, I could tell. His hands were clenched tight around the armrests of his wheelchair, and he rocked his wheelchair back and forth wildly, making it difficult for Grandma to keep control.

"WE'RE GOING HOME NOW, JAKE, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO STAY HERE," my grandmother informed him.

"I've got to stay here??"

"YES, YOU HAVE TO STAY HERE FOR A WHILE. THE DOCTORS WILL LOOK AFTER YOU."

"When can I go home??"

"WHEN THE DOCTORS SAY YOU'RE READY."

"But I want to go home now."

"YOU CAN'T, JAKE, YOU'VE GOT TO STAY HERE. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WILL CARE FOR YOU."

"Who cares?"

There was a sudden, deafening silence. Increasingly unsettled, I looked at my mother, but her face was set in stone. This was the way things had to be, she was thinking.

"The nurses will take care of you," answered my mother.

Jake looked around the room like a trapped animal, searching for a way to escape. His chair rocked back and forth, but Grandma held him firmly in place. Finally, his eyes fell on me, as if I was his last hope in the entire world.

"Jon," he rasped desperately. "Jon, come closer."

I glanced at my mother for permission, then stepped forward and leaned down over him. His eyes seized my own, and his hand grabbed my arm with startling strength. His skin felt crinkled up, lined, and papery. Then, he whispered two words in a low, hoarse voice, too guttural for me to make out. I leaned in closer.

"Pull me," he breathed, his hand still locked on my arm. "Pull me away

from her.”

“What did he say?” asked my grandmother, still maintaining her vise grip on the back of his chair in case he resumed his struggle. But I wasn’t listening anymore.

“Jon, pull me...” he whispered hoarsely, pinning all his hopes on me. On a boy he didn’t even recognize. What did he expect me to do? Grab his wheelchair, push aside my mother and grandmother, and make a run for the nearest exit? And why would he want to escape from a prison that was designed with his own safety and well being at heart? Didn’t he realize how selfish he was being?

You’d know what you were expected to do, and everyone would pat you on the back and call you a hero, afterwards. But when no one’s around to pat you on the back, doing the right thing somehow seems a lot less important.

Grandpa was still fighting, still rocking back and forth, trying to get free. But he was far too weak to make it on his own. Pain-filled eyes pleaded with me.

Questions flitted through my brain like a hurricane of fireflies. I heard Mom and Grandma’s voices buzzing in the background. But I remained frozen, lost in my own thoughts. What was the right thing to do? *Was* there any right thing to do? What would my father have done?

In the back of my mind, I heard my mother shout my name, calling me back from my reverie to a cold and hostile world, a world of harsh realities, of expediency and indifference. I resisted for a moment longer, wishing there was something I could do. Wishing I had the courage to stay in the world of my conscience, painful as it was...wishing I had the courage not to give up and close my eyes. But I was a coward.

I rose from my knees unsteadily, turned my face away from his wet eyes, unlocked his trembling hand from my arm, and told him, “I’m sorry.”

Then I walked out of the room, without looking back. Pretended there was nothing wrong, as I wiped away the moisture from my face. Tried to forget the despair in his face in those last few moments. Before I crumpled him up and threw him away.

The ride home was silent and still. No carols, no pretense of Christmas spirit chirping in the background this time. Mom didn’t ask what happened, and I never spoke of it.

Three months later, my grandfather died in his sleep. The doctors said his heart finally gave out, and that it was a painless death. I found it kind of hard to believe that.

Six O'clock in the Land of the Free

Mary Teaford

Somewhere on Earth today,
men will kill.
Somewhere war will stop them,
but war will kill.
When the war ends, the peace will kill
and I may live to see it
on the six o'clock news

though it's better not to.

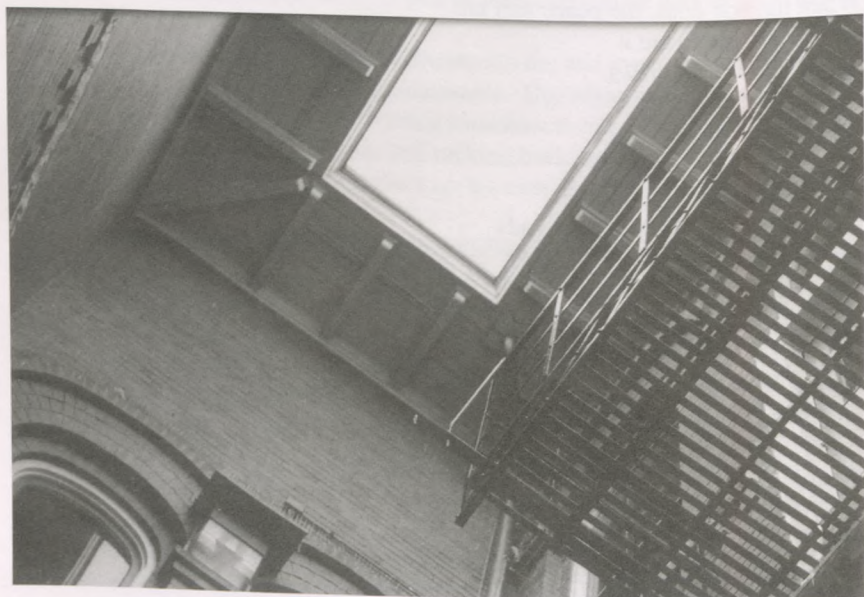
I may survive to see
bodies stacked neatly between ads
for fiber and paper
and eggs.

I may see hungry eyes
that will be dead by dawn
flashed between slim models
and their death-white teeth

though it's better to die.

I may live to watch in safety.
I may live to see their corpses
sterile
on a screen.
they may come to haunt my dreams
and ask me how they died
and not I—
and I will have no answer.

Adam Cottrel



Toast

Allison Bradley

How odd
to take the
liquid from
a slice
leave her
rough, dry,
stale.

Then drag
a knife
across her face
for beauty's sake,
exfoliation
by butter,
jam, jelly.

Not even Strawberry
preserves
her place in the loaf.

No.
She,
crisp and hollow
lies alone
missing once
so supple
grains.

She is
Unnatural.

She is
Toast.

Welcoming Warriors

Mac McGowan

Welcome us home with joy and with trembling.
We come to our beloved foreign country
through such travail we dare not even start to say.

Welcome us tenderly and with patience.
Do not interrogate us for the grim details
of who we killed or what we saw and smelled.
Offer gently to listen,
but only if you can open yourself to horror
and permit yourself to be violated
without damning us.

We are not who you think we are.
We are transformed.
We have not come home to harm you
but bring our dear ghosts
through front doors,
to kitchen tables
and even into bed.
We will embrace them
until they are woven within us,
as close to being one with us
as membrane between the living and the dead allows.

Be patient with our impatience,
give us time.

Hope with us.
Pray for us.
If you are able, come weep with us.
Dream all the crooked places straight with us.

Wait with us.
Do not judge.

We can't just wish it all away.

Sestina of Inaudible Sound

Julie Eaton

Stepping off the train, there explodes a deafening silence.
 One that imprisons your heart
 making it echo in your ear like a deserted alley.
 Draped in a trench coat, handling a black valise, a man
 rushes past as if late for the birth of a child, a woman
 struts, dressed in gingham, checkered curtains of the café.

Strange to think about the café,
 with its constant white noise, no silence.
 A place to gossip over steaming dreams. A woman
 comforted by her surroundings, connection, heart.
 A line is drawn between them and man.
 The no-war zone is bridged by an alley.

At the end of the dark maze - the alley -
 stands the opposite of the café.
 Here testosterone flies free of the man.
 A killer of sorts roams free. Its name is silence.
 Upon this sacred ground runs the crud, blackest heart.
 Toxic to the touch, grisly to the eye of woman.

An establishment, with no admittance to a woman.
 Desolation, trash and grime decorate the alley.
 Shots ring like a tribute to the dead, straight through the heart.
 In comparison, laughter and glee spill from the café.
 A release of pride creates a place for man.
 Closed-mouthed, vaulted emotions, the description of silence.

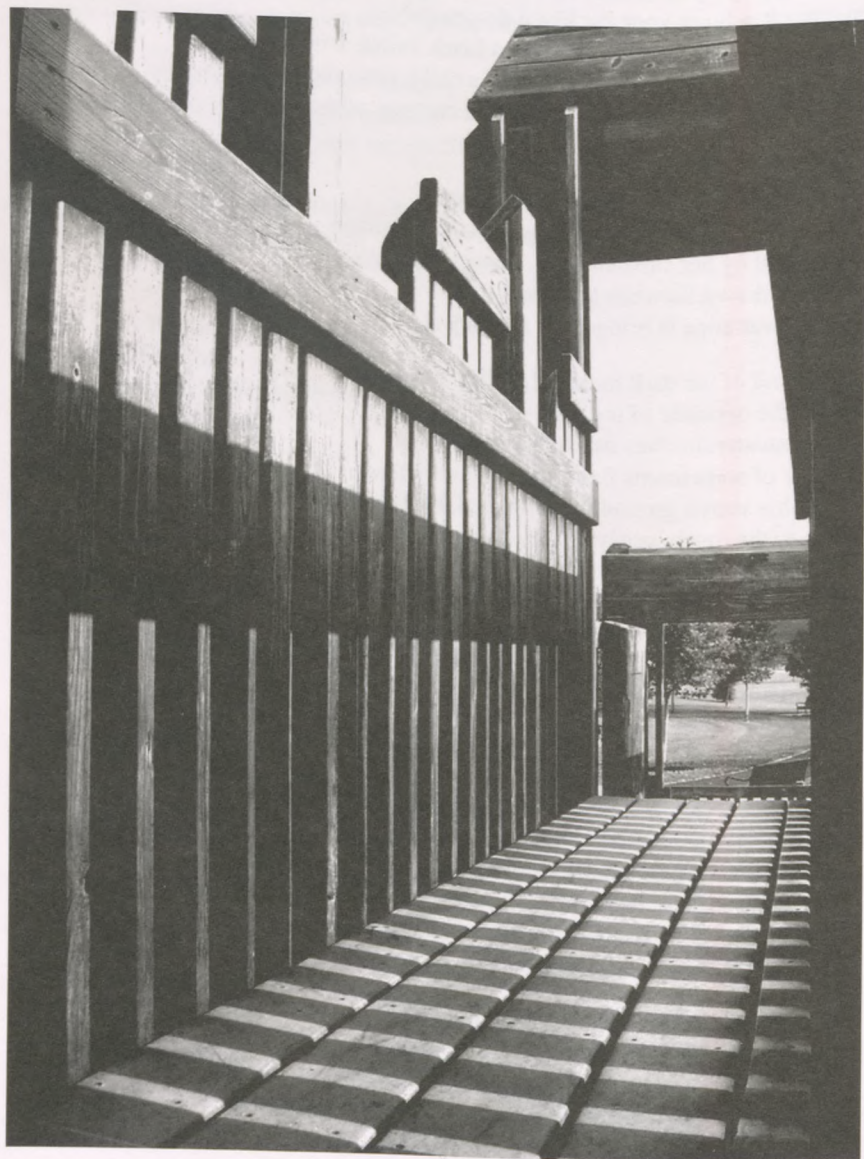
Break free, break free, break free from the silence,
 a song of encouragement, longing. The song of woman.
 Sounds clicking past cans, asking for recognition from man.
 Long, narrow, how the buildings stretch toward the alley.
 Steaming liquid flows from the lips of cups in the café.
 Proudly displayed are the medals won for the taming of a heart.

The dried up, crusted, pitted prune of a heart
 beats voraciously to float on the tide. Silence
 comes, soft mill, hum. Bustle pours from the café.
 Lips part and return questions. Answers from a woman.
 A swish of inaudible sound refreshes the alley,
 swirling, gliding. But no one is there to hear the man.

The café welcomes the needy woman.
 The heart tries to beat out the silence,
 And the alley is the only way to man.

This Way

Colleen Tappel



A Lesson in Breathing

Karly Powell

Take a deep breath. Go on, don't be afraid. Be aware that your participation is crucial to your understanding of this essay. Please don't half-ass it either—make this the mother of all deep breaths. Go ahead, try it. You're not allowed to continue reading if you don't...Good, now try it again and this time notice your shoulders. Do they rise up as you take a breath? Now, I'd like you to try it once more (but please try not to hyperventilate, I don't want to be responsible for that) and this time I want you to focus on your stomach. Does it suck in when you inhale? If you answered "no" to both of these questions, congratulations, you know how to breathe properly. I urge you to go out and celebrate. Hell, have a beer. Don't be afraid to flaunt this incredible skill and don't take it for granted—you are truly blessed. However, if your answer was "yes" to either of these questions then I'm sorry to have to break it to you, but you are breathing incorrectly and are you aware of the punishment for incorrect breathing? Life in prison.

No, I'm not talking about actual physical confinement in a 13 ft. by 9 ft. cell block with a hole in the floor in which to relieve yourself in the company of a creepy cellmate who causes you to sleep with one eye open. I'm talking about a life where your thoughts are locked up inside of you, unable to escape. I'm also not trying to say that you are any less of a person because of your incapability of breathing correctly. I'm sure there are millions of admirable people in this world, such as Bill Gates, the Queen of England, or even Mary Swander, who walk around every day breathing incorrectly. Some people live their entire lives without breathing fully and never think twice about it, yet they are still functional. In fact, I myself am a victim of improper breathing, and lately I've been finding it extremely difficult to get through even a single day without being reminded that the success of everything I do in my life relies on the perfect breath. Maybe not necessarily all my success in life, but rather, my voice in the world is dependent upon this breath. This perfect breath seems to be unattainable at this point and I've tried so hard to find it, to seek it out, but this game of hide-and-seek has turned sour. I'm tired of this because what I'm fighting for goes way beyond correct breathing techniques. What I'm ultimately searching for is my voice. The voice with which I can communicate to the world is locked within that breath. It is being held captive by that breath and until I find it, I am rendered silent.

This imperfection was first brought to my attention on May 23, 2005, during a voice lesson by my teacher, Roz. (The only reason I can state the specific day is because I documented the particular event in my journal—I won't even try to pretend my memory is that impressive.) The lesson started off just like any other. I walked into the small studio, which could easily be mistaken for a janitor's closet. I was sufficiently unprepared, and proceeded to warm up

my voice.

Let me pause for a moment to mention a few things about Roz. Rosalind Crew is known throughout the Otterbein College music department for being unusually absent-minded and just plain crazy. Most of her students don't see these as negative qualities, though. I actually find them somewhat endearing. Her forgetfulness fuels her reputation for scheduling two of her students' lessons at the same time. It's not an uncommon occurrence to find a pair of bewildered students standing outside the door of her studio, each questioning the validity of their scheduled lesson.

As you step into her dimly lit studio, you enter the "world of Roz." That tiny room is cramped in every sense of the word. It holds a large piano dotted with yellow Post-It notes that serve as reminders of things she will most likely forget, a desk, a filing cabinet, a music stand, and a Pilates ball that she makes her students lay on while they're singing. Sound odd? Well, it is. You should try to lay on top of a big bouncy ball and sing an Italian aria while attempting to keep your balance for fear of sliding off and hitting your head on the desk!

Sitting at the piano bench, she plays a splotchy measure of music and after her fingers slip onto notes that weren't intended, she'll run her hand through her red, curly hair and chuckle heartily, "Darn it! What's wrong with my hand?!" She slaps her right hand with her left. "Bad hand! Or I suppose it could be bad brain..." She chuckles again. "Oh well!"

Not only is her laugh pretty recognizable—a blast of a high-pitched noise followed by a descending chuckle—her choice of clothing is unmistakable. Typical "Roz attire" includes comfy—not to mention sweaty—slip-on clogs, pants, and several different long, flowing, smock-like tops that blow behind her as she walks down the hall. She is also a big admirer of elegant scarves and she has a good number of them in any material or color you could imagine. However, her scarf does not always match her outfit.

On that 23rd day of May, we were going through one of my songs note by note, my voice dipping down to meet those resonate, low notes that I love, but when it came to the signature high note of the piece, my voice came to a screeching halt.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"I don't know, I just can't seem to hit those notes."

"Have you been practicing this section at home?"

"Yes."

That was a lie. I hardly ever have time to practice outside of my lessons, but there *was* a time, around when I first started taking lessons, that I practiced on my own and it still didn't make much of a difference. My voice just doesn't get along well with those high notes. It's not that I don't practice because I don't care. I do care—if I didn't there would be no reason for me to keep taking voice lessons. It really just comes down to extreme feelings of frustration and an issue of a lack of time in my schedule.

"Okay, well, I have noticed that you're not breathing correctly."

"What do you mean?"

"You're not taking deep enough breaths. You're not supporting your breath and you're keeping too much tension in your throat. All of that will have a negative impact on your voice."

"Oh, okay."

"All right, let's try it again and have you focus on your breathing. Sound good?"

"Uhm-hmm..."

I slowly proceeded up the scale once again, A#...B...C#...D#... SQUEAK! CACKLE! SCREECH! Chaos erupted from within my vocal folds. I had just succeeded in imitating the voice of a pubescent boy. I was sure Roz was ready to get out her whip. I'm kidding, she doesn't really have one, I don't think, but I felt like she was getting pretty frustrated with me at this point.

"Hmmm, that's just not working now is it, hon?"

"No, it doesn't seem like it."

"Okay dear, let's try it once more and I *really* want you to concentrate on taking a low, deep breath before you start to sing."

I was trying to do everything she said, but I was starting to feel extremely defeated. It seemed like she had faith in me, but my faith in myself was fading fast. I had a feeling that this "breathing thing" would work; it was simply a matter of mastering it. It just seemed like quite a handful to think about it all at the same time. Once again, I started up the scale.

"A#..."

"Okay honey, I want you to feel that ribcage expanding!"

"B..."

Her volume intensified. "Support that breath! Don't hold back!"

"C#..."

"Release your neck! No tension!! Open that space in the back of your mouth! Send it out through the top of your head! RELAX!!! Really lean into that note!"

"D#---SQUEAK!"

There was actually no D#, just a steady stream of squeaky air, somewhat equivalent to chalk squeaking on a blackboard. It was quite gruesome. Roz looked at me with a crushed look on her face. I flinched and waited for the whip. Then she said something that caught me completely off-guard.

"You know, I think the reason that you're having trouble hitting those notes is because you haven't unlocked your voice yet. Everyone unlocks their voice at a different time in their lives. Your time just hasn't come yet, and that's okay."

I'm not too particularly close with Roz and I don't think that she knows much more about me than the fact that I'm a dancer and that I'm from Texas. I mean, she still asks me on occasion how I'm enjoying my freshman year here at

Otterbein, even though I'm now a junior. So I surely wasn't expecting this next insightful comment to come out of her mouth.

"The liberation of your voice has so much to do with trusting yourself and trusting your voice to speak out and open up. I think you're hesitating because somewhere in your past you were told not to speak up. You were refused the right to verbalize your thoughts."

Bulls-eye! How did she know that?

"Am I right?"

Speechless, I nodded my head.

"Who did that to you?"

I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to answer that question. I tried, but a lump that felt like the size of a muffin had become lodged in my throat. I didn't answer her question.

"Uh...I...well..." I was fighting back tears. "I don't know..."

Of course I knew.

"Was it your father, honey?"

I scanned the studio, looking for her crystal ball. I couldn't come up with any reason why she would've known that. I didn't think that I had said anything to her about my relationship with my father. Was it leaking out of me? Seeping out of my eyes or written in the wrinkles on my forehead? Maybe the inability to unlock one's voice is a classic symptom of a rocky father/daughter relationship. Another nod of my head was all I could manage. The tears won the fight. I started to cry.

It *was* my father. It has always been my father and it probably always will be. There is no getting around it. Every time I am faced with a situation where I have to explain myself or the opportunity to speak my mind presents itself, a roadblock in the shape of my father immediately appears before me. My breathing becomes erratic and my father's stern facial expressions flash before my eyes and I remember the debilitating words that he spoke to me that triggered my silence. I think it was his controlling personality and the harsh words that he employed to carry out that power that most heavily influenced the burial of my voice.

I can't remember a specific, individual scene where this burial took place. Each turbulent interaction, beginning in childhood and continuing on through adolescence, piled on top of the one before it until a "Princess and the Pea" effect was created. This seems to be how things have ended up in my memory as well. Every episode of anger and abuse coalesce into a melting pot of feelings, and the particular events that occurred have taken on a blurry existence. Whenever I did try to speak up, my words were shot down and I was denied my own beliefs. If I were to say something in my defense, the words I used would be quickly manipulated into a meaning I hadn't intended. This led to an immense fury of frustration which prompted tears at which point I was asked, "Why are you crying?" as if the rejection previously administered wasn't reason enough for my crying.

There was no room in the midst of his fury for me to test the waters of self-expression, so I was left feeling unimportant and discouraged. There was no one present to affirm the validity of my feelings or questions, but there sure as hell was someone there to destroy them. Whoever came up with the saying "sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me" was full of shit. I used to believe in that adage, but I've come to find that it just doesn't ring true for me, and I haven't ever been shown otherwise. I'm inclined to believe in a more honest version of the saying:

"Sticks and stones may break my bones,

Aimed with angry art.

Fists can sting like anything—

Words will break the heart."

I think that my mother had the potential to be my saving grace from this silencing of my voice, but it didn't exactly work out that way. She was struggling with her own obstacles. She too had to bear witness to his controlling behavior, even more so than I. I think that left her somewhat incapable of providing me with support. I need to believe that she wanted to, and maybe it just wasn't possible. I'm not trying to let my mother off of the hook here. I know that the matters I've presented are substantial and crucial to this process of understanding and acceptance, but there is too much wrapped up in this topic to release it right now.

I wasn't aware up until that point that something as simple as the way you structured your breath could be so greatly affected by outside forces. I was devastated by this fact, not just because I couldn't hit that blasted note, but primarily because of the lasting effect my relationship with my father has had on what seems like every aspect of my life. Even something so diminutive as my ability to hit a particular note has been affected, at least indirectly, by the aftermath of our crippling history. That absolutely pissed me off. *What else can he ruin?* I thought.

I know that blame is easy to fasten to another person and pretty difficult to take. My purpose of this essay isn't to charge my father for all of his wrongdoings against me---there is nothing constructive in that approach. Rather, I am using examples from my past as support for the struggles and confusion that are present in my life right now. I have found that many of the obstacles I've encountered in my life have seemed more difficult to overcome because of the way of life that I was accustomed to for so long.

Socially I am a bit inept. I happen to be a very awkward person, especially in conversation, and I think that was initiated by the lack of encouragement to vocalize my thoughts. Relationships are also considerably difficult for me to engage in. My parents' marriage was not the best representation of what a healthy relationship should be, but it was the only one I was able to observe firsthand. Witnessing this fractured marriage every day for twenty years of my life has most certainly left a lasting impression in my mind. Sure, I've had glimpses into marriages and relationships that are successful

and whole, but it's hard for me to deny what I've known for so long. I can't help but remain skeptical and believe that it's inevitable that my relationships are going to turn out the same way. One would think that because I've been exposed to such a harsh reality as far as relationships go, I'd be more inclined to do everything I could to prevent that same situation from happening in my own life. While this is true, I am still hesitant to enter into relationships. What if this problem is genetic? If I marry, is my relationship destined for the fate of my parents' marriage?

My inhaler is my best friend. Yeah, I said it. That's right, I'm the girl you see at the gym puffing it up in the corner after a brief stint on the treadmill. I have exercise- and allergy-induced asthma. I was diagnosed with it when I was just a youngster and have lived with it ever since. It actually runs in the family, my grandma being the first one that I know of to have it and my mom subsequently inheriting it from her. I can remember having asthma attacks in the middle of the night when I was younger (maybe four or five? six?) and being ushered out by my parents to sit on the front porch bench in the cool night air in an attempt to calm my bronchial spasms. I'm guessing this was before I was old enough to use an inhaler or have regular breathing treatments because if I couldn't get the attack under control out on the porch, then it was off to the Emergency Room.

Years later I'm now the proud owner of three different inhalers, all of which I use on a pretty regular basis. Except for a few recent and unusual occurrences, I'd say that my asthma has become fairly mild for the most part. I don't have nearly as many asthma attacks as I did when I was kid, and when I do, they're almost always exercise-induced. For example, it's pretty much a given that I will have at least one during a dance performance, so I make sure that there are stage managers on both sides of the stage armed and ready with an inhaler. You can ask anyone I dance with and they will tell you that it's not uncommon for me to run into the wings after a number, take a couple of puffs and immediately run back onstage for the next number. That's just how I roll. I'm hardcore.

I recently started reading a book called *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise L. Hay that gave me some new insight to the topic of this essay. In it she explains how what we think about ourselves becomes our truth. She believes that every illness or disease we contract is triggered by our past experiences which cause negative thought patterns that infiltrate our minds. I know it sounds a little out there, but she does have some interesting and thought-provoking things to say. Not to mention the pages of the book are incredibly colorful and covered in pictures of "feel-good" icons like hearts, sunflowers, stars, moons, seahorses, circles of people holding hands, rainbows, birds, and butterflies. In the back of the book, she has an index of ailments and right next to them she lists a probable cause for each. Then next to the cause she lists a new thought pattern that the readers should try to apply to their lives. I've found identifying your different

problems and speculating what might be wrong with you to be a perfect source of entertainment for a rainy day. This was how I stumbled upon my interesting discovery.

I looked up “asthma” in the back of the book and it directed me to an entire paragraph devoted to the condition. Hay uses the term “smother love” as another name for “asthma.” She states that those with asthma, specifically children, cling to the “feeling that [they] do not have the right to breathe for [themselves].” She believes that “asthmatic children often have ‘overdeveloped consciences’” and that “they take on guilt feelings for whatever seems wrong in their environment.”

I couldn’t believe what I had just read. It was eerily similar to my life. I’ve shared this book with people who automatically dismiss it, calling the author a nut case, her ideas and beliefs ridiculous. (It probably didn’t help that I pointed out the fact that her suggested cure for migraine headaches was masturbation. Who knows? It might work, I haven’t gotten around to trying it yet, but even so, I can’t be so quick to write her off.) I can’t help but recognize that some of what she says actually reflects and explains the things that have happened in my life; since I am at a point where I am actively seeking answers from mentors, God, literature, and friends, I openly welcome her opinions. I mean, they can’t hurt, right?

“We’re not staring off into space, people—get your heads up! Eyes out!”

Thirty dancers, clothed in various layers of nylon, lycra, and spandex, our muscles exposed and still cold from the chilly morning air, release our hold on the metal barre that stays grounded to the floor. Our hands lift off the steady barre and immediately we transform ourselves into the grounded object. Balanced there like ethereal statues we enter into a concentrated trance that is sometimes interrupted by the occasional tremble of the leg or deviation of the torso. We make our first attempt of the morning to defy the laws of nature and balance on one leg.

“Straighten your supporting leg! Think of lengthening those thighs! Don’t sickle your feet! I want to see those feet up to your knees!!”

A few adjustments are made and a couple of bodies start to wobble. They quickly reach for the safety of the sturdy barre.

“Don’t grab that barre! Hands off and balance!! Engage your center! Keep your sternum in line with your pubic bone! Pretend there’s a bungee cord hooked to your sternum and connecting to your pubic bone. Don’t let the bungee cord become loose! Keep it taut! That’s it, good. Now tuck your pelvis under, but don’t collapse your chest! Relax your shoulders! Long necks! Keep those tummies in and for heaven’s sake, BREATHE!!!”

Well shit. You can’t really blame us for not remembering to breathe. I bet *you* would have a hard time remembering to do so if you had a 5’10” homosexual man walking around in ballet slippers and striped booty shorts, shouting out a long list of demands, each of which take a fair amount of

concentration to execute. As a dancer, I'm constantly being told to breathe, but it's almost impossible to even think about breathing when there are so many other things for me to focus on. Miraculously, after a while, you actually forget that you need to breathe; it's as if you somehow learn to function without it, like it's not an essential mechanism of the human body.

Something else that dancers are taught to strive for is to connect our movement through breath. This can sometimes become a problem, especially considering my already intermittent relationship with this seemingly simple task of inhaling and exhaling. To achieve this, I've found that instead of focusing on the steps, I must make a conscious effort to hone in on my breath. Now, just because I start to concentrate on my breath doesn't mean that the movement automatically comes together. Doing this gets me to release the tension in my body and then subsequently breathe life into my movement. When this effect is attained, it's actually quite breath-taking. Pun intended.

Throughout my entire life, the only form of expression that I've felt comfortable with, the only place where I've actually felt somewhat capable of articulating my thoughts and feelings, is dancing. Sure, it's a physical form of communication, but it's a form of communication nonetheless...and I guess that's something to be proud of. I mentioned earlier that the effects of my father's behavior had a way of infiltrating every aspect of my life and affecting it negatively, but it seems to me that my life-long affair with dance has gone virtually untouched by his negative influences. Yes, my experiences with my father *have* affected the way that I dance, but I've been able to turn them around and use them to my advantage.

I have a friend who is also a dancer, and her motto for dance is: "Use the pain." I think that I have also learned to follow this motto. For whatever reason, I have been able to take the pain that I've accumulated over the years and use it in my dancing. Each movement becomes a silent expression of affliction, truth, injustice, loss, guilt, anger... It could be possible that I'm a silent expressionist. That I hold so tightly to my pain because it's exclusively mine and it's what I have to use; it inspires me. This seems a bit masochistic doesn't it? I'd say so, but I think that all artists—whether dancers, actors, painters, writers, singers, or whatever—would acknowledge that they operate from the same sort of place. The question is what motivates us to create. And from this creation we hope to, in some form or fashion, get a better understanding of what it is that pains us. Rilke wrote in *Letters to a Young Poet*, "...be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions *themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue." Love the questions...love the pain?

I guess that using my negative experiences to influence my art for the positive is a way of forbidding them to control that part of my life like they control the rest. Perhaps it's as easy as that. Maybe if I just absolutely refuse to let them control the other aspects of my life, or turn them into useful tools, I can conquer this beast. It's probably no surprise that dance is the only area of

my life where I have succeeded, at least in some part, in mastering my breathing techniques and learning how to communicate. Little did my father know that by “taking” my voice he provided me one—through dance.

A few days ago I had my weekly voice lesson with Roz. There I was, going through the usual warm-up routine. I quickly scanned my sheet music in a last-ditch effort to memorize the words to a song that I was supposed to have committed to memory weeks before. After warming up, we started to go over the song and then a familiar scene presented itself. My voice freaked out when I arrived at the high notes.

“Miss Karly, do you know what you’re *not* doing?”

Sigh. Here it was again, rearing its ugly little head.

“Breathing correctly?”

“Exactly.”

And then Roz surprised me once again and said something that was so poignant and achingly beautiful that I have been simmering in its echoes ever since.

“You know, honey, I truly believe that the breath that you take before you release your first note is absolutely crucial to any singer’s success. You just have to embrace the breath because everything else after that is done below the level of consciousness, and whatever follows will be rich. *All you have to do is take the breath and allow the voice that comes...*”

“Okay Roz, I’ll do my best...”

For Gabriel

Mary Teaford

Had I known they let you go,
I would have held you in my palm
like a crumb dropped by morning
on its way into night,
like the first drop of rain ever caught,
like the last spark of life on a doomed planet.
But I couldn't hold you, Gabriel,
and now you are gone.

You were the last drop of blood
in a poet's last heartbeat.
You were the first syllable ever sung.
You were the smell of winter
and the first ray of dawn,
the flame on Saturn's rings
and the pure air after rain,
the answer to every question, Gabriel,
and to all my prayers.

You were sent to give new life.
Now the world will die again,
because there is no Gabriel.

Two Tragedies In One Color

Alec Volpe

I painted the names of stars
In the color of your lips
With staccato flourishes
And inexperienced whips

To remind me every night
Of the moment we last kissed.
Your soul fast escaping
As your heart ceases beating
Beneath the lonely Moon's watchful
eye.
You had left the room with
mischievous eyes
And into the ghastly wood I followed
The wicked thickets and the razored
branches
Conspired to keep me out.
But the whispers of your dress
And the laughter on your lips
Drew me deeper and deeper.
The masked owls turned their shy faces
In shame.
Their glittering peeks,
Snuck when I look from the sky,
Betraying the wood
For the impending goblin it was.
The vines, branches and thorns
Withheld me from a dark truth.
As I broke the clearing,
Where we had bathed in the grace
Of the moon unabashed in nights gone,
I saw you there.
In the birthing dew you lay,
Your dress floating on the tides of grass
Tainted with crimson as dark as the
void.
To send soul,
So fast leaving,
With love
My lips stole a grace from yours
Growing cold and pale.
The dew,
Now frost
In the presence of your winter.

To wreath the world in my agony
And never allow you to rest.
You glazed your lips
In your favorite cast
And caressed my heart with lies.
Once your fingers slipped
My beats began to slip
And my blood ran as ice.
I believed that wicked glance was for
myself
And so I pursued your seductive gait
Through the crimson flowered roses.
Had I but noticed the blossoms
Birthing in your approach,
Burning in your wake.
Enticed,
As I,
By your beauty.
And destroyed,
As I,
By your cruelty.
Their withered black husks caressed
my cheek
In sympathy for what I yet would
witness.
I drew close to the clearing,
Where we had bathed in the grace
Of the moon unabashed in nights gone,
I saw you there.
His mouth and yours,
His hips and yours,
His hands and yours,
One.
I walked from that place forever,
My heart now stopped.
The memory of your lusting eyes
And ghost pale lips in mischieving grin
Making me wretch every nightfall to
eternity.

Adam Cottrel



The Indistinguishable Line

Christeen Stridesburg

Molly's wine glass was half-empty. She would have said half-full. She was half-drunk.

"Smell that?" she asked me.

"Sewage?"

"No. The smell of rain." She closed her eyes.

I smelled worms and muddy streets.

Dusk. We sat on the porch watching cars drive by, their tires sticky and oppressive on the wet pavement. The rain was a welcomed hiatus from the intolerant summer heat. I watched Molly's face as she breathed deeply, unable to be distracted by the bothersome aspects of the evening: the bugs, the rush-hour traffic outside our front door, the recent events of our relationship. She had always reminded me of a porcelain doll. She had wild curls of black hair radiant against her pale skin. Her skin shone brightly of uncalled youth and I could remind myself of what it felt like, not long ago, to touch the smoothest skin I had ever felt. I wanted to talk to her but I didn't dare ruin her moment. She was somewhere else.

That's the way Molly was, taking little moments like these and placing them into her own memory box, a private section of her that I could not understand. Her enjoyment was so pure; I was reminded of our age difference--just ten years, yet noticeable. She was young, expectant, still a college girl. I had learned not to anticipate. Time had made me jagged and weary. She made me feel centuries old. Her mind uncorrupted by the toils of adulthood, her heart still open and genuine.

I always feared that I would crack her glass. It had been so long since I had touched her, besides the slight brush of shoulders that morning as we commuted to our bathroom. We competed for mirror space while she applied makeup and I shaved. "I'm the one that needs to see myself," she had argued. "I don't need a mirror to shave my legs! Why should you need one to shave your face?" I told her that while she didn't need makeup, I, on the other hand, was required by my job to keep a hairless face. She looked at me, for the first time since we awoke, and blankly said, "If you need a mirror, go use the downstairs bathroom."

I had meant it when I said that she didn't need to wear makeup. I found her to be very beautiful. I felt like an imp next to her with my rough wrinkled masculinity, an acute contrast that made us the Tai-Chi couple. We coined this our title while Molly was studying Confucianism and Taoism in a Chinese Religions course. I would watch her as she studied, genuinely interested in what she was reading. I wanted to know every thought that provoked her excitement, every pearl of data that was birthing itself. I was well acquainted with Eastern religion and philosophy, having studied it myself, but I pretended to learn from her every time she would put her book down and tell me about what stimulated her. I wanted to hear her speak, her voice proud of what she had discovered, shedding it unto me.

"Okay...so the Chinese yin and yang symbols, ya know?" she had

asked me two very long years ago. As she studied on the loveseat I sat on the corner of the coffee table, clipping my toe nails into a small wastebasket.

"The Tai-Chi," I stated.

She looked disappointed. "Oh you already know, never mind."

"Tell me."

She pushed her glasses up higher on her nose and put on her studious face. "Well, yin and yang are polar opposites...."

"Right...."

"Yin represents everything about the world that is dark, hidden, passive, soft, shady, secretive, mysterious, and cold." She was reading from her book. "And yang in turn means clear, bright, evident---"

"Ooo, evident, that's one of my favorite words," I interrupted.

"...active, controlling, hot, and hard. Yin is the feminine and yang is the masculine."

"I'd like to think of myself as hot, hard, and masculine."

"Apparently, everything in the world can be identified with either yin or yang," she said. "It's a choice."

"Like the dark and light side? 'Don't go to the dark!'"

"Sure, *Darth*, I suppose so,"

"Hey, Mrs. Skywalker..." I gave her an evil look. She was wearing my t-shirt and my boxers and I loved her.

"What?"

"I'm hot and hard if ya know what I mean." I put the nail clippers down and inched closer to her.

"As sexy as you are right now"---she nodded to my foot positioned over the trash can---"I have to admit...not in the mood." She was lying to me. She always did.

She laughed. I smiled.

"Well, I'm going to shower. You know where to find me." I started towards the stairs.

"Later. After my homework."

"Missing the chance of a lifetime, Baby!" I shouted down as I walked upstairs.

Later that evening, while we were making love, I opened my eyes to catch Molly looking up at me vacantly.

"You look like you're enjoying yourself," I said, offended.

"Why do you do that?" she asked.

"Uhhhh...wh-what?"

"Keep your eyes closed so tight."

"I'm concentrating."

"On what?"

"On you."

"Then why don't you look at me?"

"What is this, twenty questions? We're supposed to be having sex!"

"I didn't finish telling you about the Tai-Chi."

I sighed and rolled off of her. Lying beside her on the bed, I looked at her. "Okay. What's the problem?"

"Most diagrams of the yin and yang, like the ones I used to draw on my

notebook and teenagers wear on the backpacks?"

I nodded. "Yeah?"

"They have the yin and yang flowing into each other. The Romans used to engrave the Tai-Chi symbol onto their shields with an interior dot of the other in both the yin and the yang, being the idea that each force contains the seed of the other."

I looked at her strangely. "You got baby fever? Want me to knock you up?"

"Don't be juvenile!" she yelled. "The yin and yang don't merely replace each other..."

"Oooohhhkay..."

"They become each other." She reached over and played with my hair, shaggy and due for a cut. I didn't know whether to be flattered or scared, but Molly so rarely expressed sentiment towards me that I had learned to take it however it came. I held her stare.

"All right," she said. "Now fuck me."

We sat on the porch until midnight, barely talking. Molly repeatedly looked down at her stomach. I didn't know if this was the vanity in her appreciating the fact that nine months from now she wouldn't have lost her six pack or mourning the unborn child that was no longer there. We had murdered it in a doctor's office twelve hours prior.

"So..." she said.

"Yes, love?"

"You really think I'm yin?" She asked me this at least once a week.

"Well, you are the female."

"Yeah, but...am I cold, dark...secretive? Do I stay hidden from you?"

"Yes. Yes. Yes. And yes."

She frowned. She wouldn't look at me, only past my head to the street. "You're so clear and full of light. Obvious."

"Evident," I said.

"Warm and loving...."

"Don't forget hot and hard."

We remained silent for either several minutes or several hours. Eventually she spoke again.

"Kids, ya know. I hate them."

"I know you do."

"Babies are ugly. And smelly. And a burden."

"Um-hmm...."

"I'm far too selfish to be a mother. Ever."

"That might change."

"I hope it never does." She stood and brushed imaginary particles from her lap. She stretched and rolled her head in a circle, cracking her neck. As she stretched, her shirt lifted to reveal the tattoo on her stomach of the top half of the Tai-Chi, the yin portion. I wore the other half of the tattoo on my back, a childish romanticized idea we had when we were in drunk and in love. Molly used to love me. A clap of thunder could be heard distantly.

"Storm's brewing," I said.

"I hadn't noticed," she said sarcastically.

I didn't know why I loved her so much. She dressed strangely, smoked, wore purple lipstick, actually *liked* Bon Jovi, and rarely smiled. Her hair was never well kept, her feet were too large for her small body, her body more thin than what I liked for a woman, and she called me "Jeffrey" when I insisted upon being addressed by everyone as "Jeff." We had conflicting opinions regarding nearly everything. If arguing were a sport, she would have won all honors available. She was dark and moody. She had been taking Zoloft since she was fifteen and was clinically diagnosed as a whack-job. She was known to say and do crazy things, blaming it on "the illness." She didn't enunciate words correctly, which drove me crazy. She was beautiful to me.

Molly walked off the porch and trudged through our pathetic excuse for a garden. We had been living in that house together for two years and still hadn't fulfilled our promise to each other to plant flowers together. She crossed over the driveway and onto the sidewalk. She was near soaked with rain.

I wanted to tell her to stop, to come back onto the porch and talk to me like we used to. I wanted to dry her off with soft towels and make her hot tea to melt the chill from her. I didn't say a word. I couldn't look away from her decreasing image, growing smaller the further she walked away from me.

Once she had crossed the street she looked around, confused as if she had no where to go. She was barefoot and crying...I could hear the sobs. I had never seen her cry in the three and a half years I had known her...I had never seen her cry. The rain made the tears invisible. Molly threw her head back and looked into the black sky, thunderous with pressure that could explode though a cloud at any second. She let out a dramatic howl, the kind only in movies and Shakespearean plays. It was sharp and piercing.

"FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!"

I stood stridently, not a conscious choice but a will of my body to be called to action. I couldn't bring myself to walk. Just stand. And watch.

A bolt of lightning struck down through the sky, luminous and beautiful. I watched it take shape in the form of electricity, a yellow zig zag that came down onto my lover's head. Her entire body and face tensed, wide-eyed. Then she was gone.

There are no words to describe that which you cannot remember. I suppose I ran to where she had been, searching the surrounding area, convinced that her body was thrown elsewhere. She had disappeared.

I hated science fiction movies. Never more than I did at that moment.

The rest of the night into the next day was a blur of frantic surrealism. I phoned the police, the doctor, everyone I knew. Search parties were sent out. No one could find her.

Life from that moment on played out much differently, every day an expectation. Every telephone ring an ultimatum. Molly, my insane friend, was gone. But she lurked in all the dark corners of the house...her favorite chair, her books, her toothbrush. I touched nothing that was hers.

After a night of a thousand breakdowns, I slept on her side of the bed. I awoke the next day with a voice in my head.

"Jeffrey."

I screamed and jumped from the bed. "Goddammit!" I hushed. All I

could hear was the ticking of the clock. "Molly?"

I laughed at myself. I was just as insane as she was. Is. Was. I didn't know.

That morning, I used her toothbrush. I took her car to work. I even wore her underwear to bed. I felt queer and sickened. What was happening to me? I couldn't sleep all night. I found myself at four a.m., staring at her picture on the nightstand.

"Maybe you need a Zolof, crazy bitch."

I plugged my ears.

"I know what always helps you sleep."

My hand snaked down towards my genitals and roughly started to arouse my excitement.

"Just pretend it's me doing it."

"This isn't happening. You're not here, Molly."

"Jeffrey. Jeffrey. Don't you want me?"

I threw my hand off of myself and ran into the bathroom. I took three Vicidons and a shot of Nyquil. I slept for fifteen hours. I dreamed of her the whole time.

The next day at work I was unnervingly distracted. I remained sheltered in my office and refused to see anyone. When a young intern came to my door, I snapped at her and immediately felt bad.

"I'm sorry, Lucy, come in."

"Oh ... I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Kauffman. I just needed you to check my work on these numbers." She brought a piece of paper to my desk and leaned over to point out her questions. She wore a low-cut blouse with no bra. Her breasts dangled in my face. I didn't look away from them.

"Horny motherfucker!"

"Shit!" I leaped from my desk, spilling my coffee all over my desk, and Lucy's paper.

"Mr. Kauffman?" She was confused.

"I'm going home," I yelled. I ran frantically out of the building, plugging my ears the whole way.

"Love is two people in perfect harmony."

I ran faster.

At home later, I got drunk and prepared myself to speak with her. I needed verification. Was I just hearing things? It had to be her. I felt her presence. I sat on the couch and peered about the room, reminding myself of her mark, calloused around the house. I thought of all the spots in that room alone that I had fucked her: the couch, the floor, her chair, against the wall, on top of the table. I could sense her vindictive stain unmoved from these areas. Where was she? I waited until six the next morning.

"Are you there or what?" I yelled.

"Finally! Acknowledgement! I was wondering when you'd talk."

"You've been here the whole night?"

"Of course! You look like shit, babe."

"Why didn't you talk?"

"I've been thoroughly entertained by watching you go out of your mind."

"You bitch. You evil bitch. You're the devil, aren't you? Incarnate."

I heard Molly's laughter. *"I told you we would become each other."*

"You're crazy."

"You're the one hearing voices."

"GO GO GO! Leave me be!"

"Like you want the voices to stop? Like you want me to go away?"

"Did you really hear voices, Molly? When we were together? Were you telling the truth?"

"Infatuation -- passion without intimacy or commitment -- along with romantic love -- intimacy and passion, but no commitment -- and fatuous love -- commitment and passion with no intimacy."

"What was I?"

"An addiction."

"Like Heraclitus said?"

"Yes, my Greek philosophy master, yes. Love is an addiction."

Were we the Tai-Chi? Had I lost all sanity?

"Yes and yes."

"I didn't say that out loud!"

"Ha!"

I hated her. She occupied my brain to the point where I couldn't tell which thoughts were mine and which were hers. Did I crave chocolate chip cookies or did she? What would "we" like to watch on the television today? Conversations...endless and dreary. This was my life now.

I woke up one morning and stumbled into the bathroom to take my morning shower.

"Good morning, lover."

"Morning, bitch."

While urinating, I looked down to find a tattoo on my stomach, a yin. I ran to the mirror and checked myself from behind, on my back, still a yang.

I heard laughter.

How could I mourn someone that never left?

I Dreamed You Into Existence

Jen Roberts

Lying on my back, belly bloated and hard, I count pinholes in tiles lining the bedroom ceiling while Winter howls outside. My breath matches the wind in long whispers as it brushes against the window. My eyes draw like heavy velvet curtains of the *Stanford Theater* where we will someday sit and watch old black-and-whites. The organist will be disguised in fedora and pinstripes, will rise up on a hidden platform tucked beneath the stage. His fingers will dance upon the Wurlitzer between *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *All About Eve* to provide an interlude, the pipes a proxy for tears and terrors on Silent Movie Night. I will reach out and touch your hand while yuppies gather 'round in stiff, small seats rubbed raw from time and lament about a lost era they never really knew but still mourn and romanticize. And I squeeze my eyes tighter, while Winter howls outside, and I think of that curtain, of that music, of my belly full of life. I see her though her face is not clear. She is older and the film is playing out against her face, reflecting off her smile. *I detest cheap sentiment*. We laugh like Margo Channing and I know that I have my baby girl, who I will dress in pretty clothes, who will hold my finger as she learns to walk, who will grab my left leg when we meet someone new, who will walk with me up University Avenue. But Winter howls and I exhale. She was older in my dream, her face obscured by velvet, but I *feel* her as the wind whistles with such ferocity that the curtain whips open and the pinholes came into view.

Anyone Here Today?

Colleen Tappel



The Swing

Julie Eaton

The playground is damp
with the early spring thaw.
Warm to the touch, the sun
pulsates like a dying strobe light,
dodging to stay alive as the clouds
rush by in the stiff breeze.

We make our entrance to the scene
quiet but with force. Hand in hand
we roam the assorted pieces
of a childhood memory. Metal, wood,
reflective glass, pillows of soft sand,
pleasures during recess.

We pause for a lesson in
communication.
Drenched in passion juices, the two pink
sensors of taste meld into one. We wrap
them together, playfully introducing
them, as if for the first time.

Properly introduced, we break
the lock of whisperers. No talk.
I take your hand. Leading you,
we make our way to my favorite spot.

Once arrived, I sit myself upon the
swing, gently adjusting to find the
comfort spot.

You grab my ankles, an anchor,
to make sure that I don't fall.
You pull me near you. I can feel your
breath as you get ready to release me.

Fingers lose their grip,
I am slowly gliding from front to back.
My legs tighten.

You give me a slight nudge, I am
gaining momentum, speed.
forward . . . forward . . . forward.

I take note where you are. Your hand
glides down the small of my back.
Each push coaches me,
begs me, upward.

A hissing teakettle, a foreign voice
rises from the depths. Time has come.
My muscles tense. I let go of the chains.
and flutter in the air.

My body collapses into the soft ground.
Hands, fingers intertwine.

My favorite memories revolve around
this sacred ground of make believe.
You, Me and the swing.

Crusaders on the March to Antioch

Mac McGowan

Let all those matted monks who lead us south
past alabaster bones and crumbled temples,
pray for we grim warriors of the north
before the scimitars of Damascus steel we sample.

The road ahead twists and then ascends
the pregnant stones of these dun-coloured mountains.
Our rasping breath, my noble, armoured friends,
will melt such heathenwalls as we encounter.
Let us abstain from doubt and all despair
as we surmount these paths that guide to glory,
recalling gentle Jesus, sweet, sincere –
our commandant shall give us victory.

I watch our fluttering banners, splendid steeds.
Our sheathed swords rattle,
come this far to bleed.

CHAPTER ON THE MOUNTAINS

THE MOUNTAINS

The mountains are the most important features of the landscape. They are the source of the rivers and the winds. The mountains are the backbone of the land.

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