The Project, 2007

University of Alabama in Huntsville
The Project Mission Statement

The Project is a student produced literary magazine concentrating on representing a mass of culturally diverse and talented students who choose to submit. Our goal, as a literary magazine, is to represent the struggle of The "ongoing" Project and the passion, devotion, and merit of all who contribute.

Staff Policy and Submission Policies:

The Project is a student produced entity with participating staff members judging submissions for their content, artistic imagery, and literary significance. The Project staff holds the right to cut or edit any submission to the magazine.

The Project accepts submissions of any artistic format throughout the year, although there are deadlines bi-yearly for magazine production. When submitting during the school year, please e-mail submissions to theproject2006@gmail.com. When school is not in session, simply e-mail submissions in an attachment with the following information in the body of the message: your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address, along with the date of the submission, the title of the piece, the date of creation, and either the genre (poetry, prose, drama, etc.) or medium (watercolor, pastel, mixed media, etc.). All legal matters are discussed on our submission forms which are available through e-mail.

To contact us, please e-mail theproject2006@gmail.com or any member of our staff (addresses can be located on our staff page). Any written mail can be directed towards The Project and mailed to 163 Freedom Way, Madison, AL 35758.

The Project

Fall 2007

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Thanks Today Mom
Sergey S Sarkisov II

Thanks for the life and the chance that you gave,
Thanks to the Lord while I'm thinking of you,
You gave me my light and helped carry me through,
I know I'm lucky to have you, amongst few.

Only the future and infinity know,
What awaits us in our future moments,
We've had our troubles in the past,
But let's forget the thorns and we'll be moving forward.

I know that I have hurt you greatly,
I know you gave me more than just your physical fatigue,
I cannot cry now 'cause I think it'll soon be over,
Those drops of bloody miseries you spilled for me.

I've done my best and do not blame myself,
I'm sorry if I hurt you and I'll stop at that,
We both love each other to a great extent,
Life moves on and we'll succeed as He has planned.

Now this day I want you to understand,
I'm thankful, we are thankful for the blessed sugar land (Sergerland),
You gave me life and there was pain to withstand,
But you gave much more than a blessed young man.

All mothers give birth and all good fathers like mine remain,
All women can bubble up in a float-a-way,
But you, my mother, have given me life,
Your whole life for me,
I thank you for that—
Let it be...
Echoes of the Rain
Robert Daniel Glasscock

Clouds chase away the sun
On this emotional plane
Their heavy dark colors let me know,
They carry with them rain.

Slowly at first, I hear the sound,
As the clouds begin to drain,
I do not feel, but only hear,
Echoes, Echoes in the rain.

My eyes are wet,
No rain, just tears,
From all my pain,
From all my fears,

I wish to feel the drops,
Something to some so plain.
But again I fear, I only hear,
Echoes, Echoes of the rain.

I feel left out,
No rain for me,
Why is this rain,
I cannot feel or see?

Some may be envious,
For their rains never stop,
But what I wouldn’t do,
To just feel one drop.

For me to feel this essence of life,
To fill this empty vane,
If only I could more than hear,
Echoes, Echoes of the rain.

I know not how much longer,
My sanity will remain,
But I know it will be washed away,
By these echoes of the rain.

Return from the Ashes
Charlie Rogers

So, here I stand once again,
A silent proclamation to the ones that choose to see
For it’s been a lifetime or two in the eyes of some,
And never long enough to others.

The transgressions of iniquity are never easy to forgive
And even harder to forget,
When the worlds that are destroyed are your very own,
And they fall by the hands of one of your own.

The roads ahead are forked,
The distances are long and short,
The fractal possibilities intertwining,
Creating a symphonic road map to our destiny.

The tuning is over; the overture is starting.
I must choose my instrument now,
For this is my only chance to create a new world
And harmonize with reality.

Winter Path
Mallory Rowe

Along this trail I feel peace.
My nerves are calmed by rustling leaves.
The cool wind blows away my fears
And quickly dries my falling tears.
Snowflakes dance with joy and grace
And softly brush against my face.
Tree limbs wrap around my soul
To keep it from a world so cold.
Donna is humming. I love that. She’s always humming, or singing or something like that. I know that she’s home when I hear music. I come in from class, or from a run, and hear Donna humming and all’s right with the world.

I met her my freshman year as I literally ran into her on my way to the track. She was singing then too.

I look out the window of the apartment, and I see the 7/11. I wonder how fast I can make it there. Could be a mile away. It’s the closest convenience store to our place, and every morning I try to get there a little bit faster than the day before. I’m never quite fast enough. Never fast enough ...

I guess the way I am, I owe to my brother Frank. Without Frank’s motivation I wouldn’t be the man I am today. I’m the fastest runner in the state, maybe the country now. I’m training for the Olympics and I will get the gold. There’s no doubt about it. I’ve got the fastest time of anyone, and my trainer tells me that the prelims will be no problem. That’s all thanks to Frank, and how I hate him for it.

See, when I was a kid I had a dog named Spike. He was just a mutt, no pedigree to speak of, not so bright either, but he was my dog. It was the last thing Mom and Pop gave me before they passed away.

After Mom and Pop died, Frank and I were shipped off to live with a distant Uncle who was gone more than he was around, so it was just Frank and me most of the time. Frank hated Spike, I never could figure out why. Mostly I tried to stay out of his way.

One day I came home from school and I couldn’t find Spike. I called him, and called him, but he didn’t come. I got a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I looked around in all the places Spike liked to hide, under the porch, in the alley behind the house, nothing. Finally I went inside. Frank was on the couch holding Spike. At first I was relieved, and a little happy, because I thought that Frank was warming up to him, ya know? And I said “Hey Frank, you found Spike!”

“Yeah, I found him all right,” He said. “We’re gonna have a little test, K?”

“Whataya mean?” I said, getting a little nervous. Frank had a tendency to get mean for no reason.

“That’s right.” He said. “We’re gonna find out how fast you can run. K?”

“C’mon Frank...”

“We’re gonna find out if you can do a four minute mile,” he said.

“I can’t do that Frank, nobody can.”

“I’m out of cigarettes,” he said ignoring me. “What you’re gonna do it run down to the corner store, boost a pack of cigarettes for and run back here. Now the store’s about a mile away, so I’ll give you 10 minutes. 4 minutes down there. 4 minutes back. That leaves you 2 minutes to boost the cigs and get here.”

“Come on Frank, they won’t sell me cigarettes.”

“I didn’t say ‘buy’ now did I?” I said “boost” as in steal. BIG difference.”

“I’m NOT gonna do that!”

“Sure you are,” he said. “You’re gonna do it or it’s Bye Bye Spike.” Spike, who’d been sitting quietly under Frank’s arm whined. It was the first sound he’d made.

“C’mon Frank,” I said, my voice starting to shake. “Stop foolin’ around.”
Frank didn’t reply, only squeezed Spike until he let out a yelp.

“STOP IT!” I cried.

“Get my smokes, and don’t mess around. I’m getting tired of waiting.” He squeezed Spike’s neck again, and Spike let out a loud yelp.

“Please,” I said, starting to cry. “Please... let him go.”

“Oh, I will, just as soon as you get my cigarettes ... you’ve got 10 minutes. Starting now.”

I didn’t have time to think. I bolted out the door. I ran down the sidewalk as fast as I could. Halfway down the block, I tripped. I’d seen what Frank was like when he was mad. I once saw him beat a kid bloody for tripping over his leg in the hallway at school. They kicked him out for that. Now he had Spike.

The store was a few blocks away yet. I had no idea how much time had passed, I just knew I had to get to the store. There were some older kids playing on the stoop, and one of them jumped out in front of me as I ran down the street. I swerved left to miss him, and bumped into the rearview mirror of a parked car.

I caught the mirror with my nose, and fell flat on my back. It hurt like crazy, but I had to keep going. The other kids were saying something I couldn’t make out, mostly “oooos.” My eyes were full of tears as I ran, I was at the front door of the grocery when I noticed the red on my t-shirt. My nose was gushing blood.

I must have looked pretty bad when I burst through the door because everyone stopped and stared at me. The guy behind the counter asked me if I was all right, and I told him to stick it. He muttered something about no good kids and went back to talking to the guy at the counter. The customers were still staring at me, so I wandered down the aisle where the comic books were. I pretended to read some superhero book, until the customers lost interest in me. I watched the counter nervously, seconds ticking by. I looked up and a guy was buying a pack of Marlboro’s.

I watched as the guy behind the counter slid them over to him, and I walked up to the ice cream freezer next to the counter. I pretended to look at the ice cream selections, as the guy fumbled in his pockets for change. I edged closer to the cashier, and when the guy reached into his other pocket, I grabbed the smokes and sprinted out the door.

I ran down an alley, to avoid the kids from before, I was sweating, my legs were starting to hurt. I climbed over fences, and knocked over trashcans on my way. I kept getting choked on the blood from my nose. I coughed out a wad of blood and phlegm, and kept going. I was close to home now.

The alley took a turn and at the end of it, I found myself at a fence. I stuffed the smokes in my shirt, and started to climb. All I could think about was Spike. He was the only thing in the world I cared about, and he was counting on me. I had to get back there before Frank could hurt him.

I clambered over the fence and jumped down. I crossed the small culvert, soaking my pants up to the knees. I was almost home. I could see the house, and sprinted up the front steps. I burst through the front door.

“HERE!” I cried. “Here’s your – (gasp) Smokes!”

Frank stared at me. He looked down at his watch, and then up at me.

“Marlboro’s? You know I only smoke Lucky’s” he said, then he looked down at his watch. “Tsk, tsk, tsk. 20 minutes. Twice as long, too bad.”

“Where’s Spike?” I demanded.

Frank was about a thousand miles away by then. He pulled a cigarette from the pack,
and lit it up. "Oh, he's in the back yard."
I didn't wait to hear more, I ran down the hallway and out into the back, yelling Spike's name. I ran all over the backyard, I looked under the porch again, looked at the back gate. No Spike.

Then I saw him. Spike was lying in the corner by the Oak tree. He wasn't moving. I ran to him and picked him up. His head lolled at an odd angle. I wasn't fast enough.

Donna's arms wrap around me, bringing me back to the present.
"Where are you honey?" she says. Noticing the tears, her voice takes on a note of concern. "Hey, what's wrong?"
"Nothing," I said. "I uh ... was just thinking about my brother."
"Oh ..."

Donna doesn't know much about Frank; only that I don't have a very high opinion of him. I don't talk about him much. I keep that part of my life quiet. She knows that he's a bad seed. I told her that he was vicious and brutal. She also knows that he's been doing a stretch in the state pen, and that he's recently been released.
"Don't worry about that," she says. "He won't find you. You've covered your tracks pretty well."

"Yeah..." I reply, faking a smile. Of the two of us, I'm the only one who's managed to make something of his life. I started running every day the day after Spike died. I worked hard at it. Uncle Thomas died when I was about 14, not that he was ever around that much. Frank wound up getting convicted of a B & E. I wound up in a foster home and was eventually adopted. I had the beginnings of a normal life, with a new name and family. In high school, I got the attention of a track coach, and later wrangled myself a full scholarship to a good college. Now I'm in training for the Olympics.

Once a writer for the college newspaper interviewed me. She asked me what it was that drove me to train so hard. I lied and told her it was all I'd ever wanted to do. The truth doesn't make good press, and besides, that's the past. I'm not that guy anymore.
"Yeah," I repeated to Donna. "We'll be fine."
"Course we will," she said smiling. "Hey, you know what would do you some good?"
I grinned, turning to face her, pulling her close. "I think I do."
"A good run." She says, smiling, and laughing and pushes me playfully. "Now scoot!"
"Yeah ... OK," I chuckle. "But I had something in mind that would be good for both of us."

"Later, Speed Boy," she says. "You're in training."

No point in arguing with her. She's right. The trials are coming up, and I need to get in all the training time I can. I pull on my running shoes, and slip out the door. I stretch on the stoop of my building, and sprint down the street. For the first time, I feel like I'm running for me. I actually enjoy it. It's freeing, moving along the sidewalk to the park, and then sprinting around lake. It feels good to run for the simple joy of it. I relax into it and let the rhythm take over. There'll be plenty of time to speed train later. After about an hour, I decide it's was time to head home.

I walk in, and drop my keys on the table by the front door. I don't hear Donna humming.
"Honey! I'm home!" I call out.
Silence.
"OK, I get it," I say. "You're hiding."
Silence again.
I poke my head into the bedroom; it's empty. Well, that's disappointing, but like she said, training.

I walk into the den and stopped dead in my tracks. A strange man is sitting on the couch with Donna. He's dressed in ratty jeans, a ragged Motorhead T-shirt and old combat boots. He has one arm draped around Donna’s neck. The look on her face is sheer terror.

“Look ... we don’t want any trouble,” I stammer.

The stranger laughs. “You never did!”

“What?” I manage to spew, confused.

“Sorry I couldn’t make the wedding,” the stranger says. “I was... otherwise occupied.”

“Do I know you?”

“Know me?” The stranger says with mock surprise. “I made you what you are today!”

“Frank?” I say, suddenly realizing.

“Yes, the same.” He says grinning. “Thought I’d come see what my little brother is up to these days. Made quite a name for yourself. Although, it’s not the name you were born with.”

“That was a long time ago Frank. Let Donna go,” I say with less steel than I’d hoped for.

“She’s got nothing to do with what went on between us.”

“Awww, you make it sound so informal!” He says. “Is that any way to talk to your kin?”

“Just let her go,” I say, trying to muster more strength, while keeping back the fear.

“Tell you what,” he says grinning over his ragged beard. “Let’s see how good you’ve gotten. I’m thirsty.”

“There’s water and juice in the fridge,” I say.

“That’s not what I mean.” He grins “There’s a 7/11 down the end of the road. I checked the distance, and it’s exactly a mile. I want you to run down there and boost me a bottle of Sneaky Pete. They say you’re the fastest man in the U.S. right about now. Let’s see if you can do a four minute mile now.”

“You pig,” I spit. “How dare you come back here like this.”

“Ah, ah, ahh...” he taunts, squeezing Donna’s neck, until she screams. “You better get goin’. Time’s a starting now.”

I look at Donna, she mouths the words “I love you.”

“I’ll be right back,” I say. Frank just smiles that hideous smile.

I burst through the door. I’m 12 again, and terrified. The cars, the faces on the street become a blur. I run past a row of houses, I make the 7/11 with a full minute to spare. I walked past the counter; the clerk barely knows I’m there. I find the bottle I’m looking for. I’m still dressed in my clothes from my earlier run, so there’s no place to hide the square bottle. It’s too heavy to stuff in the waistband of my running shorts. It would fall and shatter on the floor. I need something so the clerk won’t notice me. Luckily, a couple of kids come in. They walk past me and look into the fridge where the soft drinks are stored. They open the door, but don’t take anything out. Then they turn and walk down the comic book aisle. An idea hits me.

Once the kids get to the newsstand and start reading, I reach into the drink fridge and grab a bottle of root beer. I walk to the aisle adjacent to the kids and pretend to look at the chips. I walk down to the space people to weave in and out of the aisles. I take the bottle of Root Beer, and toss it around the corner where it brakes at one of the kid’s feet.

The clerk looks up from his Hustler at the kids. The kids look surprised, and then look
up at the clerk. He starts yelling and comes around the counter toward the kids, yelling. While he’s cursing at them, I walk out the front door, and take off for home, my adrenaline skyrocketing.

I run faster than I have ever run before. I cradle the bottle to my chest like a precious child; soon our building is in sight. I sprint up the stairs and burst through the front door. I glance quickly down at the clock on the hallway table. 1 minute to spare.

I rush into the den, where Frank was sitting on the couch ... alone.
I shoved the bottle in his face. “HERE!” I said.
“Well, well, well, son, that’s pretty impressive!” he says. “With time to spare no less.”
“Where’s Donna?” I demand.
“She’s here,” he chuckles. “She’s in there in the bedroom.”
I brush past Frank and head to the bedroom. I barely grasp the handle when he speaks.

“Ya know little brother,” he says. “All those year’s back, it wasn’t about the smokes. It was about nothing comin’ between us.”

I turn the knob and thrust the bedroom door open. I can just make out Donna lying face down on the bed.

“Hell,” Frank continues, “I broke that mutt’s neck right after you left...”

Sonnet No. 5: Two Ravens
Christian Bonnell

Look here: two ravens passing in the night—
Each striving hard, and turning not its eye
To see its matching specter pass in flight,
But stays its course across the lonely sky.

Look here: two strangers passing in the street—
But say, what if by some strange destiny
Their paths should cross one day, and they should meet?
What joy might come, what happiness might be?

Look here: now we are passing, you and I—
Both walking quickly down our city block.
I fully think that we will pass on by,
‘Til, as we pass, I find our gazes lock...

Look here: two ravens passing in the day,
What may happen as they pass—ah, who can say?
I exist
Creatively constipated.
Like the mind that holds my pen
I have become stagnant in my thoughts.

I must leave this place
This time
This moment
To reclaim the heritage of my self.

I'm at the beginning of my journey
But to get to know the potential of me
I must first embrace all that I can't be
And yes, contrary to the ‘be all you can be’ motto
I can't be and do anything I want

I will never be
Able to write with Angelou's grace
Hurston's fluidity
Or Martin's optimism
Nor should I

I will never be able to
Sing with Cooke's fluidity
Speak with Poitier's confidence
Or walk with

Nor should I

So I start my journey, knowing
Knowing that although my pen
Will never speak of my being a phenomenal woman
My dream doesn't have to be deferred

Because my pen is multilingual
And my paper speaks three languages

So I sit
Trying to find a mental laxative
To flush out the creative juices that have backed up my thoughts
But I find none.
Twenty Little Revolutionary Dances and Heavy Bricks
Kyle Medlen

2. My finger points and when it does, you turn into a giant in a land of ants.
3. Did I say smelling? Like a fool? Looking drunk. Feeling dry cotton in my mouth. Hearing music, beckoning me to jump and dance and tip my hat to the princess.
4. I heard that you could smell me dancing but I wasn’t very good. Nonetheless, it wafted towards you.
5. Polyphonic music when Luigi jumps. Very robotic. His name is not in the title “The Mario Bros.” It looks like he dances when he slides to a stop.
6. No, as a matter of fact, he never dances. Imbecile. He is not the one with the princess.
7. Don’t be so dramatic, It’s just a video game. For funsies! Even with friends. Try Duckhunt and watch that dog laugh at you.
8. Did you notice that they hold their hats when they jump? It’s very fashionable, not to lose your hat. Did you notice that there is no goomba poop? But there is...
9. When Luigi gets a star, he flips about and enemies bounce off of him. Therefore, I will run around bashing my face into bricks until I find a star.
10. The princess said, “If you’re crippled, there’s no way out of this joker.”
11. The “green” “hat” of “metal Luigi” in a brick world of confusion is on the brink of destruction. My skin is a shaved muzzled rabid howler monkey I hate. Quiet!
12. The Princess wears gloves and smiles with her mouth shut. She is a beautiful vampire with blood-stained hands and a taste for red, not green.
13. In real life, shrooms jig-saw your thoughts up. Oh! But in this 8-bit side scrolling funhouse they make you confident enough to take on the world of bricks.
14. Introducing a new character: You just need to know his name is Stump, and he plays (as?) Mario. He is involved with the control of Mario’s hands and feet, dancing in the darkness of the world.
15. When Luigi defeats Bowser, do you know who will get the Princess? Its all happened to us. Prediction: You will die by monkey wrench in level 8
16. Pre-shroom Luigi’s prepubescent hat squeaks and covers his scalp too much. Can you imagine?!? His amazing hat with fire flower-power? It’s red.
17. The next time you sky dive, don’t use a parachute. Its O.K. You’ll tell the pilot, I picked up more lives way back in level one.
18. Como estás? What does it look like? I’m dancing on this multi directional pad and stepping on corresponding arrows. Such as: “I am happy” or “Please, make your way to the refrigerator.”
19. If I was Bowser, you know how I’d get those darn’d Mario Bros.? Host and informal dance in the mouth of a robotic furnace that chomped off moving feet.
20. Luigi slides to avoid failing, falling off of the edge. This is his reason and style for dancing.

Goodbye

Aileen Stellingwerf

Goodbye, friend, whom I
Met along life’s winding road.
You see in my eyes
My feelings mean more than I can say
And what pain it is to let go.

I wish I could spend all time
Near you. But alas the truth
Is deep within your eyes
And, like a knife, pierces cold within my side.
I must now part from you.

I know our paths must part
And I cannot bind, even by
The love that is in my heart.
But, in parting, we must go our own ways
To live some distant answer in time.

An Observation of Time

Charlie Rogers

“In a Wonderland they lie,”
Totally convinced of their superiority
And yet obsessed by their inferiority
As we scurry about, clueless,
Helpless,
“Dreaming as the days go by,”
As time escapes all of us;
Because as we live in the space between moments
We lose sight of all that is around us,
In our own prefabricated worlds,
“Dreaming as the summers die;”
So we retreat to the mundane,
The ordinary, the usual,
Wanting to reject it
But hopelessly out of control,
“Ever drifting down the stream—”
The stream of life, time, fate, whatever
The stream that takes us all on different journeys
And though we can control our path
We still gaze and wonder around us,
“Lingering in the golden gleam—”
Asking if there is a purpose for it all,
But all our journeys end the same, like a book,
And our memories fill the book of life,
Painting pictures like dreams, but still we wonder,
“Life, what is it but a dream?”

“Through the Looking Glass, and what Alice Found There” quotes © Lewis Carroll
Philosolove
Sergey S Sarkisov II

Love is for some the most intoxicating drink,
It comes from man’s hunger with a perpetual link,
That is formed when two lucky souls meet and touch,
Yet in truth, what is love, I know not that much.

Some say love is when you have found your soul mate,
And this is guaranteed by the bliss of one’s fate,
And you and your mate will both love ‘till the end,
Your mate will be with you as a lifelong best friend.

Some say that love is to see someone as ideal,
Their characteristics are perfect and yet seem so real,
You will give anything just to join hands and hold on,
The only thing that’ll kill you is to find out they’re gone.

Some say love is knowing that you’ll be safe and warm,
When you join hands, you’ll find shelter from the storm,
You may choose to buy all that you wish,
It’s like luck out at sea—a big, juicy fish.

Some say love is when your eyes are spread wide,
As you see the physical beauty from which you can’t hide,
And you think of touch and you kiss when you can,
Impatient until you are made wife and man.

Some say love is some sort of chemical bond,
Your eyes meet and you’re touched by a magical wand,
And the passion is such that one look is so strong,
That the other can hardly look down for long.

Some say love is merely the sound and words,
From hand or by mouth they fly out like birds,
And that every detail said, no matter how short,
Enteraps your love’s heart in a beautiful fort.

What do I say, you may wonder by now,
Surely I know something ‘bout this concept of love,
I think that it’s a mixture of all this and more,
And that no man, be he Philosolove, can be sure.
A Moment of Your Time, Please  
Kristen Ruccio  
This is the way it happened:  

We are walking back to the creek and the day seems full of possibility and hope in a way that nothing else in my life ever will again. We come round the last bend in the deer trail and see a raccoon. It does not run away. I am in the lead, as usual, and I take the first cautious steps toward her. I see that her hind leg is caught in a trap, but appears unbroken. I remember that dad has let his taxidermist friend place traps on the farm, despite my protest. I don't know what to do...should I let the raccoon go or run back to the house? Eventually we try to release the raccoon only to narrowly escape bites...this scares the younger kids and my brother decides we need an ADULT. He runs back to the house and mom calls the taxidermist's wife. Meantime, I have stayed with the raccoon, who looks at me with black eyes filled with desperation. Her clever little paws, so human seeming, pull at her tail endlessly and she has gnawed a raw spot on the end. We bring her blackberries and water from the creek, to try to calm her. She won't let me release her, although I swear to this day she looked apologetic after each snarling snapping attempt on my fingers. Ginger and Holly start to cry. I keep it inside; I am always hoping for the happy ending. The taxidermist’s wife arrives twenty minutes later and my brother is not with her. Me, two younger girls, and the taxidermist’s wife stand in a circle around the raccoon. The taxidermist’s wife has a pistol. She looks down and begins to sweat, despite the relative coolness of the morning. I ask her to please let the raccoon go. She says her husband wants it; a client has asked for a raccoon to mount on his mantel. She pulls out the gun and points it at the black-masked face. The raccoon lifts her paws, stands on her hind legs and grasps the barrel of the gun. I have not yet incorporated the word supplication into my vocabulary, but later, when I learn the word, the image of the raccoon reaching toward her executioner pops into my head. Supplication...an entreaty...a humble prayer. The taxidermist’s wife says, “Oh coony, I am sorry.” She pulls the trigger. I whisper, “Why did you do it?” She does not answer and she never looks me in the eye again...(shortly after this, the taxidermist and his wife stop coming over). I look down and see the raccoon is now quiet, but she does not look peaceful. She looks dead. I kneel down and take her leg from the trap. For the first time in my life, I feel the connection of all living things. This death mattered. Beauty was taken from the world and I felt the lack. The echoes of that moment are always with me. When I choose not to eat meat, when I choose to leave religion out of my life, when I try to always always always throw myself into being with a movement of love instead of hate, I’m listening to that echo in the hollow of Kentucky when I was still innocent.
Red Riding Hood
Kyle Medlen

Red Riding Hood

Imagine
the damage of
a molotov cocktail filled basket.
You could easily trot
to grandma's,
create a battlefront.
You wish for the reek
of kerosene and lit matches
permeating in your nostrils.
Smiling your wolfish smile
you pull your red skirt
down some,
red hood over
your eyes
click shut your lipstick
and paint an easy smile.

Wolfy

He crouches behind trees
grandma never sees
the gaping mouth, only
quietly realizes darkness.
and after Red arrives,
and he hides,
Wolfy doesn't know they share
of his pride, his starving greed.
On purpose, she left
late, so when grandma's
dead,
red could assign
it to fate instead. It's so tedious,
she thinks
coming here every day,
to give
medicine to a lady
that won't go away.

Fairytale

What about Red,
what happened when she grew up?
Quite possibly,
she could have married
the lumberjack that
put an axe in the back
of the wolf. Does she lead
a housewife's life? Does she scrub
toilets and dirty bottoms?
Has her old destruction
become less subtle,
and does she now destroy
what is easier to hide?
Cheers Darlin’
Kate Blake

Poor bastard, Andy thought. He steeled himself with some more Jack.
The suit would have fit him a year ago, but it wasn’t working for him now. Just sitting to put his feet into his shoes meant enduring the sharp criticism of his waistband. He considered taking the Jack with him.

At the church the usher seated him and the girl he was sleeping with five rows from the back. She wouldn’t even notice he was there. The girl he was sleeping with threaded her arm through his and leaned against him. Andy coughed.

There were worse things than attending your ex-fiance’s wedding. Having your skin flayed off you in strips. Being doused in Texas Pete and then set upon by scorpions. Getting on the wrong side of Tony Soprano. There were plenty of worse things than seeing the love of your life walk down the aisle and into the arms of another man. Another man with cash to burn. And a vacation house in Hawaii. And one in Fiji. Dr. Flippin Dirtbag.

Andy wished he’d brought the Jack.

At some point, he had lost her.
Oh God—here she came. He caught his breath. She was as beautiful as ever. Wide dusky face with those immense dark eyes. Skin so smooth he shivered thinking of running his fingers across it, over the contour of her back, the slope of her neck. Remembering the way his lips fit to her skin was crippling; he reached for the back of the pew in front of him.

One hundred and thirty-seven ways this could go wrong. One: They would discover a sexual incompatibility on their wedding night.

Next to him, Lori was sniffing.

Two: Dr. Flippin Dirtbag would fall in love with the stewardess on the flight to Fiji.

He supposed, listening to the vows, that they had written them themselves. Bet Dr Dirtbag had stolen his from a book. How To Convince Your Woman You’re Not in It Just for Her Can.

Three: While on honeymoon, Dr. Dirtbag would be set upon by rabid porpoises. Carried out to sea to live a life of watery splendor.

The woman on the other side of him poked him and handed him a crumpled tissue, gesturing toward Lori. He passed it to her. Lori dabbed her what Andy now noticed were small, rather flat blue eyes.

He wondered if the reception would have an open bar.

It all went back to that night. What had been the big deal? Why did girls get so worked up over babies anyway?

Oh, God. It was almost over. The pastor—she was a female—was wrapping it up. He was sweating; the Jack had worn off.

Four: While on honeymoon, Dr. Dirtbag would decide to explore his sexuality with the cabana boy.

Five . . .

There it was. The kiss. His kiss. He thought he might throw up.

***

In the reception hall, after a Scotch, he was better. The nausea passed. Lori was talking to a woman with a mole on her chin.

“At my wedding—” and she looked sideways at Andy, “—I want to have doves released.”
"They'll probably get shot," he said.
"The bride glowed," the woman said. "Are you family?"
"Cousins," Andy said. "First cousins on the Scottish side."
The woman drew her eyebrows together.
"Oh!" said Lori. "Here they come!"
The crowd in the hall—why did there have to be so damn many of them?—clapped. Hand in hand they burst through the doors. Dr. and Mrs. Dirtbag. With forthcoming little Dirtbag Juniors. He drank some more Scotch and whistled loudly through his fingers.
"Excuse me," he said, leaning over Lori to talk to the woman with a mole on her chin. "I haven't introduced myself. I'm Andy Kozlov. And you are?"
"Eunice Pamfilis. I work with her mother. At the agency? You know, I didn't know there was a Scottish side to Rachel's family—"
They were clearing the floor for the couple. First dance as a married couple.
"Aren't they beautiful? So in love," said another woman near him.
She'd made such a big deal over his not being there when it happened. How he hadn't come home right away when she'd called. But—he couldn't have stopped it. Had she expected him to stand by and watch her bleed and be unable to do anything about it?
Then her bitching about his getting drunk so frequently after that. He wished he were drunk now, watching them begin to waltz. The wedding singer was doing Barbra.
"North and south and east and west of your life . . ." he said out loud. He drank some more Scotch.
"You," he said to the woman on his right, a tall bony woman with squarish glasses. He felt like dancing. "You want to dance?"
Lori looked surprised. He handed her his drink and took the woman's arm. "Like to waltz?"
"Well . . ."
Andy pulled her toward the floor into the handful of couples that had joined the nuptial pair. He draped his arm across the woman's back and took a giant leap forward to start the waltz. "What's your name, sweetheart?"
"Diana--"
"Well Diana, you are a beautiful dancer." Around and around. One step, two step, etc., etc.
Five: Dr. Flippin Dirtbag would invite the cabana boy in for the rest of the honeymoon.
"How do you know the Kirklands?" Diana was asking him.
"I used to sleep with Mrs. Kirkland," he said.
"Oh," Diana said. Her face was red.
On the next step he misjudged the distance between himself and a short Asian couple and accidentally swung Diana into the female of the pair. "Sorry," he said, too loudly. The man looked him over.
"We were going to get married," he confided to Diana. She was not really a good dancer; actually she seemed to be extremely stiff. Right now she seemed to be attempting to catch the eyes of a number of onlookers. "Last year she broke it off. Came home—" and narrowly missing the Asian couple again he had the impulse to dip Diana. She was not particularly bendable. "--And she was packing. I said, Rachel, if it's about the baby thing, it's not like you can't have another. I mean--" Lori waltzed by with a glistening fat man. She glared at him. "It was just bad timing. That's what I told her. What was she so upset about anyway? It's not like she ever saw it. It's not like it had a name or something."
His palms were sweating, and he let go of Diana to wipe them on his pantsleg. Diana made a break for the crowd.

"Nice dancing with you," he called out. Several of the dancing couples craned to stare at him. "Who else wants to dance? C'mon! It's a wedding! We're celebrating, aren't we? Rachel--"

Impulsively, he pushed through the dancers toward her. He felt, suddenly, that he had to hold her one final time.

Dr. Dirtbag had spotted him and was turning Rachel out of his path with nervous glances backward. Andy spoke over the doctor's shoulder to Rachel, who fixed her gaze on him with something like a familiar disappointment. "C'mon and dance with me. Once," he said.

"Whoever you are--" her new husband began, one hand wavering protectively across Rachel's midsection, but Rachel pushed his hand away. Hesitated, then held out her hand to Andy.

"I'm surprised you came," she said as they began to dance.

"Well, it was your big day," he said. "I wanted to see you happy." Didn't add the pathetic words that hurried after his sentiment: I wanted to see how it would have been if you had been happy with me. . . .

"Thank you," she said. She spoke with soft, luminous lips. What had their last kiss been like? Tender? Perfunctory? Had he been able to kiss those lips a final time before she had closed the door? He couldn't remember. "It's nice that you came. But Andy, after we dance maybe you had better go home. I'll call you a cab."

"I miss you," he said to her, suddenly desperate. "Sometimes I wake up and I think you're still there. . . ."

"Well, I'm not, Andy."

"Why not?" he asked, an unguarded break in his voice.

Her eyes grew sad. Faraway. He knew that face. Tightened his fingers around hers as if it could keep her with him, in this dance.

"Andy, you know I loved you very much, but you--you don't want the same things I want," she said. Looking away, as if it were easier for her to speak if she didn't have to see his eyes trying to meet hers.

"I want you." He had to clear his throat.

"I know. That hurts me . . ." The dance was ending. Oh God, why had it been so short? This was it, the last time he would ever hold her this closely to him. Had she always had that tiny scar at her hairline?

"Rachel . . ." he said, pulling her to him. "Please . . ."

He kissed her then, fitting the palm of his hand to her cheek. For one moment, in sweet, heartbreaking charity, her lips pressed tenderly back against his as if they belonged to him. Her husband--husband!--was between them then, the air striking Andy's lips. Suddenly standing alone, he became aware of the dozens of surrounding eyes now looking him up and down.

"Andy," Rachel pled.

"I'm going," Andy said. And, hesitating, offered his hand, fingers stiff, to Rachel's new husband. With narrow, distrustful eyes, the groom looked from Andy to Rachel before returning the handshake. Rachel put her arm through her husband's and the two stood waiting for him to leave.

He hung back.

"It would have been April," he said then.

Rachel drew her eyebrows together. "Our wedding? No, Andy, it was June."

"Not that," he said. "The baby. He would have been born in April."
Resolute Superiority (The Fly Swatter)
Sheila Holt Lee

Like swatting flies
She discards...nastily
Those who obstruct
Her paths to sweetness...
Disguised with lies,
Reaching...brazen goals
...the opportunist
Sweetens her path
With glorious visions
...for those who peer
Into glassless windows
That are broken by
...the swatting of flies,
The Fly Swatter engorges
Her being with honey
...she sucks up amidst
Swatted flies
Only to breed
Maggots in capture
Waiting to join the ranks
Of swatted flies,
Resolute Superiority bred
In nepotism when
Swatted flies twitch as
Cockshies in mental pang
Of realism
As the Fly Swatter's
Only goal
Is swatting flies
To their demise.
When I Feel I am Halfway to Being Complete, an Ode to _____
Kyle Medlen

“The heart is deceitful above all things...”
Jeremiah 17:9

Your hedonistic
with your elusiveness.
Your dancing lips
scratch the spot
that makes men itch
and your witchcraft
eyes have engraved
an A on my chest.
The vivacious twist
of your hips
is the pheromone
that causes my senses
to bleed
effortlessly.
Easily you leave,
with a fingerprint
on my cheek
and I kneel
to let you kiss
my forehead.
When I think I have returned
to myself
your ghost still lingers
crucified.

Sonnet No. 3: Radiant Night
Christian Bonnell

The sky is just so fine tonight,
And all its stars shine clearly
Sending down their brilliant light
In scintillating beauty.
How aptly this, this radiant night
With all its host arrayed
Shows the void of mortal life
And pain of hope delayed.

Nightly from their crystal spheres
These million flecks of fire
Shine as though they strive to teach
A core of truth to all our fears:
These objects of our heart’s desire
Are always out of reach.

Aileen Stellingwerf, Pink Daffodil

“The heart is deceitful above all things...”
Jeremiah 17:9

Your hedonistic
with your elusiveness.
Your dancing lips
scratch the spot
that makes men itch
and your witchcraft
eyes have engraved
an A on my chest.
The vivacious twist
of your hips
is the pheromone
that causes my senses
to bleed
effortlessly.
Easily you leave,
with a fingerprint
on my cheek
and I kneel
to let you kiss
my forehead.
When I think I have returned
to myself
your ghost still lingers
crucified.
The snowball effect, is where one little thing like turning in homework late, or not at all, builds and builds until the class ends up getting dropped. Does it end there? No. The student ends up dropping out of not only that class but other classes as well, until all classes are dropped! Then the whole college degree flies out the window with the disappointment of another college drop out. Even the seemingly smallest things are important. Turning homework in on time, that one little quiz grade, the missing commas, and skipped Writing Center visits, all have an impact on grades and the future. Because I did not write my Cause and Effect essay, my academic and professional career aspirations were ruined.

Never dreaming that the effects of not writing one paper would have such a great impact, I unwisely choose not to write my Cause and Effect essay. Thinking that it was just one essay would be no big deal, right? I was wrong. That one grade demolished my grade point average. With my diminished GPA (Grade Point Average) I lost all faith and confidence in myself. I started to slack off in my other classes, slipping farther into my pit of despair. My self-esteem was shot. I stopped showing up to classes and failed tests and quizzes; finally, I got kicked out of school for my poor grades. With my new status of college drop-out I realized that my dreams were crush like a fragile flower under the snow.

The University of Auburn, veterinary school, having an equine practice in my future, and my other dreams were all gone. My cataclysmic failure as an undergraduate student stripped my chance of being accepted by the University of Auburn. All my plans for becoming an equine veterinarian were dashed, and my happy ending became a nightmare. All because of that fateful essay that I put off and ended up not writing.

Without so much as an Associate’s Degree, I was thrown into the harsh world of reality. Trying to get a job as a college drop out is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. I was applying for jobs anywhere that had a “Help Wanted” sign up, but falling short of the business owner’s academic qualifications. Turned away by employer after employer I became discouraged. Failing in my attempts for a job I became a vagrant living under the overpass of Highway I-565 in Huntsville, Alabama. Homeless, jobless, and hopeless I scratched a living by picking up aluminum cans on the side of the road, turning them in for every penny I could get. All this work, frustration, and turmoil started because I just did not write that one essay. Seemingly a small thing that no one would ever guess that it could build into such big problem.

At the time, the little things seem to be of limited importance, having no apparent impact. Even the smallest of things have an effect on life and the world we live in. Whether it is for better or worse does not change the fact that it happens. Grades, schools, and jobs are important in determining one’s worldly status, future opportunities, and financial advancements. They show ability to discipline the mind, retain information, use time wisely, and follow directions correctly. Although academics are important, there needs to be a balance in people’s lives, just like in their diets. With too much fat and sugar in a diet the end result is weight and health problems, whereas too much partying and goofing off results in having the weight of the world on your shoulders. Even though one academic failure changed my life for the worse, perhaps if I had had more balance in my life, writing my Cause and Effect essay would not have overwhelmed me. If I had started working on the essay when it was assigned it would not have turned into the workload it did, giving me time for more enjoyable things free of worry and stress. The lack of balance in my priorities resulted in the little essay snowballing into a problematic life. Work and play should be taken in moderation making life like a well-rounded diet free of snowballs. When you play in snow you should expect to get wet.
Self-destructive
Damien Field

Another day, another way to fuck things up again....
Saying things I don't really mean to see if you're feeling anything...
I'm giving in to that fatalism, I'm being self-destructive...
Sorry for the hurts, and sorry for the pain, it's me fucking things up again.

So what do I do when I see a dream come true?
Do I smile and rejoice that the good fortune made its choice?
Or do I try too hard and make you play the wrong cards,
Ruining the chance of being constructive by being self-destructive...

J. Erin Kennedy

Untitled

In the peace of the scarless head
The truth is told yet never said
And look into the starless sky
The world is now completely dry

In the vastness of perfection
There is no room left for affection
And wake with a surprise
We are now paralyzed

And then we fall into the wind
The passion's gone, we are not friends

There is no war
There is no pain
There is no sun
There is no rain

And staring down from a shooting star
I see that my dream for the world is yet so far
From this Heaven I have made
In my desperate attempts to escape the masquerade

And living in a world where I'm always trying to run away
I'm happy I was alive today
Because I learned that, for me, there could be another way
The moment I realized I am okay
So, I’m off to the university, where the scholars are. Scholars hold that the pressure of the atmosphere is most potent, I tend to disagree. Sure, it’s strong enough to crush your bones, and bray the very fibers through which you subside, But what’s worse? Today I sat, legs dangling twenty feet above what used to be Raintree Lake. I say it this way simply because that’s how I see it; it’s dead to me. When you rise at 5:00 AM and make it to the dock by 5:30, you’re cheating nature. You’ve begun a foot race with an entity millions of miles away that, in truth, is moving faster than anything of this world, And the irony? You win. Sometimes you even beat it by a fair fifteen minutes, enough time to perch yourself on your usual rock; Giving you time to let your legs dangle over what, for four years, was your deliverance – your extrication. And then it comes. Yawning, your enigmatic racing opponent comes creeping over the wall like a curious child peering into his crazy neighbor’s yard. First, the fingers, then a head, and finally, with enough time to work up enough courage, it comes silently clamoring into sight, breaking splendidly free of the horizon. And it remains there, suspended for a moment, fluttering wild with anger at your triumph. And the byproduct? That view. The water, a vast pool of replenishment, blanketed for eight hours in lonely, forlorn darkness, is instantly plastered with the incandescence it screams for overnight. You’ve heard it. The sight is amazing – watching the water, trees, birds, and plain experience this daily catharsis that goes so unnoticed. Today was a day for listening to things destitute, to lend an ear to the things I’ve loved for years, but never took the time to hear. Whether it was at the cemetery, feeling the lulling tickle of the fog as hundreds of unappreciated voices of years past soothed my nerve, Whether it was lying on my stomach in the backyard taking one last look at Kansas City’s illuminated silhouette, Or whether it was walking away from that glorious delineation to spend an hour in the park with my brothers before I go, The muffled shrill of the unheeded is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard. The pressure of this emotional panorama far surpasses anything the atmosphere can inflict. The scholars I’m about to meet just haven’t heard the screams.
Assorted Haikus Ridden with Anxiety
Nick Wilbourn

Mocked by blank pages
Trapped by merciless forces
Can't shake writer's block

My palms are sweating
My date thinks I'm a failure
No, just the check, please

Stewardess looks sick
I feel the plane plummeting
These are my last thoughts

Verbose professor
Bored beyond comprehension
Can't keep eyes open

Don't know the answer
I can sense imminent doom
Won't pass this exam

Too many lovers
I hope to not pass this test
HIV, or no?

Out of aspirin
This headache is killing me
Too bad the store's closed

It's almost my turn
The audience will hate me
Giving speeches sucks

Last minutes of class
Bladder's about to rupture
Sorry, professor

Deadline's approaching
Need to submit my writing
The Project awaits
Art gallery

Top: Kate Blake, "Beethistle"
Bottom: Amy Dobbs, "Mi Soli"
Top: Aileen Stellingwerf, "Daffodil"
Bottom: Amy Dobbs, "Arlington Tree"
Every year Kaniel comes here. He comes to Paris and he sits in one of those charming cafes that tumble out from the corner of each architectural block. He dreams about this sometimes, especially when he is away from home, in first class fifty thousand feet above the ground, hovering in a massive bulk of steel and glass somewhere between the Pacific and Mid-Atlantic. Sipping on very fine wine and at ease in pressed slacks and a Rafhael tie, he tells himself he would like to buy a house and move to Paris someday. It would be him and Adiva, and their children; if they had any. Adiva tells him that she cannot imagine being a mother.

He meets the same people every time. They don’t change. They sit in conference rooms with Espresso and try to make sense of complicated digits. Five years of this has resulted in the odd friendship here and there. He knows a good man here. His name is Pierre. During lunch breaks they walk between the confines of hotels and clothing boutiques in downtown till they find a restaurant that serves good seafood. Pierre loves fish. They order white crab meat and catch up on old times.

“But what has this girl done to you?” Pierre cannot believe that Kaniel is getting married. “Look at you! You are young; you are rich – and handsome. Stay a few more days; I will introduce you to my cousin. She’s a model you know, a beautiful woman. What do you want to get married for anyway?”

Kaniel laughs and shakes his head. “Adiva’s lovely. You have to meet her to understand.”

When he saw Adiva for the first time, he found himself. People talk about love at first sight. What Kaniel felt that day was not love. It was more like an awakening, like hearing one’s name being said again and again over the microphone at an event and not realizing it until nudged by the person sitting in the next seat. Adiva nudged him. From across a room with brown varnished tiles, she nudged him out of the twenty-six years of life he had been living until then. Of course she didn’t see him till later. She was shuffling in between the rows of seats with a stack of brochures. As she bent to hand brochures and whisper in the ears of the most prosperous business men and women of the year, she shook her hair back. It was all over the place, longer than that of any woman’s Kaniel had known personally before.

Paris doesn’t bore him. It makes him feel like he has made a discovery. Over here, he has a ritual. Most evenings after dinner in his hotel room he visits a bookstore. They remind him of how much culture is vested into each artifact within this city.

There are candle lanterns hanging from the ceiling and their soft light bounces over the babble of students, housewives, and drunks lugging volumes of poetry and philosophy to the clerk’s desk. Candles in a room of books. He wants to tell every person that has sat next to him in first class that there is a place in this world where you can see candles in a room full of books.

Adiva grew up living with her mother and aunt. Her mother and aunt were biological sisters but rarely got along. As far as Adiva could remember, they averaged at least six arguments a day. For all their verbal differences, the similarity of their genes could be seen as clearly as polished glass in their temperaments. They were both old fashioned and vulgarly opinionated, and seemed to possess the wonderful inability to experience humiliation. Shortly after her eighteenth birthday, they helped her empty out the contents of her closet into a small suitcase and dropped her off at university. Adiva felt like a dove that after years of captivation had suddenly been let
one sunlit afternoon. The world was not big she knew, or even necessarily dangerous, but crowded it was. And that she was unprepared for. She spread her wings and flew with caution.

Adiva never filled out the shoes of the siblings that raised her. She was a listener rather than an orator. She did not have their brash forwardness or confidence. She had coffeebeanbrown hair and sketchy dreams. Two months before graduation, she dropped out of university. Four days later, a newly transmitting radio station hired her to host a poetry show that aired once a day. Within the next two years her resume had extended to include hair modeling, entertainment park ticket seller, nature activist, and a herbal soaps and salts shop clerk. She got easily bored, discarding each job like a pair of old jeans before moving on to the next.

Deep within her soul, Adiva was grieving, and had been for a long time. The funny thing was, she didn't know why. She had not ever been victim to any trauma or heart wrenching tragedy. As a child, she would daydream of a soul mate, a perfect equal to balance her hurt. To be the yang for her yang, the warmth for her clammy cold, the glittering treasure for her searching. She met Kaniel on one of her many employment fiascos at a prestigious business conference. She had been distributing brochures. When she got to the row of seats Kaniel was seated in, he held out his hand for a brochure although she was still half a row away from him. He had been watching her. First she noticed his shirt, deep maroon colored cotton completely at odds with the sophistication of the event, then the smile on his face. He was not the man she had spent her childhood dreaming of, but she let him take her to dinner anyway.

It is night and the streets are quieter than Kaniel is used to. He lies awake in bed. His body, still adjusting to the change in time zone, is not yet prepared for sleep. His mind is also left seven hours behind in time. Adiva had seen him off at the airport. She had been wearing yellow but he cannot recall now whether the garment had been blouse, dress, or sweater. If he concentrates, he can visualize her face from behind his shut eyes. Her skin, honeycomb hued. Her hair, piled atop of her head or down in wide waves on either side of her shoulders. The first time they ate together, he took her to the most expensive restaurant he knew. She ordered a large avocado cocktail, and smiled at him evasively from behind the fishbowl shaped glass while he dined his way through four courses. Unusually nervous, he had talked a lot that first night, asking her many questions. But Adiva had softly laughed off most of his inquiries, seemingly content to let him lead the conversation.

From that evening onwards, they saw each other almost every day of the week. When it was warm, they would go shopping for fruit from the Farmer’s Market. On other occasions they would watch black and white films at a rundown theater. Both of these experiences were new to Kaniel. But he loved them instantly, for these were the activities that Adiva loved. He could not love her for the person she was, because this she never allowed him to know. So he loved her instead for the small things he did know. The food she ate, the scents she wore. He realized not long after their first few meetings that it was useless to try to understand her. In his car, she would sit holding his hand and stare out the window. Hours at a time would go by without any exchange of words between them. Kaniel never broke the silence, never shook her from her reverie. She was like a wildflower, an estranged miracle of botany. It did not bother him too much that she would not let him into her world. It only made him more intrigued by her. More engrossed. More in love.

After dropping Kaniel off at the airport, Adiva went straight to work. Her latest occupation
was at an artificially induced hot springs resort. She was met by wafts of dense, lemon fragranced air as she walked into the facility. Nodding at a coworker, she settled behind a desk in the main lobby. Customers in bath robes walked by, their skin glowing and wrinkled like prunes from the water. A woman came towards the desk to make a payment. Adiva took her credit card and swiped it through the machine.

“What a beautiful ring!” the woman exclaimed, eyeing the engagement ring on Adiva’s left hand.

Adiva worked consistently for the next few hours, signing in customers in the log book and processing payments. When the time for her lunch break struck, she wandered into a small coffee shop on the second floor. The shop was relatively empty. Ordering a turkey filled croissant, she stood trying to decide where to sit. Towards the rear of the room, two men sat across from each other engaged in an animated conversation. She chose a table directly behind them and began to remove the Saran wrap from her sandwich. The content of others conversations had always fascinated Adiva, and she had a secret fetish with eavesdropping in public spaces. As she chewed on the tender turkey meat, she listened to what they were saying.

Of the two men, a middle aged Asian man was doing most of the talking. He waved his hands in the air, gesticulating excitedly as he spoke to his friend. “In the town I where I grew up in China, hot springs are like shopping malls. People go there everyday, many times a day. In early times, it was believed that washing the body with the hot waters of the springs also washed the soul. Not so many people believe that anymore. They go to the springs more because it is such a nice idea, this cleansing of the soul.”

By early evening, Adiva was still at work behind the main desk. She waited tiredly for the last of the customers to make their payments and leave. The overheard words of the man at the coffee shop had stayed with her throughout the afternoon. In most of the conversations she listened in on, people talked about down payments on cars or grumbled about their spouses. She considered what she had heard that day a distinctly interesting piece of information. What had occupied her thoughts most was why people felt their souls needed cleansing. Was it because they were always late for work? Or had committed a crime? Or was it because they had brought pain to those closest to them? The customers left, leaving her alone in the building. Adiva breathed in the silence. She walked towards the springs, into a hall containing large basins of still water surrounded by artificial rocks and plants. With the flip of a switch, the springs turned on. Adiva stared at the gushing water. She had never done this before. Removing her clothes, she lowered herself into the hissing water. The cloying aroma of lemons struck her more than the temperature of the water. Through the steam, she lifted her hand up to the light. Her engagement ring, a blazing diamond entangled within a narrow love knot, was beautiful. Adiva sank lower into the springs and tried to think. Her soul needed much cleansing.

Adiva knew, even before Kaniel asked, that he was going to ask her to marry him. They went for a day to a small fishing town. They drove into the town, a maze of narrow streets with the sea on one side and shops on the other, and Adiva knew in that instant that Kaniel would propose to her before the day was over. When they reached the hotel, Kaniel suggested that they order lunch from the dining room. Adiva urged him to eat without her, claiming that she needed fresh air after the drive and went for a walk. She walked a long way. The town was enchanting, an extract from a story book illustration, no more factual to her than the reality of her relationship with Kaniel. To be loved but to not love back. The bitter sweetness of it shook her. She watched the boats pull into the harbor hugging herself.
Pierre hears a knock on the door and opens it to find Kaniel standing outside. Pierre is pleased. “Good, good you decided to come.”

Kaniel steps into the dimly lit apartment. Lounge chaises scatter the room and sultry, female vocals in French pour out from undetectable speakers. Pierre is hosting a party. He leads Kaniel to a small group of guests, introducing one of them as his cousin. At the mention of her name, she looks up at Kaniel and smiles. Pierre has not lied. His cousin is a handiwork of exquisite beauty. Her long limbed body has the sleekness of a dancer. Kaniel is a charismatic man. He steers his way into the setting of strangers with ease. Pierre’s cousin turns away from the other guests, and leans in towards him with obvious interest. She touches his arm and knee and laughs at all his jokes. Her large stunning eyes never leave his face.

By the time Kaniel stands up to leave, it is well into the night. Most of the other guests have left, but Pierre’s cousin still lingers close by. She raises her eyebrows at him, and the smile on her face is mischievously suggestive. When he pecks her on the cheek and politely bids her goodbye, she is unable to contain her surprise. No man has ever rejected her. Out on the street, Kaniel hails a cab. Pierre’s efforts to match him with his cousin amuse him. He watches the sharp Paris lights zip by as the car heads toward his hotel. What a breathtaking city. He cannot wait until the day Adiva joins him here.

On her way home, Adiva passed a blind saxophone player. He had a small build and the saxophone towered against him, yet he played it with mastery. She stopped to listen to his music. The notes of the song rose and broke rhythmically. Adiva found the effect soothing somehow. She felt better than she had all day. As the man ended his song, spectators clapped appreciatively and slipped folded up notes and coins into a bowler hat lying at his feet. Adiva reached into her purse and was disappointed when she found no change. She started to walk away, then stopped and went back. In one swift movement, she dropped her engagement ring into the hat. As she walked away, Adiva tried to tell herself that Kaniel’s hurt would heal. And maybe, someday, so would hers.

Autumn Night
Mallory Rowe

Pinks and reds invade the evening sky
As black comes quietly to add its dye.
The blue fades away as the moonlight brightens.
Night sounds erupt and quickly frighten
The leaves, so they fall to the ground.
Nature’s breath picks them up, and it makes a rustling sound.
Chimney smoke rolls through the forest trees,
While creeks move sticks down current with ease.
As sunrise comes, the crickets sing
Their last song ‘til the start of spring.
Perfection
Justin Roller

Until tonight, I had never realized just how perfect the human figure is. It dawned on me as I stood there, isolated in a stark white room, alone in a sea of a hundred. Pensively observant, I found that the contours on my hands are perfectly complementary – as if one day, your hands clasp, and the missing piece to life’s proverbial jigsaw is recovered and fitted accordingly.

So hypnotically calming in a time of dread and sorrow was this idea of human perfection – so healing was this idea that perhaps certain things in life, like hands being shaped for one another, are planned, fabricated, and hurled onto the unsuspecting for an ultimately divine purpose. So numbing was the sense of propriety I felt that night in the connection of two hands.

And then it crashed down; her hands, like mine, were clasped in nature’s perfect contour. In a futile attempt to erase the whole idea from my mind, and as if a simple disconnection could eradicate the impending tears, I quickly jerked my hands apart and found pockets for them like an insolent child hiding that one forbidden toy.

I remember mine distinctly: a cap gun. She gave it to me for my eighth birthday and it was promptly taken away when she realized I would use it to terrorize her parakeet. Banished from accessibility, the cap gun now dissolves into blurry memory. To my heart’s dismay, so too do many more important recollections of her.

The feeling is inexpressible – the feeling of guilt that comes standard when you simply cannot remember your grandmother’s voice without the assistance of her answering machine. I’ve listened to it 71 times, and counting. It’s 27 seconds long. She sounds so artificial, and yet I just can’t bring myself to ignore it. It feels as if “leave your name and number” is the only snippet of her addictive, alluring voice I’ll ever retain. As if that tape, which was so tightly tucked into my shirt pocket tonight, is the last and only thing she ever said to me.

How ironic that it sat next to my heart – the heart that failed. Failed at what it’s programmed to do. This heart forgot her voice; the voice that first spoke to it. The voice that welcomed it into the world. What a void in my chest.

She was so beautiful tonight, wearing a white silk gown with exquisite trim. I put my hand on the edge of the casket and stared in wonder – in paralyzing, breathtaking bewilderment. The stupefaction that such perfection inflicts is inefable.

I leaned forward and placed a final kiss on the forehead I had neglected kisses for so long. It was my heart’s final, too-little-too-late attempt to succeed.

And I remember, as I gazed my final gaze at the best grandmother possible, a solitary saline tear made the plunge from my face to hers.

“Don’t cry, granny. You’re way too strong for that.”

And the casket was closed. The hundred left. I stood, arms draped over her final bed, yearning for the chance to exchange 18 years for just five minutes.

But it never came. And it’s there I stood, a black suit, isolated by four oppressive, austere white walls, admiring perfection.
The Disappearance of Woman’s Identity, or Where Have All the Feminists Gone?

Marisa T. Ikstrums

My coworker shares an office with me and on a daily basis she checks her multiple dating websites and sighs over pictures and self-descriptions and announces (again and again and again), “Marisa, I have got to find me a man” or, “Marisa, I think this one is Mr. Right” (after a fifteen minute introductory phone call). My coworker is not a lovesick adolescent, but rather a forty-something single with a child. I have nothing against seeking companionship or a relationship, but the pure vehemence with which she insists that she “needs” one gives me significant pause. I can accept that she grew up a generation or two before me, in which liberalism was nothing compared to modern-day standards; that she was raised in a strict Christian Southern Baptist home; that she might indeed be lonely as she raises her adolescent daughter and that there are serious differences between our two cultures (me being half her age, raised in a liberal home and spending the majority of my life in the hippy-dippy-trippy Northwest), but this desperation for a man isn’t because of a generational gap anymore.

Myspace, Facebook, and other various internet social tools provide an interesting source for analysis. Most of these groups have that marvelous tell-all, “Who would I like to meet” question. What appalls me is that even in individual of my age group and generation—younger even—I see increasing numbers of a phrase which turns my stomach: “I would like to meet the man God has planned for me,” or “The One,” or “My true love.” You get the idea.

So then I ask you: Where have all the feminists gone? With the turn of the 20th century came protests for women’s suffrage, the Great War introduced more women in previously male-dominant profession, the sixties brought free love and bra-burning, the seventies told us that we women have the right to do with our bodies as we so chose and the eighties introduced us to that slightly more militant feminist, who wore blazers and flats and little to no make-up but with good intentions all the same (including making huge strides in the area of sexual harassment in the workplace).


We hit the nineties and..... Then came the movie Clueless, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. The objectification of women (the most gratuitous of which can often be found in music videos, it seems) became commonplace and no longer held much shock value. Preteens across the country were suddenly trying to speak with fake Valley Girl accents, wearing big platform heels, belly shirts, singing “Hit Me Baby One More Time.”

Clearly this type of societal influence on women isn’t new—but isn’t it perhaps now more all-invasive? The sexualization and objectification of women seems to be targeting younger and younger audiences (which has, in fact, been on of the great criticisms of the Christina/Britney group – that their music is hypersexual and yet targets the pre-teens who barely have an understanding of sex themselves)... This antithesis of feminism seems to have saturated our consciousness to the point that we don’t even notice it any more. We study advertising from the fifties selling vacuum-cleaners by making the (women) users look ecstatic in the pictures with a smirk, but don’t even notice the orgasmic cries of women showering in Herbal Essences commercials. More appallingly, we don’t even notice that our girls are being dressed up as “prostitots”—belly shirts and heels at an alarmingly young age. Sexualization before they understand sex. (It might also be noted that appallingly, many studies have concluded that the increase in emphasis on outward appearances—particularly at such a young age—have led to increased rates of depression, eating disorders and low-self esteem.) It’s baffling enough to children to be told “Appearances aren’t everything” and
“It’s your personality that matters” when children are very appearance-oriented...but then to throw them into a world that seems more and more to emphasize ONLY appearances (and the sluttier the younger, apparently) is setting them up for failure (not to mention therapy).

Almost every Disney movie has a princess rescued by her Prince Charming, Barbie would be aimless without Ken (who do you really think she’s got implants and wears six-inch stilettos for?), and even as adults we just love to go to movies and see the male and female protagonists get together in the end—the plot line usually being something about him being the distant, arrogant character brought to love by sweet, darling her. The HBO Series Sex and the City even provides an interesting point for observation. The show was hailed as edgy and racy because it was entirely based on women who had sex. (This is racy? Really?) Yet the title is a bit misleading—the entire series isn’t about women having sex, it’s about women seeking love. Carrie and her endless stream of Mr. Not-So-Right (and didn’t we just love that in the end, she gets with the guy who was an asshole the entire series?); Samantha and her “meaningless” sex—though she ends up in love and relashionshipped by the end; Charlotte and endless pursuit of Prince Charming; and Miranda, the “typical” defeminized career woman who ends up having a baby and getting married to a bartender. Because love conquers all, or something like that.

Is this really what we’re selling our girls (and ourselves), though? Are we really trying to convince ourselves that love conquers all, or are we providing justification and vindication for crappy relationships, where he’s a bastard and you’re a doormat just because love conquers all? Are we just telling our little girls from a young age that they cannot be fulfilled without Mr. Right? That a relationship—to include marriage and children—is the ultimate purpose of their existence? It sounds something like, “Yes, yes, it’s nice that you won the Nobel Prize and that you cured cancer, but have you popped out six babies yet? How is your marriage and what are you cooking for dinner?”

I would never insinuate that to be a mother or a wife is by any means an easy task—and I would even argue that it significantly more difficult than being a husband or father, as in the male roles men are generally expected to be more absent. Thus, mothers have a significant load to bear—and if they work full-time as well, it’s an even greater workload.

But why isn’t it okay to tell our children that they don’t have to have children themselves? And why do we keep allowing our younger generations to liberate themselves from the (FALSE) conviction that a relationship is going to be their “completion?” Why do we keep perpetuating the myth that men have a somehow innate (and liberating) superiority that tells us we are nothing without them? Why can’t we accept that the “emptiness” we experience without a relationship is actually an “emptiness” within ourselves that we can only solve OURSELVES? Why do we keep perpetuating the myth that to have power and to be a feminist we have to be masculine?

When are we bringing feminism back? Make that FEMINISM, all caps.

There is a false perception that somehow being a feminist, being an “independent woman” is masculine. That feminists wear shoulder pads, abhor bras and make-up, and are somehow.... unfeminine?

Being a feminist has actually become a bad word somewhere along the line. How many times do you catch yourself saying, “I’m not a feminist, but...”

I am a FEMINIST. I have lacy clothing, buy expensive bras from Victoria’s Secret, love stiletto heels and purchase Mac cosmetics in unbelievable quantities. I don’t think I’ve ever gone a day without lipgloss. I appreciate when someone opens the door for me. I can be sassy and silly and sexy, all at the same time if I want to. And I’m a FEMINIST.

I believe that I can be independant and smart. I believe that I shouldn’t hold my opinion
I believe that I'm a whole person unto myself without a man, without a significant other in my life. I don't believe that when I'm in a relationship my goals and purposes should always be second to his. I believe that being intelligent and having intellectual curiosity isn't "masculine"—it's human. I believe that speaking my mind isn't masculine—it's human. I believe that most gender roles are a social construct—and ignore many of them.

I AM A FEMINIST.

I don't believe we should be whoring ourselves to these marketing ploys which quietly and slyly work their ways into our brain and convince us that we are somehow supposed to mold ourselves to a "FEMININE IDEAL." A feminine ideal which is—OPPRESSIVE, SHALLOW, HOLLOW, AND ABSURD. A feminine ideal which is UNATTAINABLE and DRIVES US CRAZY IN PURSUIT OF IT. I don't believe we should be SEXUALIZING OUR CHILDREN BEFORE THEY UNDERSTAND SEX. I don't believe we should KEEP SELLING OURSELVES SHORT.

RISE UP AND DECLARE YOUR FEMINISM.
In stilettos and lipgloss, if you want to.

A Letter to No One
J. Erin Kennedy

Dear you,
What is your name?
In your world far away
Are people so insane?

Sometimes I ache and hurt inside
What about you, do you ever cry?
And when you are all alone
Do you wonder Why?

What is life?
What am I here for?
I know the answer everybody tells me
But still I believe I can soar

I want to mean something
I want to make a better place
In this so-called tragedy
My soul will live in a positive space

I am going to be different
Oh, believe me, I will fly
The world is now my playground
I think I just touched the sky
Autumn Day, October 2007
Allen Berry

Because she was lost in conver­sation,
She walked right past me.
Her boots clicking on the tile floor
As she passed.

(Lovers lose each other like that some­times.)

Somewhere many Autumns later
The shade of a maple leaf,
Or the sound of rattling leaves,
Or maybe a shirt similar to

The one I was wearing that day
Jogged her memory.
She keyed my old number
But there is no area code
For decades past.

Conversation
Tamara White

You choke me as I persist to verbalize those contagions of my thoughts
Swallowing pride still felt, yet trying to get those words out of the inner parts of my crevice.
Let’s connect...
It’s crazy how we sit in silence bursting with that energy that suppresses us,
Creating a space where the immaculate conception of our deceptions is felt with every breath that is taken... Our words become hollow... Our voices shallow...
My perception!
My perception of persistence stems from gaining knowledge of the situation that we are in
How we twist and twist our conversation deep with in resisting the internal dialogue that drowns us into
Non-existence and the external entities lose the spaces of reality we sought to seek...
Let’s get deep!
The conundrum of the darkness that is captured defines the delineation of our relationship... so
I submit... I submit to the utterance of your words
The style of your conversation
The message that is heard...
So I submit in order to be heard...
The sun dipped below the horizon as Sean turned the car down the dirt road leading to State Road 31. In the passenger seat Kim stared uneasily as shadows sought to bury them in semi-darkness. She disapproved of this short-cut that left them isolated from the outside world, but Sean insisted the side-road shortened their trip by two hours and Seth and Jamie, sitting in the back seat, agreed readily with him.

After finishing up summer classes, Kim and Jamie needed a break before fall classes started and so Sean suggested they head to the beach for the weekend. Besides the relaxation, Kim looked at the trip as an opportunity to cement her relationship with Sean. They had gone out several times over the past month, but biology kept her in the library for most of July so they had spent little time getting to know each other up to this point. A weekend trip seemed a good way to grow their relationship.

As they became more enmeshed in the woods and the sky steadily darkened, Kim found herself wishing she had put up more of a resistance to this shortcut. Overhead, storm clouds blotted out the stars with the threat of rain. Trees towered along either side of the road, obscuring their surroundings as the four drove towards 31. Once the sun disappeared completely the night temperature steadily dropped, forcing them to turn on the heater.

Jamie shivered and cuddled up closer to Seth. He glanced at her with a smile, his deep brown eyes conveying warmth, and wrapped his arms around her.

"Cold?" he asked.

"A little," she replied, wriggling a little closer. He kissed her gently and then rubbed the sides of her arms to warm her.

"Don't worry, we'll be there soon enough."

As they drove on, the headlights suddenly shone upon an old man trudging along the road, seemingly oblivious to the car traveling behind him. He wondered briefly how the old man saw the road in the darkness, but since he took no notice of the light cast upon him by the car, and since Kim was already timorous about this stretch of road he sped past without a second thought. Why get trapped into giving the man a ride? He just wanted to get to the beach.

Once they passed him, the darkness re-enveloped the old man, which only caused Kim's anxiety to grow. She longed to see the headlights of other cars. She imagined a train of taillights stretching towards the horizon, and thought there could not be a more welcome sight at this particular moment.

Suddenly a loud Pop startled Kim from her thoughts and the car lurched to the right, making her grasp the door handle and stiff arm the dashboard in fear. Sean slammed his foot on the break pedal and fought the steering, attempting to keep the car from careening into the trees impeding diversion. After a few nerve-racking seconds of swerving back and forth across the dividing line, Sean regained control of the steering enough to pull the car to the side of the road.
road and park it.

“Shit! I didn’t think I’d be able to stop the damn thing,” said Sean, chest heaving from adrenaline.

“What happened?” gasped Jamie, pulse racing in shock.

“Pretty sure we blew a damn tire,” he replied. “Seth, help me check it out.”

Sean withdrew a flashlight from under his seat, clambered out the driver’s side door, and hurried around the front of the car to get a look at the right front tire. A jagged line gaped through the bottom of the tire. Seth joined him a second later to stare at it in annoyance.

“You have a spare?” Seth asked in a tone that assumed he did.

“Yeah, in the trunk,” he replied, pointing towards the rear of the car. “Shit! So much for gettin’ to the beach quicker!”

The two retreated to the trunk to fetch the spare tire and jack. Meanwhile, the girls sat idly in the car worrying over the portents of this omen, neither of them wanting to proceed further down this dusty road.

Sean grabbed the spare tire and hauled it out of the car. “Girls you’re gonna have to get out for us to change the tire,” he said, clearly annoyed they had not already done so. The girls joined them reluctantly. Seth found the jack and searched around for some other tools.

“Do you have a wrench back here?” asked Seth.

“There should be one in the bag with the jack,” replied Sean as he placed the tire on the ground next to the flat.

“There isn’t,” Seth said, continuing the search.

“I thought the arm on a jack usually doubled as a wrench,” said Jamie questioningly.

“Most do,” said Sean with a frown. “-but that piece of crap doesn’t. It’s gotta be back there somewhere Seth.” Sean marched back to help Seth look for the wrench while the girls huddled closer together, shivering in the cold.

“This is an unfortunate predicament you’re in,” said an unfamiliar voice. All four jumped with fright and spun simultaneously towards the voice, flashlight illuminating the old man they’d seen traveling behind them. Hearts raced as they stared at the old man. Shorter than either of the boys, he resembled a Jew straight out of a Nazi prison camp, all bones and no flesh. A long, dirty-white beard hung from his chin as if he had never seen a razor in his life.

“Shit man,” swore Sean, looking warily at the old man. “You scared the hell out of me!”

“Sorry...but unavoidable I’m afraid,” replied the old man. “I see you have a flat. Need any help?”

“Actually, we need a wrench,” said Seth. “We can’t find ours and haven’t picked up a cell phone signal for a while.”

“I don’t carry wrenches with me, but I know of an old house a little ways up the road from here,” replied the old man. “It’s abandoned, but you might find some old tools in the shed. I’ll be happy to show you the way. You can push the car along after me, and fix the tire at the house.”

“How do you know there’s a house around here?” asked Jamie suspiciously. After all, they were a little too remote for hitchhikers.

“I used to live in the town a little ways back,” replied the old man. He smiled warmly, but his piercing blue eyes were all Kim saw of his face. Those eyes contained secrets.

“What little town? We didn’t see any town on our way here,” she told him, suspicion growing.

“There used to be a town in these parts; it burned down when I was a young man,” he
answered matter-of-factly.

"Why are you traveling alone out here in the middle of nowhere?" asked Kim nervously.

"It's not far," he promised, turning to resume his journey along the narrow road.

"We won't get anywhere sitting here," said Sean with a shrug. "Might as well follow him.

Seth, help me push. Kim you steer us. Jamie hold the flashlight."

"I don't like this," whispered Kim timidly. "This old man scares me."

"We have no choice," replied Sean angrily, then sarcastically. "Would you prefer to sit here and hope someone else drives along?"

"I told you we this shortcut was a bad idea," she said, making her way to the front door and dropping into the driver's seat. She held the wheel steady as Sean and Seth heaved, putting all their strength into pushing the car. It crept forward behind the old man. His re-entrance unnerved her, though it made perfect sense. They had passed him mere moments before the tire blew. The car rolled along slowly, which Kim reasoned as resistance to following the old man. The car did not stop altogether however. It rolled after the old man as he trudged forward. The boys pushed and grunted for about fifteen minutes before coming upon a side road stretching off into the woods.

"We have to turn down this road," said the old man turning back to them. "The house is this way. We are almost there."

Kim turned the wheel to the right, and the two young men exerted more effort into pushing the car forward. After another five minutes of exertion, a house arose out of the shadows, looming before them.

Though at a loss to explain why, the sight of the house perturbed Kim more than the old man. As the car rolled up in front, Kim took in the house standing before her. It was a nice two-story estate, probably belonging to a rich couple at one time, but now worn with age. Cobwebs lined every window, holes dotted the roof where water had eroded away its strength, and glass, from shattered windows, lie in shards on the sills and ground.

"Let's search the shed first," said Sean. "We'll have to go together. We have only one flashlight."

"Ok," replied the other three in unison, no one desiring to be left alone in the darkness.

"I'll wait here on the steps," said the old man. Sean headed towards the shed, the other three following on his heels. In the shed they found more cobwebs, dirt, and a few rats scurrying from the light. The girls faltered at the movement, but the boys plunged in and they were forced to follow or lose the light. On a bench to their left hung a hammer, saw, and several gardening tools, but found nothing to change a tire with.

"Wait a minute," said Sean. "I think my dad might've put the wrench in the glove compartment. He helped me work on the car last week, and he used to keep his wrench there in his own car."

The four rushed back to the car and found the old man perched up on the steps as promised. Sean opened the passenger door, fumbled around in the glove compartment, and then held up the wrench triumphantly.

"I found it," he said and just then thunder roared in the sky overhead and it began to sprinkle. "We better hurry, before it rains any harder."

The two boys immediately began work on the tire. Seth jacked up the right side, and Sean unbolted the tire. Once he finished removing the lug nuts, he removed the flat and Seth slipped the spare into place as another thunderous clap rumbled overhead and the rain started pouring down. They were quickly soaked through and the boys worked rapidly to finish.

Sean tightened the last bolt on the tire when lightning lit up the countryside, and the
clouds covering the sky dumped their moisture upon the group in torrents. They ran for the cover provided by the porch, and then stared out at the thunderstorm delaying their trip.

“I’m completely soaked,” complained Kim.

“Let’s look inside for something to dry off with,” suggested Sean.

“Great idea,” replied Kim sarcastically. “I hope this is better than your short-cut idea.”

“How was I to know the tire would blow?” asked Sean exasperatedly.

“Your shortcut down that unpaved road increased our chances,” replied Kim.

“Alright, it’s entirely my fault,” Sean said resignedly. “Let’s just go inside and see what we find.”

They filed into the house soberly. The door led into an expansive living room with a staircase to the left and a couple of doorways on the right, and a fireplace on the back wall. A couple of couches and several chairs were situated around the living room, every bit of it layered in a thick coat of dust. Water pouring in through the broken windows or leaking in through the holes in the roof had damaged much of the furniture as well.

“The kitchen will probably have some candles,” suggested Jamie as she stared into the first doorway, presumably the kitchen.

They found the kitchen as furnished as the living room. It appeared as though the inhabitants had suddenly left one day, leaving all their belongings when they went. Seth checked the pantry, and Sean looked in the cabinets. Jamie and Kim started rummaging through the drawers.

“I found some candles,” said Kim after a few minutes poking around.

“There are some matches up here,” said Sean. Seth walked over with some candle-holders he found on the table, and they quickly lit several candles.

“Hey, where did the old man go?” asked Jamie looking around her. They surveyed the room, but found no sign of him. They filed back to the living room, but the old man had disappeared.

“That old man is creepy,” said Kim apprehensively. “He keeps appearing and disappearing. I don’t like it.”

Jamie nodded in agreement and the girls made their way over to a couch and sat down. Sean, noticing a grate with firewood, started building a fire. Shortly a fire burned brightly, flames leaping and casting flickering shadows around the room.

“That’s a little better,” said Sean triumphantly and they moved closer to the fire to warm themselves. They longed to remove their damp clothing, but none of them had the courage yet to wander through the rest of the house to search for dry clothes. Instead, they huddled around the fire.

Over the fireplace Kim noticed a picture of a young couple sitting by a river. The young man wore a fancy button-down shirt, what appeared to be long shorts, and socks that ran up his calves almost to his knees. The young woman wore a pretty green dress. The young man searched the river, a determined expression upon his face, but the girl looked as though something troubled her. She appeared sad, and that sadness conveyed itself upon Kim.

“What a melancholy picture to have over the fireplace,” Kim remarked.

“They were the last owners of the house,” said a voice behind them. As before, the four jumped in fright and whipped around to see the old man had returned.

“You’ve got to stop that,” said Seth exasperatedly.

“I thought I was going to die you scared me so bad,” heaved Kim.

“Stop being overdramatic,” shot Sean, giving her a dark look.

“As I said, those two were the last owners of this house,” continued the old man. “As
They are rumored to still inhabit the house. Those who know of the place believe it to be haunted. At least, the people in the town I grew up in thought so. Would you like to hear the story? Overhead thunder roared, and the rain continued to pour down in an unending flood.

“We aren’t leaving right now,” said Sean. “We might as well hear the story.” He hoped the distraction might distract Kim from their surroundings and present condition. The others stared silently into the fire. They wanted to leave this eerie house and the impermanent old man, but they were hesitant to brave the storm outside, especially on an isolated road with no lights and likely no other shelter.

The young girl grew up in my town some years before I was born. Her parents named her Julie. The older townsfolk described her as a beautiful young girl with brown hair that hung in tresses upon her shoulders. She had a fair complexion and emerald green eyes.

Her father was the town preacher, and she had an older brother and a younger sister. Her mother, a seamstress, made clothing for most of the village’s inhabitants. When Julie was old enough, she helped her mother, and most assumed she would one day replace her mother, as her mother had replaced her grandmother.

Julie was courted by a young man named Gregory. Gregory’s father owned the town goods store, and Gregory worked for his father, hoping one day to replace his father as owner. Gregory wasn’t the best looking boy in town. A tall and gangly boy, he had short sandy-colored hair and too many freckles. Gregory was a very intelligent young man however. His father did well as the owner of the store, and therefore afforded his son a fairly good education by the town’s standards. Gregory was the only child in town to have a private tutor hired to teach him. Like the other boys in town, Gregory longed for Julie’s attention. He used all of his education and any money his father gave him to win her over. As there were few boys in the town to choose from, Julie finally allowed Gregory to court her. Gregory spent every free moment with Julie, doing his best to dazzle her with his knowledge, and spending everything he had on gifts to please her. Gregory fell deeply in love with her, and though she never returned his affections with his level of enthusiasm, he assumed that was her temperament; she was simply more restrained in the display of her emotions.

After a year of courting, Gregory became more prominent in his role at his father’s shop, and he felt it would soon be in a position to propose to Julie.

Around this time however, a young man named Jake moved to the town. Actually, he moved to this very house we’re in this evening. Jake’s father inherited the house when his uncle died. Since Jake’s older brother stood to inherit the family business, Jake decided to set out on his own and his father gave him the house.

From the moment Jake arrived, he fell in love with Julie. He thought her the most enchanting creature he had ever seen, and he put all his efforts into winning her affections. At first, Julie seemed disconcerted about Jake’s pursuance, but Jake’s natural good looks and earnestness gave her pause to consider his words. She knew she possessed no real love for Gregory, and the passion she felt around Jake overwhelmed her.

Gregory fought desperately to ward off Jake’s advances, but his efforts were in vain. Julie soon favored Jake’s entreaties, leaving Gregory to lament his loss in solitude.

Within a few months, Jake and Julie married in the town chapel, and she moved into this house. The town adored the young couple, perceiving their relationship as a fairy tale come to life; as if Paris and Helen had suddenly dropped down into their lives. Gregory regrettably grew to hate Jake, though he never let on to anyone. He spurious feigned to love them as much as anyone, but everyday he jealously watched Jake with the girl that belonged to him, powerless to win her back. His knowledge and wealth, by the town’s standards, availed him nothing. He bid his time...
silently, hoping for an opportunity to avenge himself upon the illustrious thief.

A year migrated south and the happy couple had a son, whom they named Stacy. The boy’s birth proved arduous for Julie, nearly claiming her life. The doctor told her another pregnancy might very well kill her so the two contented themselves with raising their only son. The little family blossomed in the town, and before they knew it, five years had passed.

One black tempestuous evening Gregory snuck out to this house, no longer willing to sit by while Jake enjoyed the life owed to him. He had even begun to hate Julie for abandoning him in favor of Jake. He arrived with a bottle of wine, dissembling desire for the warmth of their company on such a turbulent night. The pair happily welcomed him in to their home.

Before leaving the store for their house, Gregory had slipped laudanum into the wine. Jake and Julie drank liberally from the bottle, unaware Gregory’s glass never emptied. After a short time of spirited conversation, the laudanum dropped them into a deep slumber.

Gregory took advantage of their unconscious state to drag them to their bed, arranging them as if they had retired for the evening. He leaned over Julie’s sleeping form once tucked away in the bed and whispered, “I still love you,” before gently kissing her on the lips. Gregory lurched back to his feet and rushed down to the living room where the fire blazed in the hearth. Using the little ash shovel, he scooped up a couple of small embers and placed them on the bearskin rug in front of the fireplace. He blew frenziedly on the embers until they lit the rug. He stood back and observed morosely as the fire rapidly enveloped the rug and began to spread, and then fled the house.

The next morning, Julie’s parents traveled out to the house. Little Stacy had spent the night with them, and they were bringing him home. The sight that greeted them was horrific. Ash and rubble lay where their once proud home stood.

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Kim. “This house isn’t burned down.”

“If you’ll be patient,” said the old man. “It will be explained to you. May I continue?”

“Yes,” said Jamie eagerly. She loved these kinds of stories. “I want to see how this turns out.”

“Thank you,” answered the old man graciously. “As I was saying, Stacy and his grandparents found only rubble. Once the fire spread throughout the house, the rain was ineffectual to squelch its fury. The bodies were found in bed and people assumed, as Gregory intended, that the house caught fire while they slept and the smoke asphyxiated them.

Stacy was devastated. He had lived a sheltered, happy childhood and after their death he withdrew into himself. His grandparents strove to repair his broken heart, but he held little interest for anyone. He refused all attempts at friendship, preferring to spend his time consumed in one book or another, reading make-believe stories and fantasizing about another life.

When Stacy had grown into a young man, his father appeared to him in a dream. Angry he shared with Stacy what Gregory had done, how he had shattered their family. Jake demanded his son avenge them and set out the plan he had devised for his son.

Stacy began by rebuilding the house his parents lived in, the house you are resting in at this moment. It took him nearly a year to build it, and everyone in the town aided him in whatever way available to them. Once he completed the house, Stacy moved back in and started planning his revenge.

Stacy waited until Gregory went out hunting for deer. He followed Gregory into the woods, and when Gregory took up a spot to wait, he stealthily crept up behind Gregory and shot him. He carried the body back to the house and buried it in the cellar underneath the house. Before he buried the body though, he placed a curse upon Gregory’s remains. This
curse bound Gregory's spirit to the house. As long as it stood, Gregory’s spirit remained trapt to this house, abandoned for its duration. Stacy however, not realizing his parents remains were buried under the house among the ashes from the fire, cursed their souls as well.

The townsfolk used to claim their souls inhabit the painting over the fireplace. Jake looks for Gregory to ensure the curse remains intact. Julie on the other hand, looks sad. She regrets how deeply her abandonment hurt Gregory. She also sorrows for her husband, who labored in the grave to exact vengeance upon their killer, and in so doing doomed them all to this eternal unrest. Finally she grieves for her son, whose childhood was stolen by Gregory, and then lead to such injustice by his father. As for Gregory, he is rumored to wander the house and surrounding hills, hoping for the destruction of the house which releases him from his torment.

“That’s some love triangle,” exclaimed Seth. “You don’t have any crazy former lovers like that, do you Jamie?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Jamie replied coolly, then smiling winsomely. “No one for you to worry about!” She moved over in front of him and he wrapped his arms around her.

“What a tragic story,” said Kim somberly. “The poor couple drugged and killed, and their son having to grow up without really knowing his parents.”

“Jake had it coming to him after what he did to Gregory,” disagreed Sean. “He stole the man’s girl.”

“You’re condoning their murder?” gasped Kim!

“Well, maybe not murder,” stammered Sean. “-but he definitely should’ve whipped Jake’s tail when he first started after Julie.”

“What about Julie’s feelings?” protested Kim. “She didn’t love Gregory.”

“Doesn’t matter,” declared Sean. “If she wanted to break up with Gregory she would have. Jake deserved to be punished for what he did.”

“Gregory took Jake and Julie’s lives when he killed them,” the old man offered despondently. “The punishment grossly exceeded the crime.”

“It did,” agreed Jamie. “On the other hand, so did Jake’s revenge. Jake had no right to curse Gregory’s soul, nor burden his son’s soul with such an atrocious act of revenge.”

“How many others suffered, like Stacy and his grandparents, for Gregory’s actions?” asked the old man mournfully.

“Doesn’t matter,” replied Jamie sternly. “He deserved to be punished for what he did, but to curse his soul upon the Earth, assuming such a thing were possible. No person living or dead has the right to cast such a punishment on another.”

“I’m really freaked by this whole discussion,” declared Kim wide-eyed. “I think leaving might be a good idea.”

There’s no ghost,” said Sean condescendingly with a look of disgust. “We’re perfectly fine.”

“Perfectly fine?” she retorted. “Did you hear what he said? A body is buried in the cellar. There is nothing fine about this place.”

“It is only a story,” he remarked snidely, rolling his eyes. “And even if the bones of some guy were buried in the cellar, you won’t see them. We’re not traveling in this storm so we might as well try to find some warm clothes to change into. We can sleep here in the living room together, and leave first thing in the morning.”

“So much for this short-cut,” complained Kim to no one in particular. Sean rolled his eyes as he headed towards the staircase, the other three in tow. At the top of the stairs they entered the doorway on their left. It led into the master bedroom. A nice four-poster bed stretched out from the back wall.
“Hmm, do you want to sleep here?” asked Sean slyly to Kim. “It’ll give us a little privacy to enjoy our vacation.”

“Not a chance,” replied Kim briskly. “I’m sleeping downstairs with everyone. I won’t feel safe ’til we’re out of this house and the more people around me the better.”

Sean shrugged his shoulders, regretful at wasting the opportunity, and strolled over to the dresser to rummage through the drawers.

“Let’s see what’s in the closet,” said Kim, pulling Jamie after her. She carefully pulled open the door and the two peered inside. The dim outline of shoes and clothes lined the closet, coming into focus when Jamie held out the candle. Their eyes were immediately drawn to an ordinary wooden chest lying unobtrusively in the right corner. It reminded Kim of the chest her grandmother used to keep in her room. Jamie used to go with Kim when she visited her grandmother when they were little girls and they spent hours playing with the dresses and combs and other little keepsakes locked inside.

“It looks just like Grandma Jean’s,” stated Kim dazzled.

“I know,” breathed Jamie excitedly. Both girls dashed forward, plopped before the chest, and lifted the lid to examine its contents. The top of the chest contained dresses.

“Oh, they’re so pretty,” said Kim delightedly as she picked up a light green one with a black sash tied around the waist.

“I bet these belonged to Julie,” she remarked as she held the dress to her own waist, seeing if it came close to her size.

“Her house burned down,” said Jamie dryly. “Everything destroyed remember.”

“Maybe this chest survived,” replied Kim hopefully. “It’s the only thing of Julie’s that survived.”

The girls sifted through the other dresses in the chest, “oohing” at each before setting them aside with great care in order to see the next. In the bottom they found a large, navy blue book, which Kim lifted out reverently. The title on the front read, The True Account of My Parents, Jake and Julie Matheson, by Stacy Matheson. The letters printed in gold. The fragile book looked ready to fall apart under Kim’s handling, but she gently opened the book. Attached to the first page was a clipping from an unknown newspaper. The title read, Disaster in Opal County.

“We found clothes for everyone,” announced Sean. He held a couple pairs of pants from a dresser drawer and handed a pair to Seth. “Put it away Kim. Let’s change, and head downstairs to get some sleep.”

Kim reluctantly placed the book back in the chest and stood up to retrieve the clothes Sean had tossed on the bed for her. They changed quickly into the clothes, and headed back downstairs.

“Wait a second,” said Jamie in surprise as they paraded down the stairs. “The old man’s gone again. Where’s he keep disappearing to?”

“Don’t worry,” assured Seth calmly. “He’s probably roaming around the house somewhere. He’s harmless.”

“I don’t care,” asserted Jamie tartly. “I’m not sleeping if we don’t know where he is.”

Sean sighed in annoyance, casting Seth a look that communicated “the things we do for women.” Seth caught the message, but made no reply, either with his tongue or his eyes.

“Seth and I’ll keep watch,” offered Sean soothingly, though he clearly wished to do nothing of the sort. “One of us’ll watch while the others sleep. We’ll take turns.”

“Fine,” allowed Jamie crossly. “But you better not fall asleep.”

“I’ll take the first watch,” offered Sean.
Seth and Jamie curled up together on the floor to sleep. He wrapped a blanket he found upstairs under the bed over them and used his arm as a pillow. Jamie used his other arm. Sean took a seat on the couch, and Kim lay down next to him, her head resting in his lap. As she drifted off to sleep, Sean ran his fingers through her hair. Her alarm at their present situation irritated him. The bed upstairs would have been much more comfortable to sleep in and he saw no reason for her refusal, but bore his vexation silently. No need to spoil the rest of their trip. Girls tended to get moody when you pointed out the silliness of their fears. Besides, he’d have plenty of opportunities to get her alone at the beach, and if she remained reticent then...well, there were other girls at the beach to sneak off with.

Kim fell back into consciousness when Sean moved her head and stood up to tend to the fire. A small flame smoldered in the fireplace, but as Sean added a few more logs to the fire, the flames surged forth again; caressing the fuel of its passions as it licked the air above.

Kim’s eyes were drawn once more to the picture over the mantelpiece. Jake continued to glare straight ahead, but Julie’s eyes drew her attention this time. The eyes stared right at her. They were still filled with deep sorrow and pity, but now it seemed as though Julie’s sorrow and pity were directed at her. The look unsettled her, but she shrugged it off.

It’s only a trick of the light, she rationalized to herself. Julie’s not really there looking at me. Nonetheless, Kim suddenly felt the need to escape its gaze.

“Sean, let’s go back upstairs,” Kim asked. “I want to see the book again.”

“So go look at it,” replied Sean disinterestedly. “You don’t need my help.”

“I want you to come with me,” she answered timidly, unable to disguise the dismay she felt at the prospect of wandering anywhere in the house alone. “I don’t want to go alone.”

Without waiting for his response, Kim started towards the stairs. Sean thought briefly about ignoring her plea, but decided to avoid causing a fight right now. Instead he sighed, stabbed at the fire a couple more times, and stalked after her.

Kim reentered the master bedroom and quickly traversed the room and into the closet where she plopped back down in front of the chest. The dresses they removed from the chest still lay in a neat stack to her left, but were forgotten now. Behind her Sean had entered the room and begun to once more search the room for anything of interest. Kim raised the lid cautiously, unwilling to damage the antique chest and retrieved the book from its bottom, carefully handling the book lest the pages spill out from the cover. For a moment she sat motionless, mesmerized by the book. Gently, she brushed her fingers over the lettering on the front of the book and then opened the cover.

“Seth, what the hell are you doing?” yelled Jamie from downstairs. “Stop!”

Kim awoke from her reverie, jumping up as Sean burst out of the room. Kim ran after him, stopping at the rail to stare down uncomprehendingly at the bizarre scene below. Seth brandished a torch and dashed about, setting the house ablaze. He lit curtains, couches, and paintings — anything within reach. He grasped a chair and smashed it against the wall tossing the pieces into the flames. For a couple of seconds the two stood transfixed, unable to process what was happening or react. Then, as if instinct took over, Sean hustled down the stairs to stop Seth.

“Seth, what’re you doing?” exclaimed Sean as he paused to measure Seth’s mindless rampage. “Why are you setting the place on fire?”

Seth, heedless of Sean’s queries, continued destroying everything in sight. He grabbed
another chair and turned to hurl it into the wall. As he did so Sean saw into his eyes. An icy blue gaze glared through him. All of the life and recognition Sean normally saw was absent, replaced by intense hatred. Without wasting another moment he charged Seth to tackle him. Seth seemed unaware of Sean and made no move to stop him, instead focusing on an undamaged lamp table. Sean hit him, carrying the latter off his feet and they sprawled to the floor. Seth’s head thudded off the wall, leaving him momentarily stunned.

Behind the two, the girls wailed in terror as the fire quickly spread through the house. The flames raced up curtains and across furniture, rapidly consuming everything within the house.

“Sean, we have to get out of here,” screamed Jamie as he stood staring down on Seth’s unconscious body. “The fire is out of control. We have to go now.”

Jamie’s words jarred Sean from his examination and thoughts of Seth, and he glanced around the room. All forms of escape were quickly deteriorating with the house. Smoke filled the room, forcing the girls to stumble towards the front door, leaving Sean to bring Seth. He leaned down to pick up his unconscious friend, placed him over his shoulders, and moved toward the front door, struggling to breathe. The girls were already outside. He traipsed slowly to the door, half pushed half fell through the screen, hobbled down the steps, and dropped Seth against the side of the car. His chest heaved from the exertion.

Next to him, Kim and Jamie stared at the house silently as flames enveloped every inch of it, and he leaned back against the car to support him and watch it as well. What little rain still fell did little to quench the conflagration roaring into the sky. The house was beyond saving, not that any of them had the slightest inclination to try. By morning a smoking pile of ruins would be all that remained of the place.

“What happened to the house?” asked Seth curiously from below. The three jumped in fright. “How did it catch fire?”

“What the hell do you mean?” cried Jamie in outrage. “You started the fire you idiot. You ruined the house and nearly killed us all.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Seth in shock at the accusation. “I didn’t set a fire. I went to sleep with you and when I wake up, I’m lying outside against the car.”

“We all saw you starting the fire,” answered Jamie, anger flaring across her countenance. Seth appealed to his friends whose faces confirmed her accusations.

“We all saw you do it,” said Sean, but his voice lacked accusation. “-when I saw your eyes though, you weren’t there. You looked straight at me and without recognition. It creeped me out.”

“And you claimed there was nothing wrong with this place,” accused Kim fearfully. “We shouldn’t have come here. Let’s go!”

None of them argued with her plea. They swiftly reclaimed their places in the car. Sean slammed the key in the ignition and jerked it forward, the engine roaring to life in response. After shifting into drive, he gunned the engine and floored the accelerator as the car back towards the dirt road leading from the house with no intention of letting up until they saw lights from other cars.

“You still have that book?” asked Sean disdainfully when he saw it resting in Kim’s lap. “Why are you taking it with us?”

“I want to read the rest of it,” she replied defensively. “I’m curious what this book says compared with the story the old man told us. I want to know the real story.”

It sat untouched in her lap as they drove though. For the moment her only concern was escape from the house, really from the entire detour. Behind them the inferno lit up the sky,
though none of them were brave enough to even look back and see it. They feared what they 
might see traveling behind them.

They drove in silence for a good fifteen to twenty miles before Sean eased up on the 
accelerator, dropping down to a more normal speed. Ahead lay an intersecting road, plenty of 
cars headed along it.

Feeling her fear slowly drain away, Kim flipped on the overhead light, once again 
reaching for the cover of the blue book. Attached to the first page was the newspaper article, 
very old and creased. Looking at the article she read silently.

“Disaster in Opal County. October 13, 1874. The lives of Jake and Julie Matheson 
were tragically brought to a close last night when their house caught fire. Local authorities 
believe the fire started from an improperly doused fireplace. The leftover coals caught a rug on 
fire, which quickly spread to the rest of the house. The couple died in their sleep, presumably 
from smoke inhalation. The house was found the next morning by Mr. & Mrs. Williams, Julie 
Matheson’s parents, who were bringing young Stacy Matheson home. The funeral will be held 
Monday morning.”

Kim turned the page and found pictures of the young couple. On the left page were two 
separate portraits of the young couple, the first of them in their wedding clothes, the second 
of them standing in front of their home. On the right page she found a reprint of the picture 
from over the fireplace. In this picture however, the couple gaily stared into each other’s eyes 
as though they were the only two who existed in the whole world. She tried to imagine Sean 
and herself in their place; tried placing the two of them sitting in that meadow overlooking the 
river, but the image escaped her, as if Sean did not belong in such an idyllic setting, which 
troubled her. Perhaps they just needed more time together. Perhaps he would transform into 
the Jake that swept Julie off her feet with the force of his love.

She glanced wistfully at the pictures for a few minutes before turning the page to sift 
through the rest of the book. The next page however, jolted her from daydreams. She paled as 
she stared at the picture glued to the page.

“What’s wrong Kim?” asked Jamie, sensing and then seeing Kim’s alarm. “What do 
you see?”

Kim held the book up for the rest of them to see. A young man glared at them from 
the page, eyes full of rage. Despite the difference in age and the immense beard, the old man 
clearly resembled the young one in the photograph. An inscription was written beneath the 
picture. Tibult Gregory Boothe. Taken shortly before he disappeared February 22, 1894.

**Been Here Before**

**Damien Field**

We’ve been here before, you and I, 
Where you’d playing the ‘woe is me’ card, 
And I would scramble to make things right; 
But now I know better and I walk away.

There was a time when your tears tore my heart, 
And when I’d give you anything to make it alright, 
But that was before I knew the truth, 
That you’d just bleat those sheepish cries anew, 
When you wanted more attention shown to you.
Saw But Didn’t See
Sergey S Sarkisov II

I’m a giant born,
In a big brand home,
I’ve been here and there,
I go everywhere,
America, Mexico, Canada, all of it,
Even some of the Caribbean, and the hit,
Where they speak Portuguese in Brazil,
And eat some cool meat,
And I didn’t get tired one innocent bit.

And then I ran along the sky,
There wasn’t a place to which I didn’t fly,
First, Europe was my choice of treat,
England, France, Italy, and Spain by feet,
And all that other stuff,
Keeping Germany in mind,
The whole west, mid-west, till no more was to find.

I gave the eastern Europe a chance of my respect,
They failed me and knew me not,
Save for the Russian cap,
And St. Petersburg’s minor affect.

Headed I southeast to see a bit a dat n’ dis,
Ukraine, Greece, Iran were rather boring,
They had their own strange stuff,
And I, the giant, wasn’t for ‘em.
Same goes for, Turkey, Israel and E-gypt,
So sickening as I was lyin’ in that crypt.

India was the next friend that I met,
It was big, bulky, brown, and fat,
Not the people, for a giant like me doesn’t care,
To even question individuals living anywhere,
It was all so confusing,
I thought it a mess,
Yes, America sucks and is boring,
But I couldn’t take the way these people dress,
And they had no courtesy, not even for me,
They thought I was one of them who couldn’t see.
Enough of the crap I thought,
And I headed straight for China,
Wow! Nothing as I expected,
Just yella India kinda,
Same pushing the big man,
Same disrespect,
Too many people
And problems for a fact.
The Great Wall wasn't all that great to me,
I could easily climb over it as if I've climbed a tree.

So this goes to show that the whole world's a waste,
I didn't try some other stuff, like Africa's waste,
I didn't check out Australia or the Philippines,
Nor the cold, lonely, and distant islands as it seems.

But I've been everywhere,
And I know everything,
The world revolves around the sun,
And I feel the heat.

I feel that deep down I'm the main king,
So all of you ignorant poor, get down on your feet!

But if I'm so great,
Why do I have no friends?
Tears are pouring down my face,
And I thought the sun only caused flames.
I don't understand why I'm in so much pain,
Maybe the "giant" must also take blame.

In the cities of every place, people smiled,
The danced, spoke, sang, and were friends,
I thought I'd know the world by now,
But did I stop to think about everyone else's intents?

I now see that to understand the world, a man,
Must be a man unselfish to open his mind and give his hand,
And so my journeys have let me to this plan...
Fountain by a Waterfall
Kyle Medlen

at first I bathed
in the misty rushing waterfall gleaming bright
fishes tickling my shins
as they darted about.

Now the sun sets
I stand on a concrete bridge
and attempt to
drink from a shattered glass
its serrated edges
constantly cutting my
lips and gums
the salty familiar
taste of blood

My finely sculpted statue
spouting water from your mouth
overflowing from your bucket
I find you crumbling to something
underneath,
a bloody, pulpy mass
where no stitch will do.

Choose
Damien Field

You can choose to be happy,
You can choose to be miserable,
You can choose to huddle in darkness,
You can choose to dwell in the light.

You can live life afraid of what may happen,
You can live life in anxiety and trepidation,
You can live life with courage and strength,
You can live life with hope and peace.

You can believe in nothing at all,
You can believe in a beautiful lie,
You can believe in something powerful,
You can believe in a simple truth.

Choose life, happiness, and the light,
Live life with courage, strength, hope, and peace,
Choose to believe in the powerful and sublime truth,
Or not; but for your sake, just choose.
The Face

Christian Bonnell

Her hair is black as Raven’s plumes,
as rich as new moon light.
Those velvet curls which freely fall
to hide her face from sight
Are brushed away by ivory hands
as delicate and as fine
As any angel’s touch, both
immortal and divine.

Her cheeks are fair, but still are crowned
with freckles freely spaced,
She needs no rouge to cover such
perfection as her face.
Her shoulders sway with feline grace
to my stone steady stance,
To grace the space whereon she moves
in our two minded dance.

Her eyes of golden fire gaze
upon my very heart
And find there ready kindle made
of each and every part...
But her heart is tamer now
than mine will ever be,
To tame I fear to venture out
or love a beast like me.

The Project Staff

Jessie Girty
Kristen Ruccio
Alexandre Fortier-Galarneau
Mario Burton
Ruth Johnson
Lauren Dailey

jessie@jgi.com
pasagshi@t666.com
tocasie@bellsouth.net
diadem@0023.com
rumien5687@com
lailly@gmail.com
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