We dedicate this issue to the memory of
Mary Perna
whose brilliance and sensitivity are sorely missed.

Dreams Fulfilled
by Mary Perna

Our dreams that die are yet fulfilled.
The fading does not kill their seeds.
With our own hands, the fields are tilled.

Upon the land, our blood is spilled.
As we struggle to unearth the weeds
That make our dreams die unfulfilled.

Yet all is only as we willed
When our desires passed our needs,
As greater fields our hands soon tilled.

Frost not felt until all was chilled
Shook our bones as hollow reeds,
And killed young dreams, all unfulfilled.

Familiar roads are now all hilled.
Where smoother ways had paved our deeds,
As fertile fields we ably tilled.

Over ages, the anger stilled,
Until no fuel the fire feeds.
Then dreams expired are yet fulfilled,
As on our knees the fields are tilled.
Our special thanks go to the following people: Marilyn Porter (for her calm amidst the storm); Shirley Daniell (for her ready support); Susan Neville (who began as advisor, and ended as role model and friend), and Dr. Baetzhold, as always.
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A Scene

by Patricia Wheeler

The sky is a leaden grey. It is as if now is but a brief moment between storms. The seemingly endless sea is a heavy dark-green, almost black. A cold wind is blowing towards the shore. It furls the water into whitecaps, and then dashes them against the wall on which I am standing.

The wall is composed of dirty, grey-brown stones that appear to have known the sea for a long time. Scraps of paper and cigarette butts attest that the wall has also known man. The ocean, too, is littered with man’s trash, but it hardly seems to care.

After all, the sea is forever. I look to the west, and I see no end, only the liquid horizon battling with the sky. There are seagulls riding in that sky and dipping in the cold wind. Their harsh cries speak of loneliness; whether theirs, the sea’s, the sky’s or even mine, I do not know. The seagull’s cawing seems to counterpoint the swooshing of the waves as they futilely batter at the stone wall. With each new attack I am sprayed with the salt water the wind throws at me.

The wind also carries the smells of the sea: the tang of salt water, the death of seaweed, the decay of long-dead jellyfish. The wind is cold and sharp, and smells of death. Soon the sun will also die as it goes down, unseen behind the clouds. All that will remain is the wind, the sea, the seagulls and myself.
Sailor's Lament

by J. B. Brickley

I would have been a sailor,
Had the winds of time stood still,
At the helm of a whaling schooner,
Or perhaps on a crabman's troller,
Had my birth been on the same beam,
With the age of maritime.

I would have been a captain,
With the tradewinds in my face,
In the slashing gales of winter,
Or the quiet calms of summer,
Had the seasons of my lifetime,
Been some centuries ago.

I would have been a seaman,
With my hands upon the mainsheet,
Out to sea at light's first breaking,
And in port by sun's red setting,
On those islands of jungle beauty,
With the treasures of the past.

But my hand's upon the tiller,
Of a sloop of fiberglass,
And I tack through wishful daydreams,
On a little inland lake.
But I would have been a sailor,
Had time but thought to wait.

Another Day

by Joel Johnston

Sadly mistaken for a tortuous
Day. Gloom hangs heavy on the
Silence. A ray of sunlight parts
The clouds. What beauty is known
When reflection is dimmed?
Still, there is hope for he who can
See. Beauty lies not only in
The brightest, but in the dull
as well.
It was late morning. Although he knew the rest of the carnies would be sleeping off whatever they’d had too much of the night before, he still listened for the taped calliope music to blare out of the loudspeakers. He didn’t understand why he was awake.

A trickle of sweat melted down his temple and caught the corner of his eye, forcing him to blink. He kept his eyes closed for a moment, convinced that when he opened them the Ferris wheel would be glaring like neon spokes on a bicycle tire and the grey woman would be gazing vacantly from the plate pitch with her hands buried in her change apron. The sunlight, burning through his eyelids, reminded him it was morning.

Opening his eyes too quickly, he winced and twisted his face tight until he could only distinguish black forms outlined by the brightness. He reached around to his back pocket for his sunglasses and realizing that they weren’t there, grabbed the other side to make sure he hadn’t left his money behind.

To his left, the lineup of trailers reminded him of the rows of cigar box houses he’d seen from the interstate. A dinosaur reared up in the shadow of the merry-go-round. Turning his head, he noticed a second monster stalking the dinosaur. The creatures were getting ready to fight or mate.

His eyes adjusted to the light. A thin coating of dust either reflected or dulled the sunlight—he couldn’t tell which—making the midway look like the washed-out pictures in the National Geographic he’d found in a drainage ditch a few days earlier.

He fixed his eyes on the Ferris wheel. The faded canvas tents flashed past until he was standing in front of it. Almost looking directly into the sun, he examined each smooth steel girder from the hub out. He counted the red clown’s face on each of the twelve chairs as if one might be missing. He remembered when the owner told him he was the best ride-jockey on the show.

He heard the voices of two or three teenage girls behind him and quickly slid behind the ride. As their voices faded, he walked to the middle of the midway and watched them. There were three—two short girls with close-cropped black hair in jeans and dark T-shirts and a tall blonde wearing red shorts. The blonde walked a few feet in front of the other girls.

The red shorts bounced back and forth as she ground her hips with each step. Her tan line started a couple of inches below the shorts. She stopped and the two short girls walked past her. She turned around and Football hurried behind the ride. He was sure she’d seen him.

He stepped on a black cricket, squished it into the dirt with a deliberate grind of his foot and walked back to the bunkhouse trailer.

Either hunger or the sound of the generator firing-up woke him. He stared at the rusty springs under the top bunk and tried to decide whether he wanted a hamburger or a corndog.

“Football, get your lazy ass up.” The ride super was stretching his neck to see into the back of the semi. Football sat up and looked down at the fatty red face. The red face rolled around, spit and continued to yell. Football thought it might explode.
He realized that all the other bunks were empty. Pulling on his cutoffs, Football poked his feet under the bunk and slipped into a pair of flip-flops. He grabbed his towel from a nail, dug into his footlocker for a half-used bar of soap that he kept wrapped in a piece of cellophane, and walked across the midway to the public restrooms.

Football threw his body against the men's room door and tossed his towel on the shelf above the sink. Turning on the faucet, he looked into the spotted mirror. In the reflection, he noticed the man in the Shriner's hat standing in front of the urinal watching him. Football glared back at the reflection. The Shriner hurried out, still zipping his fly as he opened the door.

Football looked at the bar of soap as he rubbed it between his hands. Every few seconds, he would glance into the mirror at his pale blue eyes and quickly look back down. His dirty blonde hair hung close to his head. A St. Jude medal around his neck flashed when light hit it. His face and torso were bright red—not sunburned, but more like a rash. The veins in his neck ran down his shoulders and arms over little bulges of muscle. Under his right arm was a birthmark that everyone thought was a scar from a stab wound.

Holding his head close to the sink, he soaped up his face and hair. He tried to fit his head under the faucet, but ended up cupping his hands and pouring the water over his head. The water smelled stale. He dried off and walked back to the midway.

He guessed it was about six o'clock. The food stands were opening, so he stopped for a burger at the yellow trailer where the girl who always sang to herself worked the counter. He liked to smile at her through the greasy windows. It seemed to make her uneasy.

He went back to the semi and changed for work.

Football's uniform consisted of a dirty T-shirt with a clown's face on the front and his given name "Harold" on the back, a pair of jeans with the knees worn out, and mirrored sunglasses. He usually wore the T-shirt inside out. He sat sprawled out on a green metal stool with his legs supported on the safety
fence of the Ferris wheel. The carnival’s bright lights reflected in his sunglasses.

A few people from the town were parading up and down the midway. Football stretched his arms and stood when he heard the first B-B gun fire at the “Shoot-em-Up” facing his ride.

Two little girls with cotton candy in their pigtail fidgeted at the gate to the Ferris wheel. Football pulled two tickets from the taller one’s sticky hand and locked the little girls in chair #5. They squealed as he started the ride. Football noticed that the two girls with close-cropped hair were standing in front of the “Shoot-em-Up.” Their faces were shiny. Through the side of his sunglasses, he saw the red shorts walking down the midway toward his ride. She was just a few feet away. He didn’t turn his head.

She was maybe fifteen. Her high-heeled sandals cut like stilettos across the dust along the safety fence next to his ride. Dirt had collected in her painted toenails and thinned up her skinny calves and thighs to the pair of red shorts that her mother had bought her before she hit puberty. A baggy yellow T-shirt with the word “Physical” scrawled across it was barely tucked into the elastic waistband. Popping her gum, she thrust her hips forward and, with a little twist, leaned back on the fence like she owned it.

Football shook the fence, startling the fifteen-year-old. He stopped the ride and lifted the little girls to the ground. They ran down the midway and tugged on their mother’s dress. She knelt down and put her arms around them. Football noticed the fifteen-year-old was watching him. Trying to look busy, he started picking up the trash that surrounded his ride.

A group of teenagers was clowning around in front of the merry-go-round and started to walk toward the Ferris wheel. The shortest boy was leaning forward talking close to the cheerleader’s cheek. The chubby girl was holding hands with the gangling basketball player. The two girls following them whispered and giggled. They passed by the fifteen-year-old like she was invisible.

Football followed the group with his eyes and glanced back at the fifteen-year-old. She was still watching him. He looked away.

The fifteen-year-old looked at the ground and breathed deeply. Raising her eyes, she stared at a point a few feet above Football’s head and balanced her weight on the high-heels. Pulling at her T-shirt, she slinked across the midway and stood near the greasy old man that ran the Scrambler. The red shorts reflected in Football’s mirrored sunglasses. Football watched the old man’s tattooed arm wrap around her thin waist.

Football sat on the stool and waited for the next ride.

Football examined a greasy fingerprint on the neck of the beer bottle as he emptied it into a glass. He stuck his index finger into the top of the bottle and rolled it around on the bar top. The red exit sign reflected in the mirror behind the bar. He stared at it until the cigarette smoke stung his eyes.

Football sat alone at the bar. A dozen or so of the other carnies sat at a table in the middle of the room under an orange light. They laughed and he turned around and smiled at them.

The place was called “Diamond Lil’s”. When she bent over to get a beer from the cooler, the seams on her flower-print polyester shorts looked like they’d burst. Little rolls of fat flowed over the bra straps under her tight tank top. Her dangling pink earbobs swung wildly as she looked from table to table to take an order. A small bald man sat at a table in the back watching a black and white TV. Football figured the small man was Lil’s husband.

Football laid a dollar on the bar and Lil snatched it up. Laughing to herself,
she pulled another beer out of the cooler and sat in front of him. She mumbled as she walked to the cash register.

The reflection of the exit sign was replaced by the pair of red shorts walking through the door. The old man that ran the Scrambler followed closely behind. The old man and the fifteen-year-old walked to the table where the rest of the carnies were and turned their backs to Football. The old ride-jockey’s calloused hand rested on the red shorts.

Lil darted out from behind the bar and waddled up to the fifteen-year-old. Lil folded her flabby arms and the earbobs swung back and forth. The old ride-jockey shrugged his shoulders and the fifteen-year-old started for the door. Football watched the scene in the reflection.

At the door, the fifteen-year-old turned and looked around the room. Her eyes met Football’s in the mirror. She neither smiled nor frowned. They stared at each other’s reflection for a few seconds until Lil pushed her out the door. Football laid another dollar on the bar.

Lil gave last call and Football steadied himself on his feet. He sat a half full glass of beer down and walked out the door.

The street was deserted. Football heard only muted laughter coming from inside the bar and the hum of a car driving on the outskirts of town. The air was heavy and smelled sweaty. Dark storefronts lined the street. Many of the windows were papered from the inside. Looking to his left, the street narrowed into a cornfield about a hundred yards away. He saw no one.

To his right, the Ferris wheel towered over the storefronts. The moon shown through its spindly legs. It glowed like it was made of silver. He stumbled on an imaginary crack in the sidewalk as he started walking toward the midway. Football walked past three windows filled with used furniture. The sounds from “Lil’s” quieted with each step. He thought he heard the sound of high-heels clicking on the pavement behind him. He stopped, inhaled deeply and turned around. He saw no one.

Walking backwards, Football watched his shadow shorten as he neared the street light. He stood directly under the light and watched his shadow jump around as he swayed back and forth.

He stopped in front of the five-and-dime and looked into the window. Football placed the palms of his hands against the glass and pushed his face up close. A car drove slowly by and the headlights glared in the window. In the reflection, he thought he saw the red shorts. He spun around. The car turned at the next corner. He saw no one.

The midway was lifeless. A cloud covered the moon and Football could see nothing. The cloud passed and moonlight illuminated the Ferris wheel. It seemed to come to life like the carnival had just opened. Football walked to it.

He stood directly beneath the Ferris wheel and stared up through the metal beams. Jumping, he grabbed the lowest cross-beam and pulled himself up. He examined the red clown’s face inches away. Reaching up, he swung his body out, pulled himself up to the next beam, and continued.

Football sat on the beam at the very top and panted. His arms cramped and his legs felt heavy. He looked out over the midway and the town. The lights were out at “Lil’s.”

Football closed his eyes. The fifteen-year-old was standing at the gate to the Ferris wheel. She was holding a ticket in her right hand, nervously bouncing it off her thigh. With a little twist of her hips she turned around and started to walk away. The red shorts burned through his eyelids. Football reached out for her.

He lost his balance.
They hang fat, like hot, dark rubies,  
taunting the hungry gatherer, surprised  
at the softness of the collapsing glob of fruit.  
There are always three or four that hide,  
black-red and sweet, in the middle of the patch,  
waiting, swaying half-seen in the thick of the patch,  
where the briars finger a leg and sink in  
through boot and jean for a solid grip.

The best looking berries fall to juice in the hand.  
The stain sinks blood deep and doesn’t wipe off.  
The vines have fallen asleep with locked fists  
and the whitening sun begins to nibble  
on unsuspecting shoulders.

Blackberries  
by Sarah Hill
Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place

by Anne Voegle

Karen just had to blow off some steam. It was clear as the nose on her face that Bob's feelings for her had been put on the back burner for too long, and she was fighting mad. She flew the coop, and quick as a flash, made a bee-line for Kathy's house. Her best friend would give her a shoulder to lean on and make her see the bright side of all this. As Karen stomped through the small woods that was off the beaten track, thoughts of Bob, the bee in her bonnet, filled her mind.

"How could he have such a sudden change of heart?" she thought. "I can't make heads or tails of what is running through his head. Why does he feel our relationship is deader than a doornail?"

Meanwhile, Bob was close on the heels of Karen. He knew her blood was boiling, but he had to make her see the light. He wanted her to understand that he should bear the brunt of the blame. He had been burning the candle at both ends for too long now, and he just had too many irons in the fire.

"Karen!" Bob yelled. "Hold your horses!"

Karen stopped short, and, pacing like a caged tiger, waited for Bob to catch up.

"Bob," she said, "I'll admit I fell head over heels in love with you. And it cut like a knife when you put me on hold. I was a babe in the woods when I first laid eyes on you, and I waited on you hand and foot. But, a storm had been brewing between us for a long time, and it's time to face the music."

"What went wrong?" Bob asked. "Why couldn't we be like two kids in a candy store? I just had to finally put my foot down, before you got in over your head."

"As much as I hate to say it, you were starting to get my goat, and I'm happy as a lark to be washing my hands of your problems caused by that dog-eat-dog business world of yours," said Karen. "I know you work your fingers to the bone to make ends meet, so it's as clear as the light of day that you don't have time on your hands for me."

Bob was quiet as a mouse. He was dying to tell Karen that now they saw eye to eye, but he couldn't find the right words.

"What's wrong?" asked Karen. "Cat got your tongue?"

"I guess what I want to say," replied Bob, "is that I'm glad we buried the hatchet and can walk down life's road with no skeletons in the closet. Well, see you around."

"Yeah, Bob. Catch you on the rebound."
Clasped tightly together and resting on the table, his hands trembled softly.

On his left hand, two gold bracelets shone with a faint silver.

He separated his hands momentarily to spin the larger of the two chains, his motions slow and instinctive.

The same hand paused momentarily to center his sunglasses before returning to the safety of the other’s clutch.

The solitary light, centered directly above the small table, did little to illuminate the rest of the room.

Somehow, even in the dimness of the room, the sunglasses did not seem out of place, but merely in character.

A black leather jacket hung crumpled from the back of the chair.

The light reflected and formed white streaks along the upper folds of the jacket.

His chest rose and fell in even measures.

A deep breath preceded a sigh.

A golden earring swung like a pendulum from his left ear.

One hand reached to toy with the earring momentarily.

Pausing to run his fingers through his hair, he shifted restlessly back into the chair.

He rested one arm on the chair and extended the other out to the table, his fingers tapping out a nervous rhythm.

He wore a long-sleeved, black, silk shirt over a light grey tank top.

One sleeve of the shirt slipped down off of his shoulder, but distantly centered attention prevented adjustment.

Faded blue jeans patched with leather wound down through the metal legs of the table and chair until disappearing into his boots.

The boots were long and black, ending just above his knees.

Gold and silver bands, straddling each boot at the heel, chimed flatly as he tapped his foot in rhythm with his hand.

He moved one hand to his mouth, placing a finger on his bottom lip.

He mouthed some indecipherable word or phrase.

Pausing mid-sentence, he pushed the table away with one hand and removed his glasses with the other.

Black metal gave way to cold, blank, gleamless eyes - blue, yet shadowed.

He stirred restlessly in his chair.

He rose quickly from the chair as if arriving at some conclusion.

His glasses rolled to and fro in his fingers, reflecting the light at the peak of each swing.

Once again he ran his fingers through his hair.

Again.

As he replaced his glasses, he stepped quickly toward the table, snatching his jacket from the back of the chair.

Donning the jacket, he strode toward the door.

The heaviness seemed to leave his face.

Pausing at the door to draw a deep breath, he snapped up the collar of his jacket and opened the door, flipping off the light as the door closed slowly behind him.
The soft pounding of his boots on the carpet broke into a rhythmic clatter on the tiled floor.
Posters and multi-colored pages pasted to the walls flashed the names of musical groups.
New Order.
Dangerous Boys.
The Heartbreakers.
Spellbound.
He smiled.
He had always known Spellbound would be the name of his band.
Michael Logan and Spellbound.
One dream down.
The corridor widened and released its hold as he turned to the right.
The fluorescent lights passed overhead in 3/4 time with his footsteps.
He had written his first song in 3/4 time.
Desperate Heart.
His favorite song.
He drifted back.
Please woman believe . . . it's only me . . . I'm out here alone and it's cold.
He sang the words aloud.
His pace slowed.
His smile fading, he closed to a stop.
Pain.
He had written that song for her.
He reached into his jacket to a gold cigarette case.
No, not cigarettes.
Cocaine.
Sustenance.
She wouldn't have it.
She hadn't let him do a lot of things.
Only because she had loved him.
He thought of her often.
He wondered if she thought of him at all.
Moving to lean against the cold cement wall, he dislodged the Spellbound poster to send it fluttering downward.
He traced the paper's downward flight with his eyes.
Traced his downward flight with his mind.
He wondered if he should call her . . .
And wondered . . .
And wondered.
He slid his glasses off to wipe his eyes, but had to hesitate.
He squinted at his reflection in the gold case, but couldn't make it out.
So.
Sometimes when he looked into a mirror he didn't know who was staring back.
Sometimes he didn't want to know.
He slipped the case back into his pocket.
Glasses.
Hair.
He had a show to do.
Madison Square Garden.
Two dreams down.
He moved and the lights picked up their ¾ time.

He sang:

I've lived alone... and I've grown so tired... of watching all my dreams grow old.

Other voices cramped his solitude and his song.

He turned into the dressing room, brightly lit and occupied.

Spellbound.

Spellbound and women.

One woman too few.

Greetings.

He wound his way through instruments to the opposite corner of the room and a battered metal chair.

See you in hell was etched into the paint.

He dropped into the chair and let his legs take their place on the counter in front of him.

His boots prevented him from seeing himself in the mirror.

So.

The excitement in the room penetrated and eased his spirit.

Or did it?

He smiled anyway.

Watching the others in the corner of the mirror reminded him of the way he used to be—full spirited, energetic, and dream laden.

The seriousness of his pondering prompted him to remove his sunglasses.

He folded the glasses and set them on the counter without concentrating on his actions, his eyes transfixed and distant.

Once again his smile faded.

The voices in the room faded.

So much time had passed...

Much time had passed...

Time had passed...

Had passed...

Passed...

Submersion complete.

Minutes later, a pounding on the door restored reality.

He dropped his feet to the floor and turned.

Ten minutes until showtime.

His guitar caught his eye as he turned back toward the mirror.

It was decorated with an American flag.

The bright colors and the chrome shone with an intensity he adored.

The guitar brought back his smile as he thought back to the time he had made it.

So what if there were too many stripes and not enough stars.

He laughed softly, causing the others to turn.

He smiled at them and they returned it, wary of what might have caused the outburst.

Tilting his head back, he lost his concentration in the lights.

Only for a moment.

He snapped to attention and to his feet.

This was it.

He moved toward the door and grabbed his guitar.

Glasses.

Hair.

Showtime.
Gravity Wrinkles

by E. P. H.

A seasonal change
An atmospheric disruption
A motivational change of emotions
The drama unfolds:
Feelings of incongruent intelligence
fill a swelling void.
A rapture of green grass and melting
leaves,
We are creatures controlled by mere
seasonal fluctuations.
Simple of mind, pregnant with infatuation,
Do we desire the power we fear,
The power incomprehensible?
The grey mists defy the gravity of
a mass beyond strength.
Cloud our sight, a thickening veil
descends upon human intension.
Do not falter upon the fallacy
of divine intervention,
You control
A mass gift.

I Want to Kill My Roommate

by Michael Anthony Moore

Can you hear it?
MOVE, MOVE, MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!
That's what I'm trying to say... 
Something's coming,
An upward sweep of notes,
A flash of light,
And then... 
Nothing.
One Night
by Joel Johnston

In and out of season.
Through infinite dimension
of mind the thought
Distorted. This man,
This person, would thrive
on harm and hate.
He threatens a life.

I in mask and robe
Do trust, and take
The offerings of this fake.
Electric smile, I sit
And taste a bit.
A fruit laden with steel.
The cold blade bites back.
I taste my sweet warm blood
And swallow the blade.
A strange gift on
A child's dreamed night.
"Sorry, John—got it—did you talk to—crack—Jill today? Oh—I don’t believe you got that!” Smack. Plop.

"Yeah—grunt—ouch, we ate together." Thud-ka-thonk. "We’re going to McD’s—darn—at lunch tomorrow." Crack.


Boi-ing. Smack. "I didn’t ask—shit—got it! The timing was—oh, damn! The timing, like mine now, wasn’t right. She was in—yeah, start again—a bad mood. Squeak-bonk-slap. She got a C on Franklin’s test. Boom. "Uh-oh, the window—is it broken?"

"Naw, it’s okay. Slap-pang-pang-pang. Wow, a triple ricochet! Good shot. So when can—click-scursh—you ask her? I have to get tickets by Friday." Squeak-click Smack.

"Look, Pete, I shouldn’t—crack-splat—have to do your dirty work. Bump. Oh—that hit my wrist, sorry. Here. Creak-plop. Call her tonight."

"She’s got—pop, shroo—to study. And we have a Spanish ——test Thursday."

"Ask her some questions about Spanish. At least get it—good shot—at least talk to her." Squeak-thud-splat.

"No, John, the ball not the wall. I can’t ask her—smack—on the phone. The first thing she’ll do—squeak, grunt—after gagging anyway,—snip-crick—is call Melissa."

"Melissa is going to—plop, plop, bang—find out anyway. Life goes on. Bonk! Are you okay? Right in the head. Pete? You okay?"

Tip, tip, tip, tip.


Squig-crack-pooophoo. Bong!

"Oh, the window again. What are you—snup, kunk—trying to do? Kill—crick-thud. Slap—each other? Don’t use Liz to—smack. Bumbum—hurt Melissa. That’s mean."

Thump. Thump. Errrrrrrrrrr.

"Do you really think I would do that? I’m not that much of a jerk. Let’s quit. My knee’s swelling."


Clack-ak. Thunk. Thunk.

"What exactly happened to you guys anyway? I’m gonna take a shower since we’re going out. Do you have an extra towel?" Fflup.

“Yeah. Hey—don’t forget to take your socks off. I know your’re not talking to her, but why?” puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh puh. We-ek sh-k sh-k khhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

“Nothing. Well, everything. It was stupid. But it’s over. Hand me some soap.” hu hu hu hu hu hu. sh-khhhh.

“So that’s that, and now you’re going to date Liz. Frankly, Pete, I think she might go out with the barnyard animals. Raise your standards.”


“Didn’t you just say that you aren’t a jerk? The main reason you want to go out with Liz is that Melissa doesn’t like her. Right? Right, limp-o-leg?” Snap. Zzzzzzip.

“Don’t call me that. It hurts. Here have a towel. Fwoop. “Hey, that stings! Let’s go. I’m thirsty.” “You go on. I’m going to stick my leg in the whirlpool. And I have some... some stuff to do.”

Clak click jing... jing. “Well, see you tomorrow. Uh, ask Melissa if she wants to double with Jill and me.” Clon, clon, clon, clong...

“John!”


“Yup, Melissa. Eight-four-nine-seven-seven-four-three.” Clonclung, clonclung clonclung clonclung clonclung clonclung... bangk!
The bay horse trotted down the fence row. John was riding in front of his mother, Elizabeth. He was big enough to ride by himself, but for the longer rides like this, they rode together. Hank (the bay) didn't seem to mind. John liked to hang onto the saddle horn and watch his mother's hands on the reins. He watched her wedding rings as they caught the sun. The rings were always polished. Mother and son trotted off to find Samuel. Sometimes they took him lunch or just something to drink. They saw him a field away on a tractor. They waved. John smiled as he sat high on Hank's back with Mom's arms around him. He felt like a warrior on his proud charger, crossing the fields to a glorious battle. He pretended the songs they sang were battle cries, echoing into the green distance, frightening their deadly foes. They sang songs that Elizabeth's dad had taught her when she was growing up. John's favorites were "The Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia" and "Shine on Harvest Moon." His mother sang the little maid's part and John sighed at the right spots.

Jonathan belonged to the Corrington family. He was a brave little boy with huge brown eyes with green flecks in them. He had a small mouth that smiled and giggled frequently to show his sharp white baby teeth. His brown hair was always messy, except maybe for the times when his mom or dad could catch him and comb it. They didn't know that his red cap (also his battle helmet) messed it up. It wasn't his fault! A warrior has to be protected.

His best loved possessions were a slightly used stuffed koala and the hair messer hat. Mom said that the bear, officially named Vern, was a special creature that had kept watch over her and Daddy for a long time. When Jonathan was a little older she had felt it was time for his own Vern. Dad had given him the hat the first time they had worked together, riding to Dayton in
the Peterbuilt. Of course, he worked with Mom too. They made cookies and fed Scottie, their border collie, and Hank, their bay Quarter horse. Hank and Scottie were his special friends. Hank was a very big horse, and a careful one. Every time John was around he placed his large black hooves carefully, almost daintily, and would stand very still while Mama and Jonathan brushed him and cleaned his feet.

As for his papa, he felt he was lucky. His dad seemed bigger and stronger than anybody else’s. Daddy would throw him high, up and up, always catching him with his strong hands. They were rough with chewed nails and a Band-Aid or two, but they were kind, warm hands. John noticed that Mommy and Daddy held hands a lot. When they went shopping they all three held hands, fighting over who got to be in the middle.

Daddy and Jonathan went on secret expeditions, searching for hidden temples and fabulous treasures that his mother had hidden in the cookie jar.

Slowly and quietly they crept. The great bwana, his red hat, a safari helmet, rode Tantor the mighty elephant. They rode through the jungle, past the Wooden Mountains, the Fountains of Zest and the Terrible Whirlpool of Despair. At last, tired, sore from fighting cannibals, insects and alligators, when the fantastic chocolate jewels were almost won, CRASH! A mighty monster, guardian of the temple and the treasure, reared up, waving deadly fly swatters. It challenged them, Medusa snake curlers waving from its head. “Stop! Thieves! How dare you come into my temple! The great god will drink your blood for this! You will pay with your very lives! I will sacrifice you on the holy altar myself!” Then the monster jumped on them and began (horror!) to tickle. Tantor, the huge elephant, saved bwana, tickling the flailing, roaring monster to death on the kitchen floor. Then he claimed the treasure for his master.

** * * *

So Jonathan was happy. His mother read to him about his heroes: Aslan, Lucy, Edmund and Peter from the Narnia books. His parents took turns reading pages to him in front of the stone fireplace on winter nights. Or if it was nice, outside in the porch swing Dad had built for them.

John liked to hear the sound of their voices, comforting above storms and winter’s wailing. Mom would put her head on Dad’s lap, and John would sit in his mother’s childhood rocking chair and listen.

Sometimes he caught them kissing. Seeing him, one scooped him up and all three would share a hug and kiss, laughing.

** * * *

His favorite holidays were Halloween and Christmas. This year he and Dad dressed up in monkey suits. Dad was a fierce gorilla with sharp fangs. “At least he doesn’t drool!” laughed Mommy. John was a much smaller monkey. They were terrible, ferocious, trying to scare Mommy by hulking around corners and growling. “Boo!” His mother wouldn’t tell them what she would be, even when offered three Milky Ways. John knew she meant business after that.

Finally it was Halloween. A fairy appeared in the doorway to his parent’s room. Her dark hair was bound up with a sparkling crown, straight from the dime store jewel chest. She wore a white gown that winked in the light and seemed to float around her. In her hand was a magic wand.

The larger ape smiled when he saw her. John heard him growl and threaten
to carry the fairy off.
Stepping lightly across the room she said:
"If you two nasty beasties will take me trick-or-treating with you I'll turn
you into King Arthur and a daring knight."
Grunting, the two apes discussed her proposition.
"What do you think, my son, the great and terrible John?"
"I think it would be fun. Let's take her."
"Wouldn't you rather climb trees and throw bananas at the stupid fairy?"
"She's not stupid. I wanna be a knight, you can be King Arthur."
"Okay, okay, we'll take her. No beating up fairies tonight," the larger ape
snorted. Taking off his mask, he became human again and smiled. "I'm just
Teasing John, you know I'd never hurt Mommy. I love her and you too."
"I love you too, Daddy," answered John, and gave Samuel a fierce ape hug.
Halloween, with its pumpkin guts and black cats passed, John was
knighted.

* * *

John looked forward to Thanksgiving. He and Elizabeth took down the
Halloween decorations and put up little pilgrims and turkeys. John noticed
that Daddy worked late more often.
"Mommy, why doesn't Daddy come in for supper with us anymore?"
His mother tensed. "He's got to get the crops in, honey. Sometimes he
doesn't have time to eat until after you've gone to bed."
"I miss Daddy."
His mother looked out the window at the fields. "I do too." She hugged
John.
John knew his mommy was unhappy. He wanted to help. He would ask
Daddy to come to open house at school. They could all go together. At
Sunday dinner he asked his father.
"I'm sorry, John. Got too much work to do."
"That's all that matters to you, isn't it?" his mother said sharply. Her eyes
were ready to cry. "You don't even have time for Johnny anymore—let alone
me. Why, why can't you ever put work last for once!" She sat there, staring.
"Now Elizabeth, you know it's always hard in the fall. Why can't you under-
stand that?" His leg began to bounce.
John wished for a magic ring to put on so he could disappear. He hated to
see them fight
His father got up and went outside. John hurt for both of them. Maybe they
don't love each other anymore, he thought. Did I do something? Maybe I
shouldn't have asked Daddy to go! He wanted to cry.
The next day at breakfast his parents avoided each other. Usually Mom
fixed eggs or oatmeal while Dad made coffee or hot chocolate. This morning
she didn't have anything. John ate Fruit Loops. There was no coffee.
"I'll be late today, Johnny," his mother said. "I have a lot of work at school."
She kissed him and left.
John decided to talk to Vern about his parents. The koala didn't offer any
advice, just a hug. Coming in from working, dirty and tired, his father over-
heard John asking Vern what was wrong with his parents. Black smudges
under his eyes, he entered his son's room, the hand-painted bears on the
walls drawing a smile from him. John's mother had painted them there when
she found out she was pregnant.
"Johnny, what's the matter? Are you upset about Lizzie and me?" he asked,
picking the red cap off the floor.
John nodded. A tear rolled down his face. He missed reading time. He missed Tantor and the temple priestess. He missed the way they held hands at the table when saying grace.

His father reached down with his muscled arms, held the little Corrington.

"Mommy and I are just having a few problems, that's all. I have to work really hard this time of year. Sometimes I neglect you and Mommy. But I still love you, son. Mommy and I love each other very much. ... We'll be all right." He gave him another hug. His wife had taught him the importance of touch.

The next day his father took him to lunch at the Pizza King. They both loved burritos. As they drove by his mother's school, Daddy asked John if he wanted to stop in to see her.

"Sure, Daddy. Isn't she busy though?"

"She's not busy all the time, you stinker-bug. Let's go surprise her."

"Okay," Johnny grinned.

They went to the office to ask where she was. Two pairs of Osh Kosh walked to her English class. His father knocked on the door.

His mother went to the door and came out when she saw who it was.

"Hiya Mommy!" John whispered loudly.

"What are you two doing here?" she laughed, giving John a hug and looking at her husband.

"Milady," intoned John's father, sweeping off his hat and bowing. "We, the knights of the cardboard table, come to tell you of our love and devotion and our sorrow at our recent disagreement." He smiled slightly. "We love you honey. I love you and I'm sorry."

John was crushed as they all embraced.

"I'm so glad you stopped," whispered his mother, wiping a tear away. "Now get on home with you so I can attempt to teach! ... I love you two so much. I'm sorry too."

They looked at each other.

"Come on, Daddy, we've got work to do."

"Bye doll," said his father. Two pairs of Osh Kosh skipped down the hall.

John heard his mother's giggle as he went back to her class.

A few days later John noticed small red and white flowers on the table with a big envelope. He knew that Mommy liked flowers and cards. He picked dandelions for her when he could find them. The day after that, a box of candy sat on the television; the envelope with it said, "Sammy." John never bothered presents that weren't for him. His virtue paid off since his parents always shared.

He heard laughter more often behind his parents' bedroom door. Daddy shaved more often. The men of the family got haircuts. John saw more of Renee, his aunt, since Mommy and Daddy went out more. When he found Mommy's earring in the old blue pick-up, he asked Daddy how it got there. His father got pink. Daddy said that she must have lost it when they checked on the cattle the other night. What's so funny about that, thought John; Daddy sure is grinning. So he got to see Renee. She and John were dancers together. Renee turned up their small stereo (Mommy would have a fit) and danced in the middle of the living room rug. John told Renee that he was going to marry her when he grew up.

Jonathan got up one December morning and helped his mother clean up the house. He had promised to help her while they watched cartoons. Later he would help Dad. Mommy got out her special red candles and put them into the brass candlesticks that John had polished during the "Smurfs." She ran the sweeper and he dusted. John proudly made his own bed with his "He-Man" sheets. His father's favorite, Boston cream pie, was baked. John
took out the trash and picked up his room.

After that, he put on his Osh Kosh and Lee jacket. Grabbing his red cap, he went out to help Dad.

He walked into the elevator shed. Daddy looked extra big in his work clothes, like he could do anything. John thought he looked like a bear with his shaggy face and mustache.

“Get me that screwdriver over there, will you John?” his father called. He was working on some wiring. John stepped quickly over to the box of tools and handed him one. He knew that Dad appreciated his help. He liked to work with him in the shed. The cobwebs and the grain dust made it easy to imagine that this was an evil sorcerer’s castle. He and Daddy were brave men trying to cast the evil creature from power.

“Did you know that Mommy used to help me like this?” he called from the top of the saw horse he stood on to reach the wires.

“Really, was she good help?” John asked, another yellow screwdriver in his hand ready to give to Sam.

“Sure was, though she didn’t know a whole lot about farming in those days. I think you’re special help too. Look how many steps you saved me by handing me that screwdriver. . . Will you run to the shop and get my pocket knife? Make sure it’s closed when you carry it, son.”

“Okay Daddy!” answered John, as he ran to the shop as fast as he could.

He returned with the pocket knife firmly in hand. He liked to work with Daddy because he could get as dirty as Daddy was.

Through the afternoon they rode up to the hardware store for some glue and a part for the electrical box. Then they fed the cattle and returned to see if the glue had dried in the shed. Dad crouched down in front of the box to check it. John peeked over his broad shoulder.

“What you, hand me that wire, do you think that Mom’s going into town today?”

“Uh, nope.”

“Well, I’m planning something special. It’s our anniversary today.”

“Oh, that’s neat Pa.”

“But don’t tell her anything, okay? Don’t even tell Vern about it.”

They worked and wired and laughed the rest of the afternoon. When they came in, Mom was gone. There was a note on the table that said: “be back by six, don’t worry. love, Liz.”

“Well, it looks like she went to town after all. That gives us time to gussy up and put out the presents.” So they showered. His father shaved with John’s help.

“Feels like we’re going out on a hot date, huh John?” he grinned.

“I guess.” John answered and grinned back.

John noticed that Dad wore his wedding ring tonight. It was silver, a complement to his mother’s gold.

The two of them looked good. Shaved, combed and in his good cords, Dad was handsome. John looked spiffy in his new jeans too. His mother always told them what a handsome pair they made.

* * *

On the table was a card and small present for his father. On the fireplace was a wrapped package and tag, bright and shiny with “Jonathan” printed carefully. On the television was a long flower box and another smaller box. The room was candlelit. Red and white candles smiled everywhere, flickering shadows on the ceiling. A fancy white tablecloth covered their table. Two red
candles lit it. His father had started a fire in the stone fireplace; it glowed on the rug, mixing with the candlelight. Outside the snow fell quietly, softly to the ground.

The family sat down to dinner. It was their favorites, crab meat with melted butter, homemade bread with jam, chilled shrimp with cocktail sauce, baked potatoes with sour cream dripping, and wine. For dessert they had Dad’s pie. Mom put the flowers, miniature red and white roses, into a vase, but they saved the rest of the gifts for later. John thought they would never finish eating.

After supper, they opened the gifts. John got a new toy truck he’d been wanting. For Mommy there was a delicate band of gold set with diamonds and rubies. Red and white had been the colors at their wedding. She cried, smiling. She held Daddy for a time and whispered “thank you.” For John’s father there was a crowned figure on a horse. The soft light slid on it. The card said: “To my true gentle prince.” Samuel had lost this private title, secret to the two of them. Now it had quietly been restored.

They raised their glasses, wine for the elder two, Sprite for John. His father said, “To us.”
At the risk of avoiding the outside, 
the sunlit environment that is your nightmare, 
you climb back into your unmade bed and 
turn into a crumpled up piece of paper. 
Shut your swollen eyes. 
Forgive yourself. 
Take advantage of your own good nature, until 
the glorious security of night arises, 
laying waste to the coil of the visible. 
Hide from the uncensoring critics, 
existing in pairs, 
double-imaged mirrors, 
forcing you to recognize yourself and 
confirm their accusations.

You want to remember. 
You never want to forget. 
The torturing vulnerability surrounded you 
and waited. 
You stood up straight, 
still, motionless and stiff like a behaving statue, 
as the camera pulled away into the sky, 
the world revolved 
and you prayed the movement of your eyes would go unnoticed.
Think too fast I think

by Brian Stokes

Stream of consciousness thinking of you
little shit, why I ought to
or three pairs of the ones on the left wing radicals are the symbols that indicate square root beer and a hot dog, please not now she'll be here any minute seemed like an hour Town is good for a high school play around with reality when you're bored, for the shelf isn't nearly long enough is too much like we were last week after week, the same old thing was about this long and so high that you couldn't see the blasted top of it is so nice of you to drop by the way, have you seen them, I put them right over here we are right back where we started from, simple beginnings and it always gets so complicated

Room 219

by Darrin Fitzgerald

Sitting in Room 219 on the first of spring, cramped up in a small classroom with green painted walls, listening to a buzzing light every time it's quiet, looking out the windows, wishing I was outside soaking and breathing up some sunshine or just relaxing under a tree with some friends, watching the girls go by.
A small sign hung outside on the front porch. "Antiques," it read. Below the sign was an actual guillotine. An old wicker basket even sat at the head of it. Inside the front door and to the right was a small dark room chock full of all kinds of little oddities. Toy soldiers and dolls were jammed on shelves, floor to ceiling. And from the ceiling hung bunches of battered wicker baskets. Up the stairs, which were sure to announce even the quietest of visitors, was a short hallway leading to three small rooms. Each room held an old Victorian bathtub, dozens more wirey baskets, an age old tuba or cello, and a skeleton resting in an open coffin. The doors to these rooms were bolted shut, but a barred window in each door permitted me to see in, or maybe the inside to see out. At the bottom of the stairs hung a large Persian rug. As I pulled back the rug, I was greeted by a gush of hot dry air, and the smell of cats which scattered about my feet. A wrinkled old woman, barely visible among a sea of rugs and baskets draped about the room, sat nearly devoured by the enormity of her old rocking chair. She was within an arms distance of an old wood-burning stove which bellowed the heat from its fiery belly. The extreme temperature quickly drove any unwanted visitors back through the house and out the front door. I turned back once to make sure for myself this place was real, just in time to see the "Antiques" sign fall into the wicker basket at the head of the guillotine.
Stormy Night

by J. Keith Graybill

All are silent, all stare
waiting for the next move.

Sudden streaks of white shatter the night air.
Nothing.
The moon's view casts leafless branches
horribly upon the grasses.
A gush of gust interrupts the hush,
throwing wandering leaves
across moonlit crevices.

Again,
the crash of white comes
with striking intent.
It chooses an outreached elm
of a wealth of years (one of Mr. Smith's favorites).
Sparks speak from the striking point.
Old Elm groans a moan of falling;
crying creaks and cracks,
as he goes to meet the ungracious ground.

All are silent, all stare
waiting for the next move.

(Mr. Smith has unwelcome wood for the fire.)

Fairies

by Karen Patterson

The innocent laughter of children
brings tears to the condemned soul.
Memories.

    hop...
    skip...
    jump...

The beginning was such a happy place;
so full of laughter,
before we lost our wings.
She stands over the kitchen sink, her head tilted in front of a small compact, adjusting her blush when I walk in the side door. She says hello to me without turning her head from the compact while rubbing, rubbing, rubbing her cheeks. I walk over to her, letting the duffle bag on my shoulder fall to my elbow and I kiss her. She should have been happier to see me. She should have been happier.

Saturday is the only day she has to do her grocery shopping, and she was almost ready to leave when I arrived. It is 11:00 a.m. and the house is clean and neat and smells like ravioli. She wears a yellow Izod sweater that my younger sister discarded when she became thin. My sister has since gained the weight back, but lets her wear the sweater anyway. The hair sits on her head like perfect black feathers, though there are a few grey wisps around her temples. She gathers her purse and car keys and turns to face me. “I wasn’t like this yesterday. I’m sorry,” she says.

I never know what to say to her when she gets in these moods. Suddenly, I feel guilty for all the work she had done and will do, because I have not learned what real work is yet. She cleans, she cooks, she washes, she pretends that an orderly home is a happy one. Her obsession with organization annoys me because it allows her, at times, to ignore reality. It frustrates me that I cannot maintain such standards of tidiness, and this, in turn, frustrates her. I asked her once why she works so hard and what is the fate of a woman who does not. She answered me—almost reproachfully—that if she did not do the work, no one would and that when I finally meet someone whom I love, I would change. She did not like my question and I did not like her answer.

How her children looked, how we behaved, was always very important to my mother. At Easter, my sister and I would be dressed in matching new Easter outfits: ruffled pastel dresses, lacey, itchy stretch tights, glossy white patent leather shoes, and wide-brimmed Easter hats that had matching ribbon hanging in the back and a thin elastic band that we hated to tuck under our chins because it was always too tight. My brother got new Easter clothes, too. They were usually navy blue and polyester and he cried when he had to try them on in the store. He hated even more having to wear them and Grandma often let him change into play clothes after he finished his dinner. We would have our picture taken, but we were more interested in chocolate Easter bunnies and marshmallow chicks that turned hard if you did not eat them on Easter morning. The pictures usually came out well and my mother delighted in sending them in letters to relatives and friends.

Whenever my mother took the three of us anywhere, we were rarely well-behaved. My brother hated to go shopping for anything and my sister used to bite. How we used to wrestle in the back seat of our old green Chrysler when my mother threatened to tell our father as she maneuvered our car through the busy streets of Buffalo, New York! She told us that she had eyes in the back of her head and that she could see whom to punish. For a long time I believed that story until one day at a red light, I started to poke through her hair when she told me to sit down and behave myself because I was the oldest. It was a good story, anyway.
The ultimate punishment was to be sent to our room. The prerequisite to that was sitting by ourselves on the big red couch in the family room with no T.V. One day, after a long, hot day of department store shopping and errand-running during which we were particularly bad, she flung the three of us on the big red couch and told us that we could sit there until our father came home. After that, she went in the kitchen and she was quiet. It was uncomfortable enough not being able to see her and even more so not being able to hear her. She yelled a lot and in a fit of anger she swore, but that did not seem nearly as frightening as her not saying anything at all. I think that was the day she started smoking. I remembered the smell from the beauty parlor. When my father came home, he let us get up from the couch and we were quiet too. There was nothing more said about that day.

She was happiest when we started school. She loved to attend school plays and parents' meetings and read the comments on our report cards. She always made sure that we were dressed nicely for school and at the bus stop fifteen minutes early. She did everything for us. She was a Brownie leader, a classroom helper, a Den Mother, and our greatest fan. Everything we made in arts and crafts was wonderful and beautiful, she told us, and we believed her. When I was in the second grade, I wrote a play and my class performed it for our parents on my birthday. I got to wrap a baton with blue crepe paper and use it as a magic wand. My teacher, Mrs. Fink, gave me a special book and my mother kissed me and told me that I was wonderful and it felt good to make her so happy. My brother and sister also made and did wonderful things when they were in school, but I often felt like I was favored.
It was not long until elementary school turned into junior high and junior high turned into high school and we moved seven hundred miles away. My mother was not particularly fond of the midwest and she blamed my father for much of her unhappiness. She smoked a lot. Sometimes we would hide her cigarettes from her and she would go crazy until she finally went over to the neighbors to borrow some. I hated the way she looked when she smoked: the way she held the cigarette between her turned-in lips when she lit it and especially when she held her head up and blew the smoke out of the side of her mouth. My mother did not need to look that way—it just was not her.

I could not understand my mother's negative feelings about our midwest home until I was considerably older. The mothers here were not like her. They hired babysitters all the time and went out to lunch. Their kids went to summer camp, visited their grandparents on the weekends, and never got spanked. These women had pressed-powdered faces and a purse to match every pair of shoes they owned. Their husbands played golf on Saturdays and they polished their nails and took the dog to obedience school. My father promised us a dog when we moved, but we never got one. My mother said she was afraid of them and that they would mess up our new house. I guess she never considered obedience school.

When my sister entered junior high, my mother started working part time and then eventually full time. Her full-time job is the one she has now and it is eating her. She wishes she could quit, but out of the guilt of not having more of a formal education, she will not. This job pushes her to maximize her common sensibilities, but to the point of discouragement. She says the men at work are rude and the women are too competitive. When I call her at work, she always answers in her business voice and puts me on hold when another call comes through. I like her mother voice better.

At work, she wears neutral colored suits with conservative blouses that bow at the neck. Her finger nails are trimmed painfully short and her hands are chapped and dry. Most of the time, she wears these little pearl drop earrings that we got her for Christmas three years ago, a string of costume jewelry beads, and a gold Timex watch she bought on sale at Sears. On her left hand, she wears a single silver wedding band because she cannot fit her diamond engagement ring on since her hysterectomy last summer. She buys the majority of her clothes on sale and feels guilty when she does not. Sometimes, she charges clothes without telling my father, but always manages to pay them off before the bill comes. She wishes he would buy her nicer jewelry, but appreciates his ability to finance college educations. She always told us that we had a wonderful father.

My mother married my father a little over two decades ago and I am not entirely sure that they were in love. They may have been getting too old to be single. I always thought it was unfortunate that they had to live with my grandmother (my father's mother) after they were married. Before my sister was born, we moved to our own house in a nearby town. Every time we would go back to visit, my mother would hug and kiss my grandmother while telling her how wonderful she looked, but I know she did not miss my grandmother's advice on raising children. My father told me when I was an infant my mother made it a habit to overfeed me. One afternoon when I refused to take my bottle, my mother threw it against the kitchen wall splattering warm milk everywhere. She insisted on calling the doctor before I started to lose weight. The doctor reassured her that no baby had ever intentionally starved itself to death. My grandmother did not say a word as she picked up broken glass from the kitchen floor.
Now in her fifties, my mother’s health is strong and she seems to endure all tension. My father once said that women like my mother did not get high blood pressure—they gave it away. Maybe that is why he has it. She works, she prays, she reads Norman Vincent Peale and sends mass cards when distant relatives die. Her job pays well, but is draining her. She is a different kind of mother now. She and I rarely go to the movies anymore and shopping for school clothes is too exhausting after work. At one time when she smiled her eyes would widen and rows of perfectly-formed, coffee-stained teeth would reach into her tawny little dimples. That smile would take away all my sadness. Now I deal with my own sadness and my mother, with hers.

She is caught in the middle of her life with my younger sister who does not obey or act as my mother would like her to—she does not act like me. My sister likes to stay out late, flirt with boys from other high schools, and wear layers of outrageous make-up. My mother prays for her to be good and cannot wait until she gets married. She and my father quarrel over my sister and they threaten to leave each other when, in the middle of the night, she has not yet come home. Sometimes I wish my sister was never born. My mother often asks me for advice, but I do not know what to tell her.

My mother is a weakening spirit that has been tired for too long than seems fair or natural. She works so hard to make us so middle-class happy. I want her to be young again, and tell us that everything is wonderful, and I want for her to believe it, too.

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**Presence**

*by Sarah Hill*

You have become like the moon to me,
rising on the night.
You surprise me with the light of your face
and the quick catch of its whiteness.
The gray scars of your cheek
are cool shadows at your height.
The shine of your dead expression
is merely the reflection of your sun.
Piece by piece you open up
into my window—a familiar face.
Mother, my mother, why do you roll away
from me into the dark?
A memory: sitting on Nana’s lap at our kitchen table, peeling and slicing apples. First, she would peel the ripe skin into long, red spirals that would fall to the floor. Then she would slice a piece off, and, holding the slice between the knife and thumb, salt it and slide it into her mouth. Then, came my piece. It was fun taking the apple slice from the knife, because it was something most grown-ups wouldn’t allow children to do. I couldn’t wait for the slice to drop into my mouth.

It was always juicy, and a bit tart, and very refreshing. The apple finished, she would put her chubbvby arms around my slight body and rock me in a chair. She would teach me songs, none of which I remember, and usually put me to sleep. I would often nestle my head into her smooth cotton dress and just listen to her sing.

Nana was my babysitter when I was a child. My mother always worked, and Nana stayed with my sisters and me until I was nearly eleven. She never seemed to change or age during those years. She was a plump woman of an undetermined age, who was more of a grandmother than a babysitter.

She always wore faded cotton dresses, soft and worn. She would wear old black galoshes to the house and would carry her slippers in a small carpet bag. Around the house she wore these slippers, with rolled stockings that never stayed up. She had a smell about her, different from anyone else I knew as a child. She smelled of cosmetic powder, which is a very sweet smell, and of fresh-baked cookies. Her speckled hair was bobbed short and permed in very loose curls. She had a round rosy face that laughed all the time. To hug her was to hug many fluffy pillows, which I could never quite put my arms around. Her walk was a slow deliberate shuffle, the perfect gait for my small legs. We would often walk to the park at the end of the road. She would swing me for hours, and then we would walk back to the house.

I was lost when Nana left, and I had my mother there every day. There were no more salted apple slices to taste, no more soft dresses to lean my head on, and no more walks. But, I would go to visit her often at her house. She lived by a lake, with a beach for a front yard. She had a house full of windows and rustic furniture. The house was very old, but in a homey way.
There were fat cushions everywhere, and surprises around every corner. The kitchen was always warm from baking. On the counter near the stove sat a white pig cookie jar that was always brimming, waiting for eager hands to steal some cookies.

Often, we would ride in her rowboat out into the lake. The water was always clear and smooth as a mirror. Just by leaning over the edge, I could see my reflection. We would often drift into the middle of the lake, and look at clouds, or watch a spider on the bow make its intricate web by spinning and twining, spinning and twining. The spider finished, I would scoop water in my palm and splash the web. The spider would scamper off and leave his laced network glistening in the sun.

I haven’t seen Nana very often in the past few years, but, when we do meet, we share several affectionate hugs and kisses. She still looks the same as when I was a child; the dress, the galoshes, the speckled hair, the rosy cheeks. My thoughts of her are filled with love, delight, and warmth. Whenever life’s problems make me sad and irritable, I think of her. The softness of my memories smooths all the rough edges of my busy world. And whenever I want to become a child again, I will go to the kitchen and get an apple. I’ll take the apple to the nearest rocker and peel it into long, red spirals. Then I will slice and salt each piece, and eat it from the knife.

**Billy’s Burden**

_by Tammy Graham_

Billy was raised to believe in himself and his future. With pressing ever onward and looking only up, Billy forgot to live for the day and to believe in the present.

One day, like a hand from heaven, the wind slapped Billy’s face. The stinging brought tears to Billy’s eyes. The pain of the startling trip into reality was harsh.

With each tear shed a new thought emerged from within Billy’s soul. But, with this new knowledge came only sadness.

Gone was the security of being blind.

Now is the burden of wasted time.

Billy’s burden.
In a state of resolution I dozed off to sleep. Suddenly I was awakened, strangled by a double eighth note. My coughing, sputtering and choking soon made it let me go. Then I was handcuffed by a triplet "C-D-E." I was taken to the bass cleff dungeon, then tried by bar 23. I begged him to let me go, so to Music Theory I'd not be late. Soon my release was given by a dotted one-twenty-eighth.

No Decision to Make

Anonymous

I can't believe it. She talked about the possibility of it happening this summer, but I didn't think it would happen. I mean, I thought I had gay sperm. Just three months ago she asked me if I were homosexual or bisexual. I answered definitely with the more extreme of the two.

We were roommates. So what made her come in and start kissing me? And, what in the hell made me get an erection? With that response, she was not going to stop until I had totally explored her side of the bed.

It was gradual, but I started to like it. Then I really started to like it. But, how did the innocent playing leave us with the question: "Should we get married?"

Me married? What a switch. I was so resigned to the fact that I would live a private life involving intermittent relationships. I guess if I had to be married, it would be to her though. But I certainly didn't think it would be because we had to.

Me, a daddy? How could I suppress my attractions to men? What would Mommy say—"Daddy won't be home tonight, because he's spending the night with his boyfriend?" We'd be taking the kid to a psychiatrist after kindergarten.

"There's no way. I'm not ready. She's not ready. There's really no decision to make. "Mommy" will go to Louisville tomorrow, spend two hundred dollars, and come back with less than she left with.

I hope in twenty years I'm not sad about this.
Autumn

by Sarah Hill

Four o'clock and October.
In the east the sky glows indigo,
through trees splashed in crayon-colors
of yellow-gold and red.
Leaning on the trunks,
shining black from yesterday's late rain,
sheep doze, summer-sleek and seemingly unaware
of hayless, winter barns
and slaughterhouses, grinning
for cheap meat.
The First Bouquet

by Patricia Homeier

He saw the colors as he walked the road.
At first, he didn't know what they were, but
when he stooped he saw the

blue
violets,
the yellow
daisies,
the red,
deep-hearted roses.

He stood up, ready to go on. But his mind
pushed him back to the black earth.
Heavy, work-worn hands
threaded through stems and pulled
out some blue and yellow

and a smear of red.

Clumsily, he put the stems together. They rubbed
waxy greenness into his palms.
Then he began walking again; he
glanced down at his colors,
ready to present them.
Welcome to the Eighties

by Brian Stokes

He met her at the door, with a dozen daisies and a bottle of Asti. "You said that roses make you sneeze, right?" She tossed back her sun-streaked light brown curls to expose her dark brown eyes, a tiny nose that was slightly turned to the left because of the softball that broke it when she was playing catcher for the little league team, and a broad bedimpled passionate-lipped smile. Her head turned slightly sideways, one eyebrow raised. "Congrats! You win $64,000!" she said with a musical chuckle in her voice.

"Did you decide what flick you want to see?" he drawled as he slipped off his sheepskin and suede jacket and shook off the evening's reminder that fall was becoming winter in a big hurry. "Yeah. I wanna see 'Julia Rapes a Madman' . . . It's a love story."

"Oh, and I bet it's playing at Julia's Home-Style theater, too." She playfully led him off to her bedroom, where she lazily peeled every stitch of his clothing off. He then opened the bottle and poured them both a tall tulip glass of the sweet effervescence. They hooked arms and sipped. "Hey, sweetheart, I got a surprise for ya," she said as she pulled two pair of shiny chrome plated handcuffs out of the dresser drawer. "Oh boy . . . You would have to get kinky on me . . . " "You'll like it. I promise," she whispered as she peeled back the hand-sewn quilt her grandmother made for her when Julia was in junior high school. He slowly and cautiously lay down on the soft mattress, and put his hands over his head up to the bars of the brass. She closed the handcuffs over his wrists and locked the other ends onto the bars. "I'm so lucky to have you . . . Some guys get all the breaks." She fed him a sip of wine and kissed her way down to his firm midsection. He gasped in surprise as her lips had been chilled by the wine, or so he thought. She got up and fished the car keys out of his coat and dashed downstairs to her waiting lover's arms. He sat up as far as he could, his voice frozen as he heard the door slam, and he watched Julia and his ex-wife jump into his slightly worn BMW coupe and disappear into the night. "Welcome to the Eighties," thought Winston.
Feel Theory

by Rhet Lickliter

slow, elastic drums
formless voices
weightless chants
moving backwards
feel theory
uncertain clocks
no season
no temperature
no point of view
soft thicket
silent vegetation
thick liquids
new colour fog
amorphous shadows
hovering light islands
migrating planes
a piece of sphere
relaxful crouching
muscles,
swelling limbs
responding landscapes
inward gestures
gradual rejuvenation
effective cleansing
thought collection
sombre urgency
Sisters

by Shawn Matheny

I first spotted her on the platform of the Athens station. Backpack slung across one shoulder, she had the same tenseness as the rest of us—a “see if you can beat me to a seat” look. Yet, she was different. She appeared to be alone, for she skirted the groups of talking, laughing and singing travelers—never joining in. Stopping by a pillar, she let the pack slide down her back, then pulled a map out from one of its compartments.

Ignoring my sister Monica, who was still angry over our morning disagreement, I started playing the game of the summer—“guess the nationality.”

The girl’s hair was too dark for her to be Swedish, although she had the full, high breasts and long, tanned legs of the Swedes. She was not traveling amidst a herd of twittering girls; so, she couldn’t possibly be Italian or Spanish. But she did have an air about her—chic, fresh, and indifferent to those around her. She was the arrival of dawn in a sweltering night.

Sitting cross-legged next to me, Monica was absorbed in some travel guide to the Greek Islands. I nudged her and then motioned to the girl in the white tanktop and blue jean cut-offs. “What do you think, German or French?”

Monica’s eyes traveled through the crowd until they located the girl—a solitary island among the clusters. She studied her for a moment and then muttered, “Purely slut,” as she returned to her book.

The peace offering had failed. All summer I had been making peace offerings. Monica and I had never been particularly close growing up. I suppose the age difference had something to do with it—five years can really separate two people—especially two of such different temperaments. Also, I hadn’t been around much. Summer camp, college and then Israel. This trip had been our parents’ idea. They reasoned, I suppose, that three months of bumming around Europe would naturally draw us together. The plan was doomed from the beginning. Monica was still the ever-evasive shadow—first silent, then angry—always petulant. But, trying another olive branch (by reason of age and compassion), I said, “When did the guys say that they would return? The train should be coming soon.”

Not looking up Monica answered, “Don’t worry, they’ll be back in time.” “I’m not really worried. Only, I’d hate for them to be left behind—they’re so much fun.”

“Do you think so? Sometimes I think they bore you.”

She had caught me. I didn’t really think they were all that much “fun.” More of a nuisance. But, Monica thought that they were fun. And while she was occupied with them, I could go my own way. Deception had become a part of me, so I answered, “Only sometimes, but then, I’m the old lady here.”

It hurt to see her so distant from me. We were always so close physically—sleeping in double beds, using the same bathroom, sharing clothes—but emotionally we were separated by some barrier I could not figure out. Keep talking about the boys, I decided. It was a subject on which we could exchange at least a half dozen words. “It looked like you and Mike were having an intense conversation on in the aisle last night.”

“We were, but...I wish Danny had come out.” She looked up at the brownish Athens’ sky for a moment and then hesitantly asked, “Ivy...do you think he likes me?”
"Mike? Yeah, I know..."
"No, not Mike. Danny."
"Monica. Danny is the type of guy who likes all girls."
"I know, but I..."

She was on a roll. She hardly ever talked to me about men. About important aspects, that is. In Florence she would comment on the perfection of the men passing by on the streets or call them "fags" or "dicks" when they tried to talk to her. Yet, when she stayed out all night with some greasy, dark Italian in Rome she didn't say one word about it—she didn't even apologize when I told her I had almost gone to the police station.

As Monica was trying to finish her sentence, an unmistakably American voice cut her off. "Do either of you have a light?" Tall, lithe and ebony-headed, my French/German girl was American.

Although Monica was carrying the lighter, she said nothing. Once again she had turned into a close, hostile stranger—the antagonist.

"Sure, Monica do you mind handing her the lighter?"

As Monica passed it, the girl leaned her pack against the stucco wall, pulled a cigarette from a pouch hanging from her neck and squatted in front of us. After lighting the tip of some sweet smelling Greek brand, she turned her attention to Monica.

"Does that have the ship schedule for the islands?"

Monica nodded.

"Do you mind if I take a peek? I just arrived from northern Greece and I didn't have a chance to check the times." She smiled—her curving lips revealing perfect white teeth. "I guess I was relying on luck or the gods to get me here in time for the right ship."

Mutaely Monica held it out to the girl. Jesus Christ, I thought. the first interesting girl we meet and Monica has to act like the royal bitch.

The girl bent over the book and slowly ran her finger down the column. Monica had averted her eyes and was watching a group of blond German boys passing a bottle of wine.

Frustrated, I turned my attention back to the girl. "Where are you headed?"

"I'm afraid I'm terribly unoriginal. People tell me that I should find a deserted island and remain there the rest of my life, but I'm following the crowd to Santorini and then on to Crete."

"Hey, so are we. At least to Santorini."

"Then I guess introductions are in order. I'm Amanda Blair from Chicago. And you two are?"

"I'm Ivy Steinmetz and this is my sister Monica. We're from Saginaw, Michigan."

The girl looked uncomfortable for one second and then recovered her composure. "Saginaw. I wouldn't have guessed that. You look too, I don't know, New Yorkish."

I laughed with pleasure (our family had always considered itself a little too cultured for Michigan). "Yes, Saginaw. We're travelling with several guys—Americans also. We call them JAPS—Jewish American Princes—they're off looking at jewelry right now, but they should be back soon."

Amanda had lost that disinterested look that had at first seemed such a part of her; now, she was gregarious and beaming with life. "Well, now that the introductions are completed, how would the sisters Steinmetz like to go for a beer at the cafe across the way?"

Immediately I said "Love tol" but then I remembered Monica. I turned to her and asked, "How about you?"

"No thanks, I think I'll wait here for the guys."

With the rationalization that, after all, I had asked and she was not
receptive, Amanda and I walked through the inside of the station. Amanda kept shaking her head and saying, "Can you believe all of these people? It's going to be hell trying to find a place to stay."

We emerged on a wide sidewalk half covered with an awning and littered with small round tables, dirty and chipped, each surrounded by wobbly chairs.

Amanda looked at the congested traffic in the street and then turned to me. "Let's just stay here. The sun feels wonderful, the cafe is probably a pit and besides, we may never make it back with all this traffic."

I really didn't care where we went. It was enough of a novelty being with another female and being away from Monica.

As we sat down, a waiter in a perspiration-stained shirt hurried to our table. With a scowl on his face he asked us what we wanted and, to my surprise, Amanda ordered in Greek. The dark face of the man crinkled into a smile that revealed two glittering gold teeth. He rapped out a short question; she answered hesitantly and then giggled. It was not at all the giggle of nervousness nor embarrassment, but the bubbling over of sheer pleasure. Pleasure in what, I didn't know—perhaps in her knowledge of a squiggly tongue or perhaps in the way the eyes of the sun-baked man lingered on her face.

Then the man turned to me. "And you, miss," he said in thickly accented English. "You do not speak such perfect Greek as your friend?"

"No, I'm afraid and a little ashamed that I do not. In fact, I know no Greek."

"Ah, it is a shame. Two such beautiful women. So much alike." There was real curiosity in his face, as if Amanda's knowledge in his language had given him the right to question. "You are sister perhaps, no?"

Amanda and I both looked at one another and shook our heads. Amanda told him with a laugh, "No, in fact we are strangers—we just met."

It did not strike me until he said those words that, yes, we did resemble one another to a certain degree. I was a bad copy of her perfection. My hair was not quite so black-black and thick, my face not so delicately proportioned nor my body so lean and hard-muscled. People had always commented that Monica and I looked alike. So where did that put her in this comparison to Amanda? Perhaps we were a copy in triplicate: Amanda, the maker's original; me, the slightly blurred copy; and Monica, with her fuzzy dark hair, round madonna's face and awkward body, the marred carbon. Perhaps that was not fair. At times Monica could be very beautiful. When she was bent over a painting, when a ray of sunlight cutting through a shadowed cathedral caught her face or when she was laughing with Mike, she was then, corny as it may sound, illuminated. But most of the times her face was frozen in a frown of hostility or the blankness of neutrality. I could sometimes feel that she wanted to confide in me, that she was pulling me towards her with a tenacious hold—somehow needing me—but at the same time pushing me away, testing me.

As if reading my thoughts Amanda said, I'm sorry that Monica—it is Monica isn't it?—didn't come. She didn't say much. Isn't she feeling well?"

"She's okay, it's just... she's moody. Don't take it personally if she doesn't talk much to you... lord knows I don't... she's been like this since we met in England."

"Met?"

"Yes, I've been working in Israel for the past two years. We're Jewish, as you may have guessed, and after my sophomore year at college I went to Israel to work on a farm for the summer. For various reasons, I ended up staying and my parents thought that this tour of Europe would be a good way
The hot late afternoon sun created a heavy atmosphere in which we seemed to be the only two living creatures, despite the hum from the other tables and the droning traffic. Sweat was trickling down my back and under my long heavy braid; Amanda's bare arms and legs took on a sheen—the lustre of smooth plastic. Amanda pulled a cigarette out of her bag and the man sitting at the next table who had been watching her from the corner of his eyes quickly turned to offer a light. Smiling, but with a restraint that discouraged further communication, she accepted his offer and then thanked him in Greek.

She was the first to break the lull in the conversation. "Has it worked out, this "rediscovery"?"

"No, not really. We are further apart than we ever were." Why was I telling her all this? She was, as she had admitted, a complete stranger; yet, she was a type of sorceress—a weaver of words and keeper of secrets. And didn't people claim that it was so much easier to tell a stranger your most private thoughts? "We were never close growing up. I was so involved in other things. When she was in high school, I was in college. Then on to Israel where I met this guy—someone who was really special—so I stayed. Monica never really fit into my life nor I into hers. It's so hard now to force the pieces to fit." I turned to watch a group of old women dressed completely in black cross the street. They sounded like a clutter of hens cackling away over the day's gossip. Down the street between the box-like white buildings they passed still shouting to one another.

The strangeness of it all—the hot heavy sun, the warm beer, the man with the golden teeth and black mysterious eyes that were still watching us—allowed me to articulate feelings to this girl—this Amanda Blair—which I had not been able to tell anyone before that time.

I continued on. "The guys that I mentioned, the three boys from Cincinnati, we met them in Brindisi as we were crossing to Corfu. Well they stayed in the same hotel and we ended up spending a lot of time with them. It's been so much easier for us to get along since we hooked up with them. They're nice guys. Mike has a lot of interests in common with Monica, but she has a crush on Danny, a real Don Juan. But at least she has a good time when they're around and I can have a little time away by myself. They've kind of adopted her as a little sister. She's so pliable with them—so unlike what she's like when we're alone. I feel sometimes that we're two suspicious cats—each circling our own territory—protecting something, but I don't really know what."

Amanda, who was looking down at her empty glass, said softly, "Ivy, we never know what we're fighting to protect or save. It's a joke, don't you see? We put so much energy into forming relationships, then the sheet is pulled away and we find out that we get something that we really didn't want. Or else we decide that someone isn't worth the effort but in the end discover that that person was exactly what we wanted or needed."

Wisps of clouds spread across the hazy sky and then gathered around the monastery on a hill in the distance. I heard singing in the distance but didn't pay attention until it came closer to us. Looking up I saw the three guys who had been traveling with us, singing a slightly off-key version of "Taking It Easy." Weaving through the crowd they continued singing until they reached our table. As they approached, all eyes were on Amanda. Although the others had stopped, Danny continued "Such a fine sight to see, it's a girl, my
lord..." staring at her. A few minutes before, caught in the stillness of the afternoon and her words, she had sat motionless as if her mind were miles away in years past, but when I began the introductions, she returned to the here and now. Speaking in her clear low voice she acknowledged each and then her eyes returned to Danny. Light and dark, they complemented one another perfectly.

When we returned to Monica, Amanda and Danny alone were singing in voices that blended completely.

* * *

Two weeks after that meeting in Athens, Monica and I alone were travelling to Yugoslavia. I felt lost, as though I had lost part of myself on that dry, white island. Watching the tall green mountains pass by, I wondered, given the choice, would I be here sitting beside Monica or would I be travelling on to Crete with Amanda.

Amanda and I had formed a unique friendship that first night on the ship. While mixing Ouzo and water and drinking the pungent, milky mixture, I had told her about my three months on the farm and the following time in Jerusalem. I had even told her about my affair, something I had told no one before then. After telling her, she had merely said, "Love and desire make us do strange things." It was as if she had said that all was forgiven, nothing condemned.

In the early hours of the morning Danny had picked up his guitar and begun to pluck out a song. Slowly he entered into "Brown-Eyes Girl" while staring through the darkness at Amanda. When he finished she crawled over to him and held out her hands for the instrument. Surprised he handed it to her and then she awkwardly strummed a few chords. Her finger gained confidence after several minutes as she played chord progressions and then a simple flamenco-style tune. The sadness of the music reflected in her face, her lips, perpetually curving, became slack and o-shaped. Curling around the guitar her body seemed to be a buffer between the world and her music. She played and sang a few old Bread hits and then played the Stones' "I'm Not Looking for a Lover, I'm Just Looking for a Friend."

After that she looked up and said, "All done, that's my repertoire."

As she relinquished the instrument to Danny, her face was transformed back into the perfect planes and sheer confidence.

During Amanda's performance Monica had listened along with the rest. But once it was over she had turned back to Mike and Tom, throwing uncommon enthusiasm into their conversation until she saw Danny stand up and join Amanda. Then her words faltered and she turned to me, her whole body yelling at me "stop this."

But what could I do? Monica turned away from me and the boys toward the black night. I don't think that Mike knew how to handle her in this pained silence. After a few moments he came over and sat down next to me. We both watched her, body posed in hurt or rage, watch the shadows creep by the ship.

Mike whispered, "I didn't know she was that far gone over Danny. I knew she was attracted to him, but...Amanda is more his type. He doesn't go for the Monicas. I should know. He likes his girls witty and...chic. Monica is too quiet and sweet for him."

Surprised I asked, "You think she is sweet?"

"Yes, very much so. I know you two don't get along very well. That's
obvious. Personally, I don’t think you have enough patience with her.”

“Maybe not. I get so frustrated, Mike. Monica walks around with her head in a cloud. This morning she walked right out into an intersection. I had to grab her arm before she was hit, and even then it was a close call. And it didn’t even phase her—she could be dead now and she was mad at me for stopping her. She wants to be so independent; yet, a minute ago she was asking me to stop Danny from going off with Amanda. What could I do?

‘Danny, do you mind staying here with my sister—she has the hots for your body.’ Impossible. Like I told Amanda, Monica and I are always dancing around—never quite understanding what we want from one another.

“Right now she’s just hurt. She sees Amanda as a rival. Danny has changed camps and now she thinks you’re on Amanda’s side also.”

“Her side? What side? Sure, I like Amanda. Who wouldn’t? She’s the type of person I know how to deal with—straightforward and uncomplicated. I’m so fucking tired of trying to guess what Monica is feeling, what I’ve done to make her upset. For a change I’d like being with someone who talks to me, who’s pleasant, who’s enthusiastic about something…”

Laughter interrupted me as Amanda and Danny turned the corner. “Ta-da,” said Amanda in a lilting voice as she pulled small bundles out from behind her back. “Look what they’re selling downstairs—cheese pies. Smell…”

The ship approached Santorini sometime before noon. At the old port white ships zigzagged up the steep cliff to Phera. Small brightly colored dinghies crossed the smooth sea to the ship and caught the bundles being thrown down. From there the ship slowly moved through the azure water to the new port and the waiting bus. During the approach, Amanda, hanging onto an overhead rail, stood on one of the benches like a bird poised for flight. The deck was crowded, all the barely clad travelers taking photos of the odd volcanic island. It was strange, but Amanda did not own a camera. When I asked her about it she glibly answered something about the “mind’s eye” and not wanting to live in memories.

In Phera we managed to all find rooms up over a pub and a moped shop. They were small but clean. Ours had a small balcony overlooking a narrow street. Amanda’s, which was the smallest of the three, had a balcony overlooking the sea. Each night all six of us, wine bottles in hand, would sit on her balcony and watch the sun set. The sky blazed orange, then red, then pink as the flaming sun lowered behind a mountain of clouds.

We spent our nights moving from one pub or disco to the next. Amanda’s favorite was the Casablanca, a bar in an old abandoned church precariously hanging to the cliff. After our first evening there, she was a favorite. The Australian waiter, who immediately called her “luv,” would greet her with a hug and a goblet of white wine. Each night she wore the same hot pink T-shirt dress which clung to her body as she danced on the patio overlooking Phera.

During the days we would ride the crowded buses to different beaches on the island. Of all of us, Amanda least minded the long rides on the bus. Hanging onto the overhead bar, her body would sway with each curve, moving to the blare of the Greek music from the driver’s radio.

The first day on the beach Monica and I were surprised as Amanda abandoned all of her clothes in a pile next to her mat. Underneath the white tank top and shorts, she was the same glossy brown of her arms and legs. She turned to us with a laugh and said, “I know, I have no shame.”

I could tell that Monica resented the way that the boys reacted to this sea nymph image of Amanda. When talking to her their eyes rarely traveled below her neck; yet, when she was lying, eyes closed, on her back or
Gross vom Rheinfall
stomach, their eyes lingered over her entire body.

These days were spent in paradise. The occasional cool breeze fluttering over our bodies, the heat of the smooth black pebbles beneath us slowing everything down was seductive. Startling was the coolness of the water; hypnotic was the droning voices of the old men selling grapes and apricots from the baskets on their laden donkeys.

Soon the three boys became comfortable with Amanda's nakedness. All four would play in the waves and build "pebble castles" while arguing over who was to be the chief architect. I was of a different nature, preferring to lie on my mat, book in hand, but seldom turning a page. I was content to merely laugh at their antics as a spectator. These times at the beach were painful to Monica. She would simply lie still for hours completely encompassed in a black tank suit. Mike, as if guilty of his desertion, would occasionally sit next to her and talk or try to coax her into joining the others in the water. She was terribly self-conscious of her body, though. As if closeness somehow implied a comparison, she would not remain long with them. Any enthusiasm that Mike induced soon retreated like the tide and she would slowly make her way back to her mat.

After several days, Monica's attitude toward Amanda changed. It was the day after an evening when we had all drunk too much Ouzo that Monica began her new approach toward—or now, with hindsight, I would say campaign against—Amanda.

That evening we had gone to the Casablanca and Danny, who had been good about spreading his charm between us three girls, devoted himself entirely to Amanda. Mike, Tom and I, hidden away in a corner, were in a heated debate about the Zionist Youth movement and our role as American Jews, while Monica kept her eyes on the dancing Danny and Amanda. As we walked back to our rooms, Danny would catch Amanda's hand or put his arm around her bare shoulders. She did not seem to be encouraging him, but she was not rejecting him either. Later that night I heard a soft tapping on Amanda's door and Danny's voice. Then I heard the door open and close. The next morning we all knew that the status quo had been altered. Mike and Tom began spending less time with Amanda. And Monica's behavior was different for she began to talk to Amanda. No, not so much talk but interrogate her. And Amanda seemed slightly nervous and suspicious about this new interest. Amanda had always seemed too much a creature of the present, a vital and exciting present, for me to be concerned with her past. She had invited confidence from others; yet, she never confided in anyone. We all knew that she was from Chicago and had been travelling about Europe for several months. Every once in a while she would refer to people she knew in Spain, France and Germany—friends of the family or exchange students she had met at college—but these would be merely anecdotes. Monica's questions, however, were only about the past. These Amanda would answer with vague evasions or glib answers which left Monica with a smug, complacent expression.

The afternoon before Monica and I planned to head back to Athens we were sitting with Amanda on the balcony watching the people pass below. For the last evening we had planned a cheese and wine party and were waiting only for the boys' arrival. Having already started in on the wine, all three of us were buzzed.

Amanda, staring out at the sea, said dreamily, "I love the islands. Eternal summer. No harsh winds and biting rain like the beaches of the north during the winter."

 Barely intruding on her thoughts, Monica asked softly, "You've been in the
north during the winter?"

In her dream state Amanda replied without the usual carefulness, "Yes."

Like a sly feline stalking a mouse, Monica said, "But I thought that you’ve been here only two months. How could you have felt the "biting rain" of winter during June?"

Suddenly alert, Amanda said, "I was there a couple of years ago with my parents."

"But you told us that this was your first trip to Europe."

Playing with her fingernails Amanda answered casually. "I think you misunderstood me. This is my first trip alone. I’ve been here several times with Mother and Father."

Monica looked at her with unrelenting intensity. "I really do doubt that Amanda. In fact, I did a little snooping. I know for a fact that, according to your passport, you’ve been here for exactly fourteen months. Since you have lied to us about that, what else have you lied about? Like being from Chicago, when you don’t know the first thing about the city? Half the pictures that you claim are in the Chicago Art Museum haven’t been out of New York or Europe in the past thirty years. And your money—I have my own ideas where that’s coming from, but I won’t voice them—it’s too vulgar." Monica had finished her tirade triumphantly. For the first time in a week she had looked alive; face flushed, vitality was oozing from her.

Amanda continued sitting with her arms wrapped around her legs for a few moments and then she stood up. Turning to me, she said in a voice without any emotion, "Do you mind locking up my room after you are finished. I don’t want people looking through my things. Who knows what they might find. Tell the guys I’m sorry I couldn’t make it And if I don’t see you before you leave, have a good life." She walked out of the room and seconds later I heard the door below us open and then bang shut.

I turned to my sister, opened my mouth and then shut it. Finally I said, "I don’t know you at all. I can’t believe that you did that to her. Why? Pure jealousy? Envy? What did it matter to you whether she was telling a few white lies or the unadulterated truth? After tonight you’ll never see her again."

"I’m just tired of everyone being under some grand illusion about her. It’s all a lie."

"Maybe some of it, but who cares? It’s not an illusion that she’s fun to be with—she makes people feel good. But you, you’re such a jealous bitch you can’t see that." Tears began to form in her eyes, but I couldn’t stop myself. "I’ll tell you something else, something we weren’t going to tell you because Amanda knew that you’d be hurt. Danny is going to Crete with her. He is really in love with her."

"But . . . but she’s a fake—a fraud. Can’t he see that?"

"No, and if you tell him, you can go to Yugoslavia alone because I’ll go to Crete with Amanda."

She looked at me with unbelieving eyes. "But you can’t. You’re my sister—not hers. You’ve got to . . . stand by me."

"At this moment, even this whole trip, I’ve felt like anything but your sister. Enemy, adversary, I don’t know what, but not sister."

We both sat in silence until the boys arrived. I wanted to go after Amanda, but I felt that she wanted to be alone. I told them that she wasn’t feeling well and had gone for a walk, but I knew that they felt something else was wrong. After watching the sun set, we went to the Casablanca. I kept hoping that she would return to the fold on her own—laughing, joking and wearing her dancing shoes—but she didn’t.

About midnight I told Danny that I would find her. I had a good idea where
she would be. There was an abandoned house with crumbling walls and decayed doors and shutters that Amanda and I had discovered while exploring. We had walked through it discussing what we would do with it if we could buy it. Jokingly she had said, “With a little paint, plaster and a roof it would be perfect for us.” It was decided that we would all remain on the island in this house. She could work as a bartender (“all the free drinks I want”), I could work in a shop, Monica could paint, Danny could play his music, Tom could run a jewelry shop and Mike, well, we hadn’t decided what Mike could do. She had teased me saying that I could be den mother since I was the “old lady.”

In the dark I passed under what was left of the arched door. Amanda was sitting in one of the windows smoking a cigarette. Not sure whether I should leave or approach her, I simply stood and waited till she recognized me.

Below us the lights of Phera took on an unreal quality, pin points of darkness far away. The clouds were milky white like Ouzo dropped in milk, under a jet black heaven. A slight breeze coming from the ocean ruffled Amanda’s dress, seagreen foam cloth cut like a goddess dress, causing it to billow and then flatten against her body.

After a few minutes she turned toward me. “You didn’t have to come. I’m okay, really. Don’t you know that a cat always lands on its feet?”

“Danny and I were worried. I knew you’d be here. I wanted to see if you wanted to talk.” I headed toward the other window, which was almost circular from age.

Still looking out at the sea she began to speak, softly but without emotion. “Your sister has my number. She’s right—it was all a lie. I have been here for over a year. I’m not from Chicago . . . do you know what I love most about travelling? You can be a pampered wealthy child from Chicago. You can be a student at Northwestern. Anything you want. You don’t have to be a farm girl from Mount Pleasant, Indiana. A girl who grew up on a tiny piece of land in a trashy house with six other kids. Here I don’t have to spend my nights getting it on with a redneck farm boy in the back of a pickup or my days working in an IGA. You see, Ivy, here I can . . . live out my fantasies. Here, I’m beautiful and interesting.”

I didn’t know what to say so I simply asked, “How did you get here?”

“One day I borrowed a friend’s car and drove to Chicago to get a passport. Then I took all my money out of the bank and bought a one way ticket to Luxembourg. I planned to meet someone, anyone, there—tall, dark, handsome and kind—the answer to my dreams who would take care of me and treasure me. Harlequin Romance mentality, right?”

It was hard for me to comprehend. How could anyone be that courageous, desperate and stupid? “But how do you get by?” I asked with Monica’s innuendoes still in my mind.

“At first I played my guitar on the streets at night. I made enough doing that, but soon it got colder... then my guitar was stolen. I picked grapes for a while in France. Then in Spain I worked in a bar in Marbella since I knew a little German. I even modeled—black lace corset and undies in Hamburg. I met people along the way.”

She moved from her perch in the window and walked over to me. “Do you want a cig?”

“Sure.”

She lit one and handed it to me and then leaned against the wall. “Do you remember the “friend” in Madrid that I was telling you about?” I dumbly nodded. “Well, he was a friend when I left, but when I first met him... Ivy, I had eighty pesetas—what, less than a dollar? — and it was cold and raining. His
apartment was warm and he had a shower — not to mention food. When I left he gave me enough money to get to the coast. What else could I do?"

"Go home."

"No, as they say, there's no going back. I am where I want to be. Sure, sometimes it's rough. But right now I have some money and I'm seeing things. I'm happy . . . as happy as I can be."

"Where did you get the money?"

First studying me as if to decide whether she should tell, she finally began to speak. "I met this Greek guy in Italy. He was the one that taught me the Greek. He wasn't bad, a little pompous, but . . . anyway he had a vacation home in a small town above Athens. I stayed there with him for a week. Obviously he was richer than I thought — he was also a little in love with me or sorry for me, don't know which, maybe both. When I left he gave me nearly three hundred dollars.

I was intrigued, yet repulsed, by all that she was telling me. She was a stranger and yet she was the same. Unable to articulate my feelings I simply asked, "What are you going to do now?"

"Go to Crete with Danny."

"And then?"

She must have thought I was judging her, for she answered flippantly, "Oh, I don't know. Things turn up . . . people turn up. What's the difference? Some guy back home or some guy here? You've got to admit, the scenery is better here."

"Amanda, come to Yugoslavia with me. We could do something . . . call my parents. They would give you the money to go somewhere — to get out of this. Maybe you could go back with me."

"Where? To Saginaw? No thank you. I think I'd rather stay here and be on my own. And I really am on my own. Sure, I get money from other people, but when it comes down to it, it's just me. Do you understand?"

Although I shook my head "no," in a way I did understand. Like a cat landing on its paws, she enjoyed her life. "I'm going back to the room. Monica and I are leaving in the morning. Are you coming?"

"No, I think I'll stay here for a while. Lord knows, if I went back Danny would come knocking on my door and I feel like I've already been through enough tonight without that."

"I guess it's good-bye then." Before she could answer I gave her a hug and started walking away.

"Ivy, wait." I turned and looked at her. "Remember what the waiter said about us looking like sisters? I wish that we were." Then she turned back toward the sea, her gaze fixed somewhere far beyond.

Because a work of art does not aim at reproducing natural appearances, it is not, therefore, an escape from life . . . but an expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to greater effort in living.

— Henry Moore
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