The poem is not made of these letters that I drive in like nails, but of the white that remains on the paper.

Chinese
Our special thanks are gratefully extended to the following people: Susan Neville, creative guide and Wendell Willkie enthusiast; Dr. Baetzhold, the leader of the pack; Marilyn Porter, tireless warrior; Shirley Daniell, our momentary stay against confusion; and Michael Martone, MSS veteran and inspiring proof of life on the other side.
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He dreams. The helicopter’s blades are spinning. The dust cloud stings his eyes. The screaming engine is deafening. He’s pulling on the door—trying to get in. The door will not open. There is no one inside.

He starts to grow taller. His legs are stretching. He looks up at the blades that are getting closer and closer to his face. The door won’t open.

His head lops off in one clean cut. There is no blood. It spirals over the horizon, like a perfect football pass.

* * *

The plastic, light-up, life-size manger scene is arranged around bales of hay in front of the City Building in an anonymous town that is famous as the mobile home and recreational vehicle capital of the midwest. The bulb inside the black wise man is burned out. A thin layer of ice freezes over the mud puddles at night and melts by noon. Giant red ribbons are on top of every mobile home and recreational vehicle in the sales lot on the edge of town. The deluxe model on the end has a sign in the windshield that reads, “Indulge Yourself This X-Mas.”

Eddie sells shoes to the people who sell the mobile homes and recreational vehicles. The store where he works has a sign in the window that reads, “Just 28 More Shopping days Till X-Mas.” They are having a sale on tennis shoes. Eddie will not work on commission.

Eddie is moving from a two-room efficiency to an efficiency-plus-study in the same apartment complex. It is the only apartment complex in town. He doesn’t need the extra room.

All of his possessions fit neatly into little cardboard boxes. The little cardboard boxes fit neatly into the hatchback of his yellow Pinto. He only has two more payments until the Pinto is paid for.

Before he unpacks, he sets up a three-foot, artificial blue spruce by a window. He wraps a sheet around the base, hangs five styrofoam balls from the wire branches, and places a foil star on the top. On the lowest branch, he ties a blue ornament that used to play jingle bells. He hands three mistletoe leaves above the doorway to the bathroom.

His old apartment was in the basement, next to the laundry room. The sounds of the washing machine switching from spin to final rinse would lull him to sleep. There were no other apartments in the basement.

Eddie’s new apartment is on the second floor, at the end of the hall—Apartment 2B. His new apartment overlooks a small man-made lake with a family of ceramic ducks posed around it. There are two other apartments on his landing. Eddie is looking forward to having neighbors.

* * *

He stands by a window and watches a group of children playing with the ceramic ducks. The children try to pick them up, but the ducks’ little webbed feet are cemented into the ground. Giving up, the children start to play “smear the queer.” Eddie notices that the smallest child is getting knocked around. She is six. The bigger kids push her down into the frozen mud. She laughs. She lives with her mother in Apartment 2A, next to Eddie’s. Eddie has seen her playing by herself in the hallway.
He wants to go outside and make the children play good. He wants to stop them from picking on her. He could be Clint Eastwood, John Wayne, or the A-Team, riding into her tormented existence on a white horse and saving the day. He isn’t.

Instead, Eddie stands by the window and watches the children play. They finish the game and he notices the little girl is walking back to her building. He opens the door to his apartment and fumbles with the doorknob, pretending to be fixing it.

The little girl runs up the steps, slowing when she sees Eddie. She moves quietly toward 2A. Her dirty blonde hair is fine and shoulder-length. She wears a light blue, quilted jacket with a furry hood, a brown skirt, and sneakers. Her right knee is scraped. She looks happy, but is not smiling.

“What’s your name?”
“Mary.”
“I’m Eddie... I live here.”
“I know.”
“Do the other kids always play mean with you, Mary?”
She is silent.
“Mary, do they pick on you?”
“We’re just playin.’” She looks puzzled.
“Mary, if they start picking on you again, get me. I’ll take care of them.”
“We’re just playin.’” She looks frightened.

The door to Apartment 2A opens and Mary’s mother steps into the hallway. Mary tugs on a belt loop on her mother’s jeans. Mary’s mother smiles at Eddie and closes the door.

* * *

He dreams. He is looking out the window.
Mary’s feet are cemented into the ground. She can’t move. The children are hitting her. They throw rocks and swing sticks. Pieces of her body fall to the ground. The children are laughing and singing in rhythm.

He stands by the window and watches as her body is reduced to rubble.

* * *

Because of the Christmas rush, Eddie works evenings taking inventory. As he leaves, Mary’s mom is getting home from work after picking up Mary
from the babysitter's. Mary's mom usually talks to Eddie as she opens the
door to her apartment. He waits when they are late.

She is a fairly attractive woman. She has curly, frosted hair that she tints
herself. She wears heavy pancake make-up that covers the scars from a bad
complexion during her adolescence. She wears jeans to work. Eddie doesn't
know what she does. Eddie doesn't know what happened to her husband.
Mary's mother's name is Denise.

Eddie's sex life is regimental. It occurs each night in the shower before he
goes to bed. This has progressed to the point where merely the sound of
running water turns him on. This is not a fetish but a result of Pavlovian
conditioning. Eddie seldom thinks about making love. He never thinks about
making love to Denise.

* * *

Eddie buys a tube of ready-bake tollhouse cookies and asks Denise if Mary
can come over and help him bake them. It is only for an hour. Denise thinks
this is fine.

Mary doesn't like to bake. She watches a rerun of "I Love Lucy." She
doesn't understand it, but she laughs. Eddie puts the cookies in a shoe box
and has Mary take them home to her mother.

* * *

Denise invites Eddie to Mary's first-grade Christmas pageant.
The children fidget under bathrobes and look nervously at their parents as
they deliver their lines. The parents sit perfectly still, smiling. The baby Jesus
is a balding, plastic doll wearing a dish rag. One of the wise men wets his pants.
The teacher hurries him off stage.

Mary plays the part of a lamb. She says, "And there were in the same
country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by
night." She says her line perfectly. Eddie is proud. After the pageant, Mary
runs up to Eddie and tugs on a belt loop on his jeans.

"You must be Mary's father."
"No... Just a friend."

He dreams. A child is born in the City of David.
From behind a plate glass display window in the center of the Nativity
scene, a sterilized nurse holds the child. The baby girl yawns. Her fine yellow
hair sticks to her head. He presses his hands and face against the glass. He
feels like the child is his own. She isn't.

He wants to hold the child. He can't.

* * *

Denise invites Eddie over for dinner on Christmas Eve. Eddie buys a stuffed
animal for Mary and a bottle of medium-priced perfume for Denise. Denise
gives him a money clip that she'd originally purchased for her boss. Eddie
doesn't notice that the monogram engraved on it is not his own. They eat
spaghetti.

After dinner, Denise wants to go out and get a bottle of Ruinite. She asks if
Eddie would mind watching Mary for a little while. She hands Eddie a beer
from the fridge and tells him to feel free to go home if Mary goes to sleep.
Mary sits on the floor and stares at the twinkle lights on the small tree. A papier-mâché angel with one wing looks down from the top.

“Do ya want me to tell you a story?”

Mary nods her head, continuing to stare at the tree.

“Let me...”

“Tell me 'bout the baby Jesus.” Mary turns around and looks in his eyes.

Eddie starts to set his beer down and drops it on the floor. He walks to the kitchen and gets some paper towels. He wipes up the spill and gets another beer. Mary is asleep on the couch.

Eddie sits in the leatherette easy chair and watches her sleep. Her head is resting on a satin pillow. The lights from the tree make her face glow. The shimmering pillow encircles her head. Her chest moves up and down slowly with each even breath. Eddie sips his beer.

Denise gets home at around 2 a.m. She opens the door quietly and rubs her eyes when she sees Eddie. She is not carrying anything. She sits on the couch and hugs Mary.

“You should have put a blanket over her. She’ll catch cold.” Denise picks Mary up and starts to carry her to her room. She smells like she’s been drinking.

“She just fell asleep. She’s all excited about Santa and everything.” Denise doesn’t hear him.

He goes back to his apartment. He does not dream.

* * *

Ethel Merman’s rendition of “Oh Holy Night” blares from Eddie’s clock radio at 11 a.m. on Christmas Day. He listens to the radio while he makes scrambled eggs for breakfast. He doesn’t take a shower.

Eddie hears the door to 2A open and hurries to his own door. Mary is bundled-up standing in the hallway. Denise is reaching around a grocery sack full of presents, fumbling with her keys. Eddie grabs the bag from her and she locks the door.

“I... I forgot they don’t deliver mail on Christmas.” Eddie looks at the floor.

“Are you going...”

“We’re going to my ex’s for Christmas. I ran into him last night... It’s good if Mary sees him today.” Denise is smiling. She is wearing more make-up than usual. “Well... Have a Merry Christmas.”

“Ya... Merry Christmas.”

Eddie walks back into his apartment. On the radio, an after-Christmas sale at the mobile home and recreational vehicle dealership is being advertised.

**Writer’s Notebook**

*by Jennifer Aikman*

A poem later

and all the while

a war dances on in Iraq
The Waving World

by Jane Anfinson

hello goodbye and undulating
breeze moving branches
water forming the sign
the hand that was mine
sending away another
to take her chances.

undulating and hello goodbye
breeze carries sound
water runs into the ground
the face that was mine
smiling only to waver
dance chances around.
Incantation

by Rhet Lickliter

Life starts to fray
it feels like death again
we earn our pay
and we spend it on ourselves again
we will spend it on ourselves again
spend it on ourselves again
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continue.
Pa

*by Victoria Huntington*

On Saturday morning
(coffee, cartoons,
cigarettes, ashtrays,
homework)
Dad and I talked.

For a time he stood at the windows
watching
winter come—
horses running, cornfields blowing.

Strength passed between us.
Sometimes to him,
sometimes from him
as the coffee pot strained
up against the grounds.

His blue eyes were tired behind speckled glasses.
He said he needed a friend.
What a sad thing to have to ask—
I've always been his buddy.

As he cried I held him
in arms not strong enough
to contain his loss or bear it for him.

So we cried.
A tear cooled his coffee
How odd,
we drink our own grief.
The Point

by Debbie Edwards

First there's sand. Then, there's blacktop over white, metal drainage pipes. Finally, the dirty, cracked concrete of Waukegan Harbor's south pier begins.

By the first part of the pier, near the shore, a billboard reads, "Welcome to Waukegan, freshwater Coho capital of the world." Only someone has blocked out the word "Coho" and put "PCP" in its place. A mass of driftwood, McDonald's packaging, and a few dead fish clump ironically to the sign's watery base. The smell of factory waste, fish, and urine hangs in the air. Arches made of iron rods rise about ten feet from the concrete pier, placed like giant croquet hoops between the shore and the breakwater. Fist-sized spiders make their homes in the tops of these hoops. In the concrete between the arches are deep, round holes, usually stuffed with beer cans, which trip those who are too busy watching the spiders. This part of the pier separates the north and south boat docks. Ducks swim in and out of spaces among the various crafts as the sound of boat motors mixes with that of the squawking gulls perched on the red, white, and blue Mobil gas pump sign.

The second part of the pier, from the white rock breakwater to the stout, black-capped lighthouse, is much higher and narrower than the first mile or so. Here, the sounds of birds and boat motors are lost in the crashing of the waves against this concrete intruder. Gone, too, are the factory stench and rod-iron arches. Looking south, there's an uninterrupted view of the Chicago skyline. The Sears Tower, about the size of a domino, looms over its partner, the Hancock, the snow-white Standard Oil Building. The rest of the structures, too small to pick out, form little bumps on the horizon. Further out on the pier, right before the lighthouse, is a colorful collection of spray-paint graffiti with an almost perfectly stenciled Ghostbusters' emblem glaring up from the concrete in bold red and white. Lastly, the lighthouse sits at the very end of the pier, as if on the point of an arrow. At the tip of the pier there is no railing; the concrete drops straight into the deep, blue water. The blue-green beacon, coupled with the blow of the air horn, sweeps the rough waters of Lake Michigan.

Most people are scared of the rushing waves, only willing to venture as far as the lighthouse.

Touch it.

And then turn back toward shore.

They feel uneasy, knowing they're surrounded by a presence far more powerful than themselves. No one ever makes it to the point, especially at night.

Except for me.

I go to the point, especially at night.

Or sometimes, most of the time, I walk the pier just as the sun goes down. By the time I reach the lighthouse, the sky has turned dark blue. Then, I slip around the cold, white sides of the landmark and, finally, come to the point.
I stand, my hands stuffed in the pockets of faded Levi's. My hooded sweatshirt bunches up around my waist. The blowing wind makes its metal zipper cold. I line the toes of my worn, gray Nikes up with the crumbling concrete tip of the pier. Sometimes I try to kick one of the exposed pebbles loose, but they never give. So, I just stand, very straight and still, and watch the dark, blue sky turn to black.

The wind usually picks up after dark. And the waves get higher and stronger. And, weather permitting, the low rumbling thunder of a passing storm competes with the horn of the lighthouse to fill the empty night.

My feet and jean bottoms become wet. I get a chill.

Then, a shiver.

My hair is blown back away from my ears and forehead; I never wear the hood of my sweatshirt.

I stare straight ahead. Before me is a wall of black. Calm, solid black beneath my feet. Frenzied, churning black beyond. Pressing, endless black from above. Only texture divides this charcoal medium; all outline is lost.

I let my eyes slip out of focus. I can no longer distinguish myself from the pier, the pier from the choppy waters, or the water from the horizon. We all become one. We all become nothing. This is why people turn back. This is when I hear my dad saying, "Be careful; it's not safe out there."

They're scared of the force of nature. Maybe it's because they read it wrong, or maybe they just don't understand it in the first place. But I know they're scared.

This power, the rolling waves, the sharp, biting wind, the invisible horizon, is far beyond their grasp, and their control. People always want to understand things, and afterwards, manipulate them. They want to put everything in a place, an ordered slot. By doing this, they decrease the inherent power of the object, or force, and, thereby, increase their control over it. If they can't do this, if they can't control, they feel insignificant, and they get scared.
They can’t do it out here. 
And they are scared. 
But I’m not afraid. I’m not afraid of insignificance, and I understand that some things can’t be understood. I watch the raging, uncontrolled water. That’s enough.
I don’t want to master it, or own it, or anything. I don’t even want to think. I close my eyes; the night grows colder, the wind more powerful.
Suddenly, I hear a purr. It’s low, but it keeps getting louder. I open my eyes and search for the source of the sound. I see nothing. The sound becomes less of a purr and more of a technical grind. It doesn’t belong. Not out here with me.
The blue-green beacon touches a shiny spot on the water. I see a yellow, 40-foot Criss-Craft, its small but powerful engine cutting through the rough water. There’s a family of four on board, all dressed in matching light blue rain slickers. The father is having a hard time taxiing the boat across-current to the breakwater. They all look scared, anticipating the smooth, glassy, controlled area of the breakwater and the boat slips.
I smile.
They wave, but I don’t wave back. The back of the boat reads “Windtamer.” Something else catches my eye. The reflection of light off the boat makes another glimmer. It’s on my wrist. I look down at the gold Timex on its black leather strap.
And I step back.

Poem
by Chris Crane

You compete with cats, resurrecting without fail.
Your arrival is a mystery bringing mists, or sheets of you
warm and refreshing or chilling to the marrow.
You wash the residue of human touch to a film;
we lose you to thin air, returning to drown those who marvel at your maker.
Suicide
by Joel Johnston

Wall break down,
ground tilt.
Head sees inside,
loses face.
Little girls lost
and found.
The cold reflect
pulled from the shelf.
Disappears in skin
and drops half tinted.
Drops down in the forest.
Down to earth?

A Warning
by Jennifer Aikman

do not torment me
i now know the recklessness
of pain
and here i might say what i mean
Morality

by D.D.

The decision of his life
is in the air;
as he walks across the tightrope
from one platform to another,
he manages to live and
when asked how it works,
he says, "It's easy—
when I start to fall over
on one of the sides,
I lean toward the other."
The Silver Lady

by Ivy Fleischer

Sunlight drifted through the shutters as Emma began picking up bottles that lined the bar. Saturday morning offered no remedies to her arthritis. Her back ached like always, her eyes were bloodshot as usual, and she was damned if her husband thought she'd pick up one more broken beer bottle, let alone, mop the floor.

"Chuck." No answer.

"Chuck!" Why did she marry him anyway. "Chuck, get your ass down here and clean up this mess!"

Emma had grown up in this "mess." Her family had always owned "The Silver Lady Lounge." From the times when it was the hotspot of Meacon, Ohio to now when the only customers were rowdies and drunks who had no place else to go, Emma had seen it all.

"Awwwww! I've had enough of this crap." She winced in pain from leaning too far across the bar. Coughing sporadically, Emma stopped her work to check her watch. 11:37 a.m. Digital watches, where would we be without them? Chuck had given her that watch just a few months ago on their anniversary. Thirty-five years together. Thirty-five years she'd put up with him. God, he was always drunk. He was never nice, and oh, his Meacon frame of mind! Ah, he wasn't such a bad lug. So what if he married her for what money she had, at least he was faithful. You can't ask for too much these days.

Emma rinsed a rag to wipe the countertop. Ashes and dust dotted the counter with puddles of beer mirroring the lines on her face. Emma gave a silent laugh as she stood mesmerized by the contortions her face made in the day-old beer.

"I remember when mama used to make me wash my face everyday. Hah! Noxema girl, she used to call me. What a pretty face I was." Her spontaneous smile transformed quickly to her standard business-as-usual expression.

Lighting a cigarette, Emma yelled for her husband one more time. The silver-grayish smoke seemed to dance in narrow streams of sunlight slipping through the shutters.

Oh yes, Emma could remember her mother as if she were still there. The Silver Lady. That was her mama.

Her mother had been "the prettiest gal in Boone County," known all around the area for winning several beauty contests, but most importantly, qualifying for the State pageant. Her mother's soft grey eyes could turn almost any rowdie into an obedient child. Her mother had a smile for anybody, and her smile was a smile that could make your day. Emma could still hear her mama's crystal clear voice.

"What Mac—you don't look like you've had a hard day," she'd say, "Hal Your wife ain't that bad, sugar. She just don't want to lose ya'. Why, I can't say I blame the woman for being a little jealous. Why look at all that muscular body of yours, and with your being gone all the time. Here babe, have a drink on me."

Something about her mama. Everyone loved her. She knew what to say and when to say it. When Daddy had opened the bar, he knew he could draw a crowd. No problem. All he had to do was to remind everyone that he was married to the Silver Lady, the lady who won queen contests and county fair
bake-offs. What a lady she was. She could handle anything.

People from all around came to the bar while she was alive, and the day she died, you would have thought it was a national holiday, from the number of people who showed up to mourn.

Emma felt a tear escaping her eye and quickly wiped it from her face, resuming her work. It was only minutes before she sat down again. Emma ran her fingers through her greyed hair. Her hand ran into several knots and her coarse-textured mop reminded Emma only that she was forgetting herself once again.

Pulling her hand down to smooth out the wrinkles in her cotton dress, she tried to console herself by saying things weren't that bad. She wanted so much to be like her mama. But something was missing. Her hazel eyes lacked that special sparkle, and she never could really talk to the customers who even entered the place anymore. More than often her pensive and distracted gaze out the window irritated the customers as she'd forget they were even there.

Emma walked to the beat-up old jukebox and put in a quarter. She dusted off the machine with an edge of her dress, and then pressed button B-37, three times. Sentimental Journey. It had always been her favorite song. Her mother always said that the jukebox songs shouldn't be changed. It gave the place a little more class and flavor, she'd say. Emma knew her mother just wanted to save money.

"Gonna' take a sentimental journey. Gonna' set my mind at ease. Gonna' take a sentimental journey, to renew of memories." She sang along with the song, her voice cracking on the higher notes.

Emma had always wanted to leave this town. While she went to Meacon High, she also worked at the Woolworth's on Hickory Street where all of the Eastsiders shopped. She knew she wasn't smart enough or even rich enough to go to college, but she wanted to earn enough money to escape from this suffocating town.

She could remember running away with Johnny Baker. Her boyfriend at that time. Johnny and she had left school one day and driven clear to Dayton. Yeah, they'd gotten suspended, but that wasn't the worst part of it all. People said they'd been married, that Johnny had raped her, that she was pregnant! They couldn't stop the rumors even though they were lies.

The thought turned in Emma's head as the record began to play a second time. She let a short chuckle slip from her lips. How petty this town was. There was so little happening in Meacon that no news became news. It had to. The newspaper would have gone out of business.

Emma's mood began to lift. She found herself humming to the music and chuckling more over recent news stories on lost dogs, the Green family who saw the governor, and the mayor's recent "controversial" decision to install a 60 second stoplight on the corner of Vine and Mill Streets. Why did she stay here?

God, at least the Green family went to Columbus for a week in July. Better than that, her best friend from high school, Susie Skinner, had gone clear to Chicago. Of course, Emma didn't hear much from Susie anymore. Every holiday she might get a Hallmark card, but Susie never wrote anything on the card, and she never came to visit. She worked at a museum doing some kind of job. She now signed her cards as Mrs. Susan Stafford. Yeah, she'd gotten married too.

Emma put out her cigarette and moved to the tables placing the chairs upside-down on them and picking up bits of trash that lay on the floor. Each stoop for a cigar plastic wrapper or a stale peanut caused her left arm to
move to her lower back as she winced at the dull pain.

Again she stopped her work. No wonder she never got much done. Chuck was right; she wasn't good for much of anything, anymore. He was always telling her she spent more time daydreaming than she did working. He admitted she should leave him, but always added she had no one to leave with and no place to leave to. She didn't have any friends. But, he only said these things when he was drunk. When they slept together she knew he loved her. He would talk sweet, caress her—he could make her feel good again.

Chuck walked into the bar, in his bare feet. His dirty white t-shirt hung over an old pair of black pants that he wore almost every day. Gray and black stubble masked his face, and his graying hair was styled in wind-direction.

"You ain't got the bar cleaned yet, huh," he said in a low grumble. His right hand moved back and forth covering all of his over-sized belly. "Is dinner ready?"

Emma looked out the window. She hated him when he was like this.

"Woman, don't you ever listen to me? I'm hungry, and I have a headache. God damn it, when we eatin'?"

Emma turned around. Inside she felt a burning desire to throw something at her husband while at the same time being so very scared to do so. Yes, she was his wife, and yes, she had responsibilities, but when did she get a break... he could be so hateful!

"I'm sorry. I didn't hear you. I haven't started dinner, and I'm not even done cleaning the bar. If Sam and Terry hadn't stayed so late last night—" She thought he was going to slap her.

"Jesus Christ. I'll just go next door and grab a burger from Williams Restaurant. You can make your own dinner. I don't want no lectures and I'm sick of waitin'."

He left the room in an angry stumble. Emma looked out the window as it began to rain.

* * *

It was 5:30 and Samuel Jackson was coming through the door for his nightly dosage of Jack Daniels. He always said a little whiskey made his days go down a little easier. Or was it the other way around?

"Howdy, Emma. I'll take a double tonight. Is Chuck around?"

Emma, who was washing glasses, looked up at Sam with a blank stare. "I guess he's in the back. He should be out here soon."

"Well damn it. I sure do want to talk to him. You wouldn't believe all the ruckus we've been raising down at the papermill. All the recent talk about unions is really giving our bosses a scare. Oh yeah, but we workers are gonna' show them who's really got control here. Shit Emma, don't ya' have my drink ready yet? Why, you haven't even begun to make it. Are you feeling okay? You're looking kinda' pale... are ya' sick? Chuck's treating ya' okay, ain't he?"

Emma slowly looked up from her work. Things weren't right, but what could she say? She didn't know what was wrong.

"Chuck's treatin' me just fine, Sam. I'm sorry about your drink. What did you say you wanted?"

Chuck walked into the room. He was now clean-shaven with his favorite plaid shirt tucked into his black pants. The scent of his cheap after shave gave him a clean smell, though Emma could still see the dirt on his nails from working on the bar's exterior earlier that day.

Sam greeted him eagerly as he came through the doorway. "Chuck! You won't believe what Fred and those guys did today down at the mill. They're
talking about a strike...

Sam's voice seemed to fade as Emma mixed his drink and began humming her song. She fixed his drink and fished for a cocktail napkin under the bar. There would be more people here tonight, Emma thought, if the papermill really was such a hotbed. The Silver Lady Lounge was the closest bar to the mill, and Emma found that when people were angry, nothing could satisfy them like a little bit of liquor. Yeah, this would be a good night for business. Emma was opening a new container of swizzle sticks when a large group of people bustled through the bar, rushing her with multiple orders for beer.

"I can't believe those bosses. What do they want from us? Slave labor!"
"I'll tell ya what they can do with their fuckin' mill—"
"Man, I would love to tell them where they can go!"

A hubbub of angry conversation filtered throughout the bar. The stench of cigars and cigarettes permeated the room, and Emma seemed like a lost child in a crowd. Occasionally, she'd nod to answer a question and soon people were asking her what she thought.

She didn't know what to say. Her uncle had been a boss at the papermill and she liked him an awful lot. He seemed like an honest man. She didn't think he'd hurt anybody or take advantage. Of course, this only angered the customers and they soon kept to themselves, ordering more beers to calm their souls. At least she had told the truth. She hated to lie.

She looked over at her husband to see how he was managing. Lately, he'd been getting drunk earlier and earlier in the evening, and by the end of the night he'd almost be at a stage where he thought he could kill anything and anybody. She could see he was burning with rage like the rest of them.

Emma sat down to catch her breath as the smoke began to make her eyes burn and cause her to cough. She took a worn handkerchief from her pocket and dabbed her eyes. She couldn't tell now if the tears were from the smoke after all. She was tired. She closed her eyes to think of a happy memory.

Someone had put a quarter in the jukebox and her favorite song was blaring through the bar. She smiled as she hummed to the song. Thoughts of her wedding day went through her head. She could see herself in her mother's white linen dress. It was a gorgeous dress. And Chuck, he looked so good then. She didn't want to open her eyes.

All around her, people were talking, allowing her daydreaming to go unnoticed. She didn't want any part of them, and they didn't take any part of Emma.

No one could know the hell she'd been through. The dreams that slid by. The hopes that were now hopeless. The song came to an end, and Emma opened her eyes. She was a survivor of sorts, and she knew that, but the tears rolled down her cheeks anyway. The smoke danced in a circle around her head as if to form a crown for a new Silver Lady.

* * *
Hello

by Brian Stokes

Hi.

Hi.

What's that?
Oh, philosophical studies of the dynamics of international intellectualism.
Sounds thick.
Not really.
Nice perfume.
You like it?
Reminds me of how the house smells on a warm, dewy summer morning.
Oh, come on.
It's my imagination, and you asked me if I like it.
Oh, alright. What are you writing?
Something about two people who've just met. Free verse.
Can I see it when you're done?
I'm still working on it. It'll be a while.
What are you smiling about?
My characters. They're getting three-dimensional, and one made a funny.
Who was it?
The girl. She's a little shy and suspicious, but she's getting over it.
She must be interested. What's the guy like?
Intelligent, quick-witted, sensitive, but not wimpy, a little shy, but fun.
Is he as interested in her?
He's been watching her for a few weeks. Remember, he's a little shy.
Watching her? What do you mean?
Oh, he's seen her from time to time, and she makes him smile.
Whew. I thought you meant he's been playing Peeping Tom.
No, not that at all. Quite healthy attraction.
What does he see when he looks?
She's animated. Comfortable with herself. Well dressed, but not snobby.
Is she pretty?
If she wasn't, I don't think he'd have been looking. She's cute.
Cute doesn't equal pretty.
Not everybody wants classic pretty. Pretty sometimes equals stupid.
Not always.
I said sometimes. You seem to be taking this personally.
What makes you say that?
A Lesson for Bedtime

by Vicki Huntington

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful little girl named Ariel. Ariel was about seven years old. Not too big, she made up for her lack in size with her big smile. She had an older sister, Renee, whom she loved dearly. She also thought that Mommy and Daddy were pretty wonderful too. Every night they would tuck her in her little Sesame Street sheets (which she thought she was beyond now) and kiss her goodnight. This was only after Mom or Dad had told her a bedtime story or read from one of her favorite books.

One night she woke up and had to go to the bathroom. Ariel wasn't completely afraid of the dark because of her pal, the blue lighthouse. It always came on at night, the magic blue protection light. Mommy and Daddy had great faith in it. Too, she had her buddy the striped baby blanket which she appropriately called "Blankie." Ariel knew that only very bad little girls were afraid to go to the bathroom and so potty in their beds. Bert and Ernie wouldn't like it very much if I did that, she thought. So bravely she pulled back the blankets and started toward the hallway. It seemed like a long way to the bathroom.

She heard a noise... It's probably Boston. He was their black terrier. Since he was small too, they got along very well. As she went farther she saw a hairy shape at the mirror in the bathroom. Daddy? But Daddy's not that big. Maybe he makes funny sounds like that at night; Mommy says he snores. But the light wasn't on, so she really couldn't see. The shape turned and it wasn't Daddy, but something far, far worse—a BATHROOM MONSTER! And it was after Ariel!

The next morning they found her striped blanket in shreds by the bathroom door. But no sign of Ariel. She was never seen again.

The moral of the story: Don't drink iced tea before you go to bed.
Intelligent Erasers

by Jay Lesandrini

Imagine all of the knowledge
that is learned by
a chalkboard.
And then is taught
to its erasers.

Aunt Edna

by Deidre Morton

Aunt Edna bounced the ball, then swept the jacks off the floor.
Snapping the ball back into her wrinkled, old hand, she bounced it again and again.
And after she had let one jack slip her grasp,
She handed the ball so her great-niece could try.
The super-ball never behaved for Aunt Edna’s niece.
And the jacks she would shovel from the floor.
The ball always bounced out of control Until Aunt Edna let it know she was there.
"The best way to play," Aunt Edna always said, "is to separate the jacks from the ball."
The young niece dropped the jacks on the floor.
Then bounced the ball from her hand.
Aunt Edna wrinkled and swept up the jacks and together, they played a perfect, perfect round.
Poems

by Sarah Hill

i

She starts it with just water and a yeast,
milk carried in this evening, swinging
in its bucket from the barn.
She uses no spoon, no cup, her fingers
melt into the thick liquid, working
honey and fat, she has no hands apart
from this.
By handfuls, the flour fattens it,
rolled under and in, it rises round,
color of clay, firm and blistered, her hands
find themselves again, done with kneading,
rough with bits of dough clinging
like shreddings of her own skin.

ii

It is coming down rain today-
the white hills we piled up that stood
above our heads along the road
are lying down, washing themselves
into rivers in the ditches,
are hanging like ghost-hills
over the fields-
we have found the garden again
and we want to dig into
the cold mud, already, to break it up-
the woodpeckers have come home, they are knocking
on the dead sycamores-
we unhinge the windows, looking
for flies to curse, we still burn a fire-
we haul up seed from the cellar
in jars and baskets- it is early yet
and cold- we wade to the shed for the plow
and hoes- we stand on the threshold and search
for a patch of blue in the sky.
A mouse has crept into my rooms
from under the warping floorboards
a glossy fat rodent—
I have seen his shadow at night.
His teeth click at me from behind walls.
He is furious to gnaw through.
In the light of the morning
I find his droppings behind the coffee.
The cupboard has been invaded,
my bread is no longer mine.
I have discovered fresh scrollwork
carved into the bedframe.

Mouse, how do you squirm into such unfriendly quarters?
Poison eater, trap-tripper, you lusty mouse,
what cat could sink a well-trained claw
into your pulsing heart?

January was blue all month long,
and when we brought the horses up from the field,
their manes and tails clicked
with the clotted ice,
their hooves crunched through the barn lot

The time he broke his leg
when the mare fell on the ice,
we had plowed a path back to the old barn,
but it was far too narrow,
and when the wind shook her knees loose,
the mare went over into the drift.
He hung on but I jumped
and the terror that the snow prevented
me from screaming out,
settling onto my face and throat,
was released by the sound of the horse
lurching away through the blowing snow,
unbridled.
Five years old, learning
to feed chickens, she needs a small pail
for grain; she has seen the apron
her grandmother wore as a girl
with oversized pockets, in a photograph,
but she has not done this for years
and an apron offers little protection.

These are not wild hens, even the rooster
is too young for spurs,
but they know the rattle of corn,
the smell of grain and, half as tall
as she is herself, a dozen hens
flapping their wings against each other,
push into the pail, tipping it over first,
then out of her hand.
Too frightened to run, she watches them eat,
quiet now, scratching and tapping
at the dirt now she brushes a wing
with a finger, she snatches a tail feather.
Retrieving her bucket from under the white feathers,
she begins to wonder how heavy the hen is
that is pulling at her shoestring,
if, without this bucket in her hand,
she could lift it, maybe,
to stroke the downy underside,
to feed it from her hand, to examine, face to face,
the yellow marble eyes.

Something of the cat lies around every house,
watch for it at night—
though it comes only as
a string of tail uncurled over the eaves
a round mound of fur at the corner of the porch
a glint of green from the bottom of the drive;
the sparrows switch off their calling at sunset,
the mouse population trembles silently
behind the walls.
Old Emma's Album

by Gerri Gilliam

We had been sitting in the living room around the coffee table, looking through those same old photo albums. The cardboard pages were falling away from the binding, and the pictures did not stick to them anymore. The cellophane coverings had turned yellow and were cracked. The kids wanted to look at what they called the old-fashioned pictures every time they came to visit me, which was not often.

They always seemed to find one they had not seen before and that I had forgotten. This time they had found one of me. It had fallen out of its place and lay upside-down behind three others. Greg, the youngest of my three grandchildren, had pulled it out.

I was sitting in the middle of a small gray boat in the middle of the lake that was near our house. Junebug, Nancy, Little Carol, and Tommy Lee were in the boat with me. Everybody was holding their hands in the air and laughing with all their teeth showing except me. I looked as if I were about to cry.

After the kids left, I sat back in my worn, brown armchair and looked at the picture for a while, remembering the day it had been taken.

Little Carol's uncle had just come to town to visit and he brought a new camera that he wanted to take pictures of everybody with. He told all of us to go home and ask if we could go on the lake to pose for him in the boat that was tied to a dead willow tree on the bank. I was so excited that I ran home to ask my Mamma Jesse for permission.

She was sitting on the wide wooden porch in a folding chair like the kind we had in the choir stand at church. When I asked her, Mamma Jesse looked worried and said that maybe I should not since my Mamma was not home from work yet. I told her it would be too late when Mamma got home, and that it would be okay if she said I could, since she was my grandmamma. She did not say anything right away, so I reminded her that I was ten years old, a big girl. She was about to say yes when Aunt Johnnie, who was sitting on the porch with her, told Mamma Jesse not to let me go. She said I did not need to take pictures because I thought I was too pretty already. She said she had seen me flirting with some older boys when I passed her house the day before on my way to school. I stared at her for a second, then quickly looked away when her squinted yellow eyes peered hard at me. I did not know why Aunt Johnnie was lying. She knew those boys always picked on me, and she knew I threw rocks at them to make them leave me alone. I wanted to tell Mamma Jesse all of this, but I did not want to get slapped by Aunt Johnnie for being sassy. Anyway, Mamma Jesse already knew. I just stood on the porch with the crowded wooden post holding me up, listening to the dark, wrinkled old woman. She said I was probably begging Little Carol's uncle to take pictures of me by myself and was probably just trying to get him to look at me. Aunt Johnnie told my grandmamma that I was sassy and that if she and my mamma did not keep an eye on me, I would be a jezebel before I was twelve years old. She said it was in my blood. I hung my head to my chest and listened to her say how all my daddy's sisters were trash and thought they were so pretty. Aunt Johnnie said their long black hair and half-white skin did not bring them anything but trouble because boys did not respect them. She said I was just like them and called me a little yellow heifer.
Mamma Jesse saw the tears in my eyes and told me not to mind anything. Aunt Johnnie said because she never had anything good to say about anybody. She told me to go ahead and have Little Carol’s uncle take my picture and to bring one back to her. I kept the back of my hand across my eyes and told Mamma Jesse that I did not want to take the pictures anymore. I told her I felt sick. I said I wanted to go inside and lie down. Aunt Johnnie cut her eyes at Mamma Jesse and made a grunting I-told-you-so sound in her throat without moving her lips. Mamma Jesse pulled me to her and kissed me on the forehead, then told me to run along. She said to be sure to smile real wide and pretty for her on the pictures so everybody could see what a beautiful girl I was. Aunt Johnnie breathed loudly and let the air pass from her parted lips slowly as if she were trying to whisper. I turned around and quietly stepped off the porch. When I got to the gate in front of the yard, I heard Aunt Johnnie say that if Little Carol’s uncle sent me home crying, Mamma Jesse and my mamma had better not blame him because I would have encouraged him.

I walked into the road and the tears that had been brimming in my eyes ran hot down my cheeks and tasted salty on my lips. I knew Aunt Johnnie did not like me and she always let me know it. But I did not know why.

I rested my head on the white crocheted doily that covered the spot where the material was shredding on the back of my armchair and thought about Aunt Johnnie. She was the oldest and the meanest of all five of Mamma Jesse’s sisters. None of them liked me except the baby girl, Augusta. She was the prettiest of all. They were dark women, almost as black as the pot belly stoves that stood in the middle of their small, wooden houses. Even Mamma Jesse was dark, but Aunt Johnnie was the blackest. Aunt Augusta would take up for me whenever the others picked on me or made me cry. Whenever one of my grandaunts had to babysit me, I begged for Aunt Augusta. I cried when she could not because I knew one of the others would have to. Whenever any of them cared for me, they reminded me of how gracious they were being and how much they thought I needed somebody to keep an eye on me. I remembered the last time I stayed with Aunt Johnnie.

My mamma and Mamma Jesse had to go out of town for two days and Aunt Johnnie convinced them that I would best be looked after by her. The first day I was there, Aunt Johnnie made me haul three tubs full of water into the backyard and wash some old, stained and yellowed sheets in lye soap. I had to rinse them in the other two tubs of clear water, wring them out, then hang them on the line. After two loads of tattered sheets that should have been thrown away, my hands became red, raw, and sore. I hauled the tubs to the edge of the yard where the woods started then poured the water out of them. When I tried to stand up to stretch, my back and my stomach hurt. I slumped down in the grass and began to cry, looking at my sore hands, until the thin black woman creeped onto the back porch and began squawking what a lazy, shiftless little heifer I was.

Later on that night, Aunt Johnnie let me sit on the porch while she and her friends listened to the radio. I had asked her if I could sit and listen too, but she said no and slapped me for trying to be grown. She told the ladies that I was sassy because my mamma and grandmamma let me do anything I wanted and thought the sun rose and set in me. She said I was just a slick, shit-colored little heifer who thought every man and boy in town wanted me. I stood in front of her with my head down, looking at the blue veins in my feet, while the old women mumbled their agreements. After she finished chastising me, Aunt Johnnie told me to go onto the porch and to stay out of her sight. I walked out of the room and closed the creaky screen door quietly behind.
I was going to sit in the porch swing, but I looked down at Aunt Johnnie’s patchwork quilted cushion on the seat and decided to sit on the hard, wooden stairs.

I sat on the next-to-the-last bottom stair and pulled my knees to my chest and cradled my head in my arms. I looked at the light-colored skin on my folded arm and hated it. I did not want to be fair-skinned, and I did not want anyone to look at me. One of my braids fell into my face and I wanted to pull it off my head. I hated the long, wavy black hair because they pulled it, yanking my head and giving me headaches whenever they washed or combed it. I did not want to look like my daddy or his sisters no matter how nice-looking my mamma said they were. They were the reason why Aunt Johnnie and almost all my mamma’s people did not like me. Aunt Johnnie said they thought they were better than everybody else because they looked white and that I did too. But I did not. I wanted to be brown with short, curly hair. I wanted to look like my mamma. I sat on the steps crying and wishing I looked differently until Aunt Johnnie made me go to bed.

The next day, my mamma and Mamma Jesse came to pick me up early. I ran into my mamma’s arms and buried my head deep into her chest. She hugged me tightly and kissed me, asking if I were okay. I told her that I was fine and was only happy she was home. Aunt Johnnie sat on the edge of her porch swing and yelled over the bannister that she had kept a close watch on me and made sure that I stayed out of trouble. Mamma Jesse glanced at her coldly and held her arms out to me. I ran to her and wrapped my short arms tightly around her soft, wide hips. She patted my back gently and kissed the top of my head. My mamma told me to come and sit on the steps beside her because she had a surprise for me.

They were the pictures her friend Walter had taken of us on Easter. On one
picture, me and mamma were posing together, holding hands. Mamma was dressed in her new beige suit and smiling, barely showing her teeth. I was wearing my new blue dress and carrying my small yellow purse high up on my arm, smiling brightly. Mamma Jesse said that I looked very pretty and that my eyes were shining. Aunt Johnnie asked for the picture, looked at it for a moment, then dropped it back into my mamma’s lap. She said my mamma looked nice, but I looked like a little hussy with my chest poked out. She said it seemed as if I were trying to get Walter to look at my little yellow body and take the picture only of me. Mamma Jesse gritted her teeth and told Aunt Johnnie to hush her nonsense talk and leave me alone. My mamma gathered the pictures and put them into her flowered black purse, then stood up and held her hand out for me. She thanked Aunt Johnnie for taking care of me and handed her a five dollar bill. Aunt Johnnie quickly took the money and folded it down inside her bosom. She said she would not have charged my mamma so much if I had not been such a problem child. I stared at her with hurt and hate in my eyes and wished that the chains on the porch swing would break. I tried to understand why she hated me and why she lied. Mamma thanked her again and said she would not ask her to watch me anymore. As we stepped off the creaky stairs and walked away from the house, Mamma squeezed my hand and winked her eye at me smiling.

After we got home, Mamma held me in her lap and told me not to think about anything Aunt Johnnie had said about me. She said that it was hard to explain why, but Aunt Johnnie was just an old, bitter woman and she really did not hate me. Mamma told me not to be ashamed of my color or let people make me feel bad because of the way I looked. She told me to be proud of myself and to stop letting people make me cry. For the next few weeks I did everything she said. I tried not to be self-conscious or careful of how I looked around people. When Aunt Johnnie or anybody else said anything about me, I ignored them, continued on about my business. I had begun to like myself and even begun to think I was pretty too. I was happy.

I remembered the day Uncle Charles, my Aunt Hattie’s husband, came over to pick me up and take me to his house. Aunt Hattie, who was a midwife, was doing rounds out in the country. She had asked my mamma if I could do some laundry and housecleaning for her. Mamma said I did not have to do it if I did not want to, but that Aunt Hattie would pay me five dollars. I quickly said yes and Aunt Hattie said she would have Uncle Charles come and get me. When we got to his house, Uncle Charles went into the yard and Aunt Hattie drove away in their blue ’56 Ford Thunderbird. I went into the house and began folding the clean laundry. I was cleaning the guest bedroom when I heard Uncle Charles come in the back door. He walked through the house calling me and found me in the front room off their living room. He leaned on one arm in the doorway, talking about his chickens, then asked if I was hungry or wanted anything to drink. I said no and he just stood and looked at me. I began to feel uncomfortable and hurriedly dusted the chest of drawers so I could leave the room. As I passed him at the door, Uncle Charles lightly brushed his free hand over my newly developing chest, then grabbed my arm as I jumped away. I started to cry and told him I would tell my mamma and Mamma Jesse if he touched me again. He let me go and said he was sorry, but that he could not help himself because I was so pretty. He begged me not to tell anyone and asked me to stop crying. He tried to touch my hand and I jerked away. Then he said if I did say anything to anyone, they would say it was my fault because I thought I was so pretty. Uncle Charles said he saw the picture I had taken on Easter with my mamma and thought I looked real pretty. He agreed with Aunt Johnnie that I looked like I wanted somebody to look at me. He thought that I wanted him to touch me, that I would like it.
Tears dripped from my chin onto the waxed, wooden floor as I watched the nasty smile on his face. I hated Uncle Charles and I hated myself. I wiped my face with a cold rag in the bathroom and asked him to take me home. I did not tell my mamma when I got to the house, and I did not tell Mamma Jesse. I felt guilty and dirty and did not want anyone to know what had happened. I tried to forget about it during the next few days, but I could not stop blaming myself and I could not force Uncle Charles or the Easter picture out of my mind.

I sat up in my chair and tried to remember what had happened to that picture. Though I did not want it, I wondered who had it. I picked up the bent picture from my lap and thought about it again.

After I had left the yard with Aunt Johnnie and Mamma Jesse still sitting on the porch, I walked down the road toward the lake and saw everybody laughing with Little Carol's uncle snapping their pictures. I dried my face with the sleeve of my dress and stood watching them. Junebug pulled the little boat up to the bank of the lake and called me to come and get in with everyone else. I had been so eager to take the pictures before, but I did not want to anymore. I stepped into the boat and Junebug and Nancy pushed us off the bank with fallen willow branches. Everybody was arguing over what we should do for our picture, and I listened to them. Nancy said we should make faces at the camera, then Junebug told us all to shake our hands in the air and scream. When the bulb flashed from the top of the black camera, everyone around me was laughing and shaking their arms, while I was sitting with my head bowed.

The kids had asked me why I looked so sad on the picture and was not having fun like the other children. I told them I did not like to take pictures and had not wanted to take that one. There were not many pictures of me in any of the old albums and most were of me after I was married. There were only five pictures of me as a child, including the boat picture, and I never smiled in any of them.

This is the last of a series of poems written about Richard Brautigan, my favorite author and poet, who killed himself in September of 1984.

Richard Brautigan Meets Joe DiMaggio

by Jay Lesandrini

Just like Joe

DiMaggio's

I wish I had your

bubble-gum card.

A professor of mine once

met you at a gathering

of poets and musicians.

He, is Joe DiMaggio

to me.
Twisted

by Laura Philon

Yes,
I am twisted.
Like a green lilac stem
When you forgot the scissors,
Like the toothpick in your mouth;
Its mint long gone.
Like a wet lycra bathing suit
Carefully peeled from your body,
Like pajamas wrapped wickedly
By the wind, around a clothesline,
Like Fritze's chain around its stake
After a visit from the mailman,
Like the side yard elm tree
After the May twenty-second tornado...
Dali's Dream

by Jennifer Aikman

Wind spoken
the eye of the sphynx
bleeds
into the coming darkness

Haunting
Hulking
indolent
grotesque

The moon her muse
and twilight her torturer
A moral turpitude
sticky-sweet
settles the choking mist

All shrieks and no whispers
and the rat is in the temple
a seed grow/straining in the crack
-asphalt desert-
barren all round

Where is the green?
all is black/orange and
increments of ice.

The season of decay
Three-pronged thoughts
allen scratching claws the brain

The dream ends
but the darkness continues
cruelty bred beside the genius
Fear of Dying

by Linda Lee Horvath

Dear Frances,

I think your suggestion about making a list of the things I worry about is a good one. You are really a dear friend to offer to read it. If I just wrote it for myself it wouldn't do any good because I've been over these worries so much in my head already and just can't seem to get rid of them. I hope you don't begin to feel worried after you read this.

First of all I am worried about my son who is 22 and lives in Philadelphia. He has never had a party of his own before, he is serving liquor and inviting 102 people. I'm afraid there will be a riot at his party and he will be drowned in the bathtub.

Whenever I go out to eat I worry that I will have a terrible allergic reaction to that chemical they put on salads. Someone will think I'm choking and try Heimlich maneuvers on me while I die of anaphylactic shock.

I'm worried that there will be a brown recluse spider in my bed, it will bite me, I will turn all brown and black and die.

Some night there will be a fire but the smoke alarms won't go off in time and when I try to escape out the window I will fall on my head in the sticker bush and break my neck.

If I buy a dress with a tight collar my throat might swell up suddenly and I would strangle.

If I look like other people there could be a case of mistaken identity wherein someone accuses me of murder and I am sentenced to death even though I am innocent. This could happen even if I wear a bag over my head.

Every month right before my period I eat too much chocolate which makes me hyper and nervous. I might put my head through the storm door when the mailman comes.

I am very allergic to dust and sleep with a mask over my face so I won't get sick, but I am afraid I will die of suffocation.

Sometimes my right eye hurts and I think that after I go blind or have to get a glass eye, they will find I am dying of a brain tumor.

Frances, you know how sometimes when you've put off doing your laundry all you have left is some old stained underwear that you almost threw away? I'm afraid I will be in an accident with that underwear and the doctor will leave me bleeding to death in the emergency room.

Sometimes I try to relax in a hot bath but I always think I might get too relaxed, slip down into the water and drown.

If I don't cut my toenails straight across, they will get ingrown and hurt all the time. I will be so distracted by pain that I will step in front of a UPS truck at Christmas time.

If I go out at night wearing black shoes with thin high heels and pointy toes I will get caught in the trolley track while crossing the street and my feet will swell up from fear so that I won't be able to get the shoe off and since I am wearing black, the trolley driver won't see me and I will be run over.

Frances, this is all I can bear to write just now. This sweater feels awfully tight around my neck, the mailman is at the door and I'm absolutely exhausted from writing so I'm going to lie down for a while.

Take care. Thanks.

Love,

Madge
Dear Madie,

Thanks for your letter. I do hope it helped you feel better. If it's useful just keep on cranking out those lists.

I've been having the best time out here in Colorado. My daughter and I have been skiing like madwomen every afternoon, partying all night in the lodge and sleeping it off in the AM. We've met a darling man and his son, so it's a happy foursome, for now. In fact Barry and I are leaving the kids here and taking off for Mexico in a couple of days. Love that hot Mexican food. You could try that. Nobody is ever allergic to Mexican food.

As for the fires, you could sleep on the first floor or cut down that sticker bush. I wouldn't worry about wearing black if I had your blonde hair. Just take taxis when you go out at night. And Madie, you've got the boobs for low necklines so throw out those high necked things if you don't like them. About bugs—always remember you're a lot bigger than they are.

Here's Barry. Must go. You do sound blue. Write again soon. Maybe we can get you over those worries and back to life in the fast lane. Remember those gay times way back when...

Love ya,
Frannie

Dear Francis,

I felt just a little cheerful when your letter came and I do thank you for it. You are the only friend I have. Perhaps you wouldn't mind if I were to tell you a few more of my concerns since I did get some help from writing before I am doing my job, keeping the house in order, paying my bills on time, doing my mending, visiting my mother in the nursing home once a week but I keep worrying that I will go crazy.

Sometimes I think I have Alzheimer's disease. Yesterday morning I put the milk into the oven and the broiler pan into the refrigerator. Then I went off to work without my medicine and left the checks I was supposed to mail lying on the table. Things are falling apart. I can't remember anything. If my mind goes I'll just commit suicide.

Also I keep having the craziest dream. I go into a concert hall which has a huge red column in the center. The column then turns into a tree in a grassy park. I dive down a deep hole into a pool and suddenly I am swimming in a nice safe enclosed tank, but it has windows and people outside are banging on the walls and windows with clubs. I hold tight to my oxygen tube and stay in the middle of my tank but they break the glass. In a rush of water I am forced out through the window and lie on the grass floundering, gasping, dying. I am terrified. I look up into the sun and scream.

I am never going to any more concerts or parks.

Soon it will be spring. The termites under the porch will begin to eat the house. Water will get into the basement when it rains. The grass will grow and the lawn mower will break. I will have to shop for new clothes. The robins will build a nest in the rain gutter which will make the water back up under the eaves and damage the plaster. I planted a few daffodils and tulips in the fall but the squirrels have surely eaten them.

I do hope you had a good time in Mexico. Mother's room is empty and with just a little trouble I could put you up for a while if you can come for a visit. It would certainly be nice to see you again after all these years.

Love,
Madge
Darling Madie,

Barry followed me back to New York so we’re having a fabulous time of it. He’s one lovely hunk! Joy!

Your letter sounded a little down in the dumps. Hope you’re feeling better now that spring is here. It’s just the sexiest time of year? Don’t you just love it? Maybe you should get an apartment. The manager would take care of the termites. Pick one with a single, cute manager and be sure it needs a lot of repairs. My friend Julie in the Bronx did that and she’s very happy.

Have you heard of primal scream therapy? It’s miserable. They take you back to the womb and your birth, you scream a lot. One of my friends did it and she’s still the same, so don’t try that. But maybe one of the other therapies would help. There are lots of them.

We used to have a lot of laughs at our old bridge group. You were such a sweetie. Keep writing. Must rush.

luv ya,
Frannie

Dear Frances,

Thank you for your last letter. I have not replied for some time now because Stanley has come into my life. Stanley came to exterminate the termites. He was just as worried about them as I was. Now we get together several evenings a week to play Monopoly or watch TV. We don’t watch TV a lot because Stanley says it is bad for our eyes. He says I worry too much because of my unhealthy diet, so we are now eating brown rice, beans and tofu. A healthy body makes a healthy mind, Stanley always says. We take vitamins every day. We eat eggs sometimes but no meat because meat is full of artificial hormones and fat. It arouses violent and primitive instincts, causing people to behave like animals.

Stanley says that I must get an air conditioner since the night air is very unhealthy. He thinks I will feel better if I stay indoors in the evenings.

He helped me roll up all the rugs and remove the wallpaper. He says that bugs can get behind the wallpaper and into the rugs.

Last week he cut down all the shrubbery around the house to keep bugs and birds from getting too close. Did you know that birds carry 74 diseases which are communicable to humans?

Now I can see why you are so happy with Barry. It is nice to have a man around the house. I am not dreaming about swimming in the tank anymore. But I still will not go to any concerts or parks.

Be careful. Write soon.

With much love,

Madge

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Pick a number

1 2 3 4

Poets always choose 3.

by Jim Rattan
Mr. Big
and the big Cats
are cruising.
On the streets they look
and trouble finds
them.
A knife flicks here.
Blood spills there.
A party later.
Women and whiskey.
Morning daze and sore heads,
they cruise the streets.
Trouble finds them.
The store is robbed.
A party later.
The big Cats and
Mr. Big.

The Street
by Joel Johnston
Yes, it's true. I live in a basement room and sleep on an old Brunswick pool table. It isn't a very large room, but for my purposes it is, you might say, satisfactory. It is dark, earth encased, with only one small ceiling high window looking in from just above ground level. The white cinder block walls are textured with age and cracks. Paint is crumbling off, forming a border of white dust and chips where floor and walls meet. The yellowing stucco ceiling is low and confining. The cement floor beneath my bed is cold, almost damp, like a big gray slab of ice. Someday I'd like to cover it with linoleum squares that look like gasses being mixed together. Over by one corner is a small enclosed cubby with some sort of engine or pump inside. During the day, it turns on and runs for a few minutes. At night, I lie on my back in the darkness and listen to it drip liquid in soft slow motion. Away, in another room, I can sometimes hear the sound of somebody else's washing machine; the lethargic undulations of the wash cycle, the climactic spinning of the rinse is entrancing, hypnotic.

The pool table is high and strong. A single piece of thick slate is covered by worn, cigarette-burnt, moth-eaten gold felt. I sleep on an old hospital day bed mattress that covers the length of the table and divides its width in half. I keep books in the pockets, paperbacks bent, wedged, and creased: a library of sorts. I have a small brown metal desk lamp, the type with a heavy molded base and a half globe shade. They're connected by a jointed pipe that can be bent or twisted to any desired position, with the flexibility of a dancer's spine. When the frozen cement begins to radiate cold, I bend the lamp over my feet to keep them from going numb.

Up here, on the pool table, I can see the entire room. I'm unable to stand up without stabbing my head with stucco, but I am able to crouch or sit up. Mostly, I lie on the mattress watching, listening, wondering. Next to me on the pool table sits my television, an RCA nine-inch black and white portable, equipped with all the adjustment and fine tuning knobs. Without the use of an aerial, it picks up all the local channels. But it doesn't say Victor. Their old products used to always say Victor right under the RCA

The first television I ever had was a beautiful mahogany veneer RCA Victor floor model. I grew up with that T.V.; the reception wasn't very good, but it was always my favorite piece of furniture. Because of that set, I've never made the adjustment to colour. The colour T.V.s are just too real, overly so. The world outside is hardly ever like the one inside those things. It's the black and white television that gives a truer, more realistic view of the world. Think about it. If it isn't overcast, it's partly cloudy with a chance of rain. There's nothing like a good black and white set. Next to the RCA is my Admiral A.M. At night, I tune in some old jazz, lie on my back, and stare up at where the ceiling should be. I have a hard time remembering the titles of songs, or who played them, but I do remember the tunes and I sing along out loud. Here in the darkness, the basement seems much larger and always colder. The sounds of the pump and somebody else's washing machine drift in, layering over the music from the radio. During the day, I usually watch game shows or soap operas. I prefer old re-runs, when they're on. Most of all, I prefer to
experiment. I turn the volume down on the RCA, and listen to the Admiral while I watch some old show or movie. It's amazing the way different songs can change the mood of a show. Sometimes I distort the picture with the knobs, or turn to a channel that isn't receiving and watch and listen. Lately, I've been turning the T.V. off around four o'clock in the afternoon.

Through the small, ceiling high window, the sun will show through and cast shadows of leaves and sticks from the outside, onto the white cinderblock wall. The shadows move and I know the wind is blowing. I listen to the Admiral and watch the two-dimensional foliage dance on the wall. A breeze passes through the limbs and a young girl tosses her hair. In a storm, the branches thrash and bend and break as if they are struggling to tear themselves up from the roots and escape with the relentless wind. As I watch and listen, I become an emotional participant. I hear the sounds: music, pump, washing machine. I see the shadows struggle; I feel the roots being torn from my stomach.

Now it is Autumn. The black leaves are falling down the white cinder block wall one by one. Soon, only sticks will dance. Everyday a temporary painting appears on my wall and everyday it changes. Already the shadows grow long and distorted. I listen to the Admiral, the pump, somebody else's washing machine. I live in a basement room and sleep on an old Brunswick pool table.
Parking Meter
(for Sally)

by Laura Logan

A car in the parking lot
Its muffler was really hot
Exhaust isn't perfume
Its cloud is a mushroom.

"Do you want to be here?"
"Of course if you're here."
The steam on the windshield
Thickened.
Our Museum

by Rhet Lickliter

I hear the music of factories.
I see the steam paintings above steel
clouds stretched
across the sky
flat dark creatures glide smoothly over the lawn below
a statuary of forgotten relics;
industrial icons.
In a luminous oscillating sea
float a million inverted coat hanger antennae
carressing metal collisions softly echo
an orchestra of windchimes

A dark horizon.
Radio towers
red pulsating lights
slowly,
silently fall,
fall again
crashing a soundless crash.
Television tubes like skyscrapers
mount themselves on ledges of rock.

Night fires burn.
Flames rise up
where memories drift
like giant figure balloons
in a parade of nightmares.
From a window stares the attendant of my past.
an unfamiliar muse.

In a meadow of bone, sleepwalkers stray.
No matter how dirty and unkept it may look, the laundromat always smells fresh and clean. Industrial washers and dryers thunder and churn and vibrate and tumble and I cannot wait to get my filthy bedspread in one of them. Women of all ages are there, also a few men, and I cannot help but think that they are poor.

Twelve quarters—I have twelve quarters to put in this miserable machine. There, they're in. The first red light goes on and I put half of the little box of ALL detergent in the chute. The thick blue spread turns in its mushy sudsy wetness and I am leaning against a row of upright gold washing machines waiting for the second damn red light to come on...

"Excuse my interruption, but may I borrow your fabric softener?" I looked around me. I did not see any fabric softener—mine or anyone else's.

"No—I mean I don't have any." He was looking at my puzzled face with his high eyebrows and bony cheeks when I realized it was time to put the rest of the detergent in my washer. I turned around; he was still looking at me and he was smiling as if he did not hear what I said. "I'm sorry, I don't have any."

"You mean you don't have any WITH you." His gaze was beginning to make me uncomfortable. I glanced down at his washer. There weren't any clothes in it—just water. His reply didn't make sense to me.

"No. I don't have any fabric softener at all. I don't use it."

"Not at all?"

"No." I shook my head and looked down at his washer again. "Why do you need some? I don't see any laundry." I folded my arms in front of me, tightly clutching my purse.

"I've come to the softening cycle and I've used all of my OWN softener. For the past three months I've been coming here hoping to find someone with some extra softener."

"And you haven't found anyone?"

"No. Not yet."

"Why don't you just buy some?"

"No," he said. "You don't understand." He looked down at the water in the washer. "I've come to cleanse my thoughts."

"Oh. What?" The thought of talking to a crazy person scared me.

"My thoughts—I've come to wash and soften them again. If you wait too long and get too old, your thoughts that were once naturally soft begin to thicken. When they finally become hard, it's too late."

"Too late?"

"Too late to soften them again—to make them good and keep them creative. When thoughts become solid inside and rough around the edges—when they get edges—they can be fatal." His face dropped. He reached down to touch the water with both hands. Droplets trickled from his finger tips when he raised his hands in front of him. "It's not enough to clean them; you have to soften them before they puncture your mind, your soul. Do you understand?"

I turned to look back at my washer. It had stopped. At that moment I wanted to grab my wet bedspread and run out of the laundromat. "I don't know," I said. I went over to my washer and removed the blue spread and put it in a large air dryer across the room. From there I watched him. I watched...
everybody: children with chocolate-stained faces and holes in the knees of their jeans, grey-faced housewives in outdated pantsuits, high school dropouts in faded jeans and t-shirts—I studied all of them. There was an elderly couple putting their laundry in one of the dryers next to mine. The old woman reached down to pick up a towel she had dropped, but her body stiffened when her hand went below her knees. The old man, steadying himself with a black cane, tried to reach for the towel on the floor, but could not bend over far enough. The old woman laughed at him and tapped his arm. Without looking up, the man lifted the towel from the floor with the tip of his cane and poked it in the dryer. They both laughed. The old woman kissed his arm.

I looked back at him. He was still standing over the open washer full of clean water. He began to shake his head slowly. He looked paler and thinner from a distance as I noticed tears run down his face into the wash water. I drew my knees closer to my body. I looked at the children again, the housewives, the teenagers. The old couple was watching their laundry dry. My throat knotted. I flew out of the chair and grabbed my tumbling bedspread from out of the dryer. When I reached the parking lot, my heart was pounding. I couldn’t bear to look back. I got behind the steering wheel and turned on the ignition while thanking God that I wasn’t poor. I pulled out of the lot and glanced in my rear-view mirror. He was watching me from behind the glass. So were all of them. I started to choke.

“I’ll never be poor! I’ll never be poor!” I screamed. My hands trembled at the wheel. I looked at the limp and still damp bedspread beside me. It smelled fresh and clean. I looked at it and sobbed, fearing that I would never grow old or insane.

Mrs. Rudolph

by Anne Voegele

Mrs. Rudolph was the witchy old lady who lived next door. She kept my brothers’ baseball when it rolled in her yard. Beyond the wooden fence, beyond the privacy she crept, waiting to pounce on the sphere of rawhide when it trespassed. Her old black-framed glasses concentrated her stare at us as we pedaled our bicycles past the back of her garden. My brothers used to say that she practiced witchcraft. I didn’t believe them, but I kept my eyes open for flying brooms. I always wondered what her backyard looked like. No one had ever seen it but her—that’s a scary thought. She was not the type of woman you’d sell Girl Scout cookies to.
Combining

by Victoria Huntington

Corn lights up
as combine approaches.
Yellow corn,
red beast, rolling tongue.

Corn has arms
mummy wrappings from the earth,
yellow and brittle they wave.

Combine still, eyes are open.
Flutter moths come to worship.
Monster rests.

Truck to dryer.
Air is warm, smells of popcorn.
Dryer tumbles corn.

Bins of silver spools circle.
Noise riots on flecked air.

Across the greying fields,
arms of corn wave.

Haikus

by Linda LeRoy

I packed my fall trunk
The elephant carried his
The tree had no choice

It blew in my face
And whirled around the trees
I never saw it
It ran beside me
But I knew our paths would cross
Its bridge was so near

A drop of water
Which fell in my eye today
Covered the ground white
Modern Ambivalence

by Jennifer Aikman

Do not hold the baby

An opiate
   breeds in its honey-straw smell
   in the folds of its apricot ears

It activates the love-longing
   the nurture-needing

Body ripe
the breasts and womb cry out
in barren-angry strength
The warmth, the weight, the nuzzle in the neck
brings alive the ache
beckons with mock innocence
shames the torrid preparations for career

Do not hold the baby

Beyond the cradle
lies activity not passivity
self-hood not servitude
the world in possibilities
This wind-dancing independence
quick aborted
with new life
so utterly demanding
so completely selfish
so totally bewitching

Do not hold the baby

The modern impulse
soon is squelched
the velvet skin wants stroking
the heartbeats reach for oneness

Then to resist
an act of Will
the pain of Won’t
to surrender the little life
deprives
and tears and drills the heart

do not hold the baby
Once Upon An Angel
by Bill Creighton

CHARACTERS
MISTY BLUE (AN ANGEL)
MICHAEL LOGAN

SETTING:
The bedroom in the apartment of Michael Logan. The room is quite large for a bedroom, against one wall is a piano. Opposite the piano, stage left, is a door that opens and closes leading to the rest of the apartment. Various other musical instruments are scattered about the room—some in stands, some hanging from the wall. Toward the rear of the room is a bed, beside that a desk with books scattered about. A large wall window is immediately behind the bed. The room is well decorated, well kept, and well lit.

TIME:
The Present.
A one act play, Scene 1; A late evening, wintertime.

(A single spot rises on MISTY BLUE. After a pause, MISTY begins to speak.)

MISTY BLUE: (Facing the audience) Yes, that I understand. (Pause) I agree. (Pause) I was fifteen, how old is he? (Pause) So young. (Pause) Yes, I understand it to be a privilege, but I— (Pause) It is not your judgement I question, it’s the necessity of his death. (Pause) Yes, I will help him to understand.

(Light fades. After a pause, lights rise to a half-dim apartment bedroom. MICHAEL LOGAN enters the room and turns on the lights, revealing MISTY, now in the far corner, to the audience. MICHAEL doesn’t notice MISTY until she speaks.)

MISTY: Michael Logan?
MICHAEL: (turning in a panic) Who are you?—Never mind, I know who you are. How’d you get in here?
MISTY: If you know who I am, then you should also know the answer to that question.
MICHAEL: True. (Pause) Do you want what I think you do?
MISTY: If you are Michael Logan.
MICHAEL: Oh yeah, ’bout that, there’s no one here by that name anymore.
MISTY: Oh, there’s not?
MICHAEL: He moved.
MISTY: Where to?
MICHAEL: Kansas.
MISTY: To a farm I suppose? Bad try, Michael. Terrible try. I know who you are.
MICHAEL: Why bother to ask?
MISTY: To see if you'd lie to me.
MICHAEL: What is this, an entrance exam?
MISTY: If it was, you would've failed.
MICHAEL: Too bad. (Moves to window.)
MISTY: What are you looking for?
MICHAEL: I'm not sure. (Pause.) There were signs. I had an idea you were coming, but I'm still looking for anything that'll help prove that you're only a nightmare.
MISTY: A nightmare? Nay child, I am the Angel of the Lord come to take you to your final destination. Rejoice thee in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, . . . behold, . . . your reward is great in heaven.
MICHAEL: Profound.
MISTY: Thank you, I agree. If, in fact, my speech were to prove too profound for comprehension, I shall be happy to translate.
MICHAEL: Please!
MISTY: Pack your bags.
MICHAEL: What would happen if I wasn’t quite ready to go?
MISTY: Everybody has their turn.
MICHAEL: Yeah? Well is it alright if I give up my turn and go last?
MISTY: No.
MICHAEL: Not even a little delay?
MISTY: It’s your turn, Michael.
MICHAEL: My turn? That’s bullshit. I’m only twenty years old. What happened to my turn at marriage, at having kids, at fun things. Doesn’t my turn at dying kind of eliminate everything else?
MISTY: It’s not so bad where you’re going.
MICHAEL: It’s not so bad here either. Matter of fact I kinda like it here.
MISTY: You’ll be happy.
MICHAEL: Are You?
MISTY: Well...yes.
MICHAEL: But you were happier here.
MISTY: That’s not necessarily true.
MICHAEL: That’s not necessarily false either.
(MICHAEL softens his tone and pauses to think.)
What’s your name?
MISTY: Misty...Misty Blue.
MICHAEL: Misty Blue?
MISTY: You don’t approve?
MICHAEL: What’s it mean?
MISTY: Nothing really, it’s just a line from a song.
MICHAEL: Gotcha.
MISTY: You don’t like it.
MICHAEL: Yea, I like it, but whatever happened to names like Eternity and Gabriel?
MISTY: They ran out of those a long time ago.
MICHAEL: That many people up there?
MISTY: No, not really. It’s been kind of slow lately, but we have been more selective lately—you’re lucky you got in.
MICHAEL: Lucky like Bonnie and Clyde.
MISTY: Yes, they got in too.
MICHAEL: Bonnie and Clyde? In Heaven? They’re criminals!
MISTY: So was Al Capone, but they all asked to be forgiven.
MICHAEL: (Rises.) Well maybe the boss’ll forgive me when I don’t show up at those golden gates.
MISTY: That’s pearly gates.
MICHAEL: I don’t care if it’s a picket fence, I’m staying right fucking here!
MISTY: Have you always spoken so rudely in front of women?
MICHAEL: I apologize...
MISTY: I accept your apology.
MICHAEL: ...but I’m still not going.
MISTY: Bullshit!
MICHAEL: Pardon me?
MISTY: You heard me, I said bullshit. Whether you want to or not, you have to come with me.
MICHAEL: Listen Misty Blue—
MISTY: Misty's fine.
MICHAEL: Misty, why can't you go back to where you came from and explain to them that... I don't know, tell them there's been a mistake. Tell them there's been a computer error.
MISTY: Are you kidding? We don't use computers.
MICHAEL: Then tell them their heads are fucked up.
MISTY: Michael!
MICHAEL: Sorry. Tell them—
MISTY: Michael...
MICHAEL: What?
MISTY: ... I can't go back without you.
MICHAEL: What do you mean? What if I go without you?
MISTY: You can't.
MICHAEL: I can't die without you?
MISTY: You can't get to heaven without me, I will go before thee and make the crooked places straight.
MICHAEL: You better get started if you're going before me.
MISTY: I'm not leaving without you.
MICHAEL: Then it's settled, you can stay here with me.
MISTY: (Laughing, impressed with his efforts.) Michael, I can't stay here with you.
MICHAEL: Why? Don't you like me?
MISTY: Sure I—
MICHAEL: I can change. I'll even read the Bible.
MISTY: No, it's not that. I have a job to do.
MICHAEL: A job to do? What job?
MISTY: The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.
MICHAEL: Misty...
MISTY: What?
MICHAEL: ... you go around and tell people that they're about to die.
MISTY: So?
MICHAEL: So who's going to be disappointed if you don't show up?
MISTY: (Hurt) Thanks.
MICHAEL: (Rising and moving toward her.) I'm sorry Misty, but in the popularity polls you rank right up there with Jack the Ripper and Richard Nixon. (Moving past Misty, Michael unintentionally brushes against her breast. She in turn slaps him.)
MISTY: Michael!
MICHAEL: I'm sorry! I didn't mean to! You're an angel, I didn't think I could touch you. How was I supposed to know you had boobs? I mean, I knew you had boobs, but I didn't think that they were real... touchable boobs.
MISTY: I'm no ghost, of course you can touch them.
MICHAEL: I can?
MISTY: No! That's not what I meant. I meant yes, they are touchable—a physical presence.
MICHAEL: You can say that again.
MISTY: I can't believe this! You're supposed to be dead and on your way out, and instead we're talking about my boobs!
MICHAEL: Now isn't this much more fun?
MISTY: Michael, you're making this hard.
MICHAEL: I know what you mean.
MISTY: Michael, this is serious.
MICHAEL: How serious?
Misty: More serious than you're taking it.
Michael: I'm sorry Misty, but understand, if I have to die, there's nothing I'd like more than to go to heaven. But at this particular time in my life, death isn't one of the things I'd like to experience.
Misty: I don't mean to make you feel normal, but there aren't many people who do want to.
Michael: Maybe you're right. Maybe I would like it, but until you came here I wasn't even sure there was a heaven—I'm still not convinced this isn't a bad dream, now you want me to go to a better place when I'm more than happy right where I am. I have faith enough in a God to let it be a part of my life—honoring my mother and father, not stealing, not committing adultery. Doesn't that entitle me to some right of self-preservation?
Misty: I understand Michael—
Michael: I'm only twenty years old—I've got a lot going for me.
Misty: I understand. I was only fifteen when I was called into service. That's why they sent me; they thought you'd cause problems.
Michael: Fifteen?
Misty: Five days before my sixteenth birthday.
Michael: How old are you now?
Misty: Very.
Michael: Only as old as the song you're named after.
Misty: Very observant.
Michael: So how old are you?
Misty: Many years older than you, young one.
Michael: Oh, you're so intimidating.
Misty: I should be.
Michael: Misty, the only thing intimidating about you are your... physical presences.
Misty: It's obvious to me that you have no capability, in that small mind of yours, for respecting a woman's mind.
Michael: That's not true.
Misty: Oh no?
Michael: I can't help but respect a woman who's met kings and queens, presidents, and all kinds of stars.
Misty: Thank you.
Michael: Bet they were happy as shit to meet you.
Misty: Enough!
Michael: I'm sorry, I couldn't help it.
Misty: Actually, I haven't met very many people.
Michael: You're new at this?
Misty: Very.
Michael: A little unsure?
Misty: Yes.
Michael: Content?
Misty: What?
Michael: Do you like what you're doing?
Misty: Would you like this job?
Michael: Oh, looks like I've hit a sensitive area.
Misty: A little bit.
Michael: I won't push it. (Pause) What's your favorite color?
Misty: White.
Michael: Stupid question.
Misty: Actually there's not many of us whose favorite color is white.
Michael: Probably cause it makes 'em look pale.
Misty: Very funny... get ready we're leaving.
Michael: (Moving to the piano.) Can't, I have to practice.
Misty: Don't worry, you'll have lots of time. (Pause) Michael, I don't know why you think you can just say "No thanks."
Michael: No thanks please?
Misty: It's not like I'm here to ask you out.
Michael: Fantastic idea! I got cash. We can go anywhere you like—sound good?
Misty: Michael, I told you I have a job to do.
Michael: Sound good or not?
Misty: Yes it sounds good, but—
Michael: What would happen?
Misty: What would happen what?
Michael: If you stayed here—just for a while.
Misty: What?
Michael: Just for a little while.
Misty: Michael...
Michael: What would happen?
Misty: It's only happened once before.
Michael: And what happened?
Misty: Familiar with the name Lucifer?
Michael: Oh. (Pause) Can't you take a vacation or a leave of absence?
Misty: This isn't K-Mart, dummy. This isn't a job I applied for.
Michael: Can't you just ask real nice if you can stick around for a while?
Misty: That I could do.
Michael: Seriously?
Misty: People have asked for more impossible things.
Michael: Nothing is impossible for God.
Misty: I'll pray for you.
Michael: Pray? I don't mean pray. I mean walk up and ask; use some clout. I been sayin' my prayers all along and look what kind of mess I'm in.
Misty: First of all, Michael, I pray in respect of my Lord just like everyone, and, may I add, you are in no mess.
Michael: I'm afraid we disagree strongly on that one vital point.
Misty: And who knows better?
Michael: (Long pause) At least say some heavyweight prayers.
Misty: Promise.
Michael: If you stick around, I'll make dinner here. I'll even do the dishes.
Misty: Why are you doing this?
Michael: Doing what?
Misty: Treating me like I'm a normal person.
Michael: Aren't you?
Misty: No, Michael, I'm not. Open your eyes.
Michael: You talk don't you?
Misty: Yes.
Michael: Walk?
Misty: Of course.
Michael: Sleep?
Misty: On occasion.
Michael: Make love?
Misty: I beg your pardon?
(Misty picks up a pillow from off of the bed and moves toward Michael ready to strike.)
Michael: Just curious! God, you take everything so seriously! Gosh, you take
everything so seriously.
Misty: What do you mean “curious?”
Michael: Just that! I was wrong about your... physical presence, so I was
curious to see if angels might have... the capability.
Misty: That will never be any of your business.
Michael: It will if I’m going to heaven.
Misty: There’s no “if” in that sentence, you are going.
Michael: I like it when you act stern.
Misty: (Pause) I’m not very consistent am I?
Michael: Not at all, but that’s what makes you unpredictable. (Pause) Well?
Misty: Well what?
Michael: Can you make love or not?
Misty: Michael!
Michael: You can’t can you? You can’t, and you’re too embarrassed to admit it.
Misty: It’s part of being an angel.
Michael: The worst part I hope.
Misty: Unless you’re afraid of heights.
Michael: No way.
Misty: Yes.
Michael: You have to be kidding.
Misty: I wish I were.
Michael: This is a joke, isn’t it? You aren’t an angel, you can’t be. An angel
who’s scared of heights—a horny angel who’s scared of heights.
Misty: Who said anything about being horny?
Michael: I can see it in your eyes.
Misty: You have a gift.
Michael: And what is that?
Misty: You can be such an asshole.
Michael: At least I’m a consistent asshole.
Misty: No arguments here.
Michael: Look Misty, I’m sorry.
Misty: Then why are you still laughing?
Michael: I can’t help it.
Misty: You’re playing with the wrong woman little boy.
Michael: There it is again! Say some more please!
Misty: That’s it!
(Misty strikes Michael repeatedly with the pillow.)
Michael: Ow! Blessed are the meek!
Misty: (Each time she hits him) Bless you, bless you, bless you...
Michael: Oh that was real funny. That how I’m supposed to die?—at the
hands of a horny angel with a feather pillow?
Misty: If it could only be my pleasure.
Michael: Ouch! Enough! That’s it, just for that I’m not gonna do the dishes!
Misty: Don’t sweat it, I never planned on staying.
Michael: That’s a lie. You know you wanted to stay.
Misty: Don’t flatter yourself.
Michael: Over who?
Misty: This most beautiful angel.
Michael: I must’ve missed that vote.
Misty: Don’t worry, you won’t miss the next one.
Michael: I tell you what you’re gonna miss... me!
Misty: Dark humor, Michael. You know what else you’re going to miss, don’t
you?
MICHAEL: What now?
MISTY: Your twenty-first birthday.
MICHAEL: Very funny. You're having a good day, aren't you?
MISTY: Until I got here.
MICHAEL: Don't act like I'm keeping you!
MISTY: Don't act like I want to be here!
MICHAEL: Then why are you here?
MISTY: Ti. Lord God has, somewhat questionably, chosen to open unto thee his good treasure.
MICHAEL: In disguise obviously.
MISTY: I have less desire to be here than you do to have me here.
MICHAEL: Then leave!
MISTY: Pride allows me no need to be asked twice.
MICHAEL: Great!
MISTY: And I'll tell you something Michael Logan, .. .no, no I won't.
MICHAEL: What were you going to tell me? That I've been deemed unworthy?
MISTY: If only it were up to me. As far as I'm concerned, you can go to hell!!! (Misty slams the door as she leaves.)
MICHAEL: (Yelling after her.) Coming from you I find that hard to take seriously! Virgin! (Pause) If face to face with death, try and piss her off.
(Michael moves back toward the piano, mumbling to himself. Moments pass before Misty re-enters in a huff.)
MISTY: Did you really think it was going to be that easy? No way, not for you. Nothing's going to be easy—
MICHAEL: Don't you know how to knock?
MISTY: Knock? Are you too stupid to realize who you're talking to? I'll show you knock! I'll knock on your fat head!
(Misty moves toward Michael as if to hit him with her fist. Michael raises his hands in surrender.)
MICHAEL: (Laughing.) Okay! Okay! I'm sorry. (Misty remains ready to strike.) Honest! (Pause) Oh come on, look at yourself.
MISTY: (Pause) I look pretty stupid, huh? (Michael nods in agreement while laughing softly. Misty moves back to sit on the bed.)
MISTY: (Long pause) You know what?
MICHAEL: What?
MISTY: It's not that I'm not supposed to make love, or be in love, I can. It's that I've never had the chance. It's one of the few things I've never gotten to experience—love, I mean. I love my fellow beings and my Lord, but that's different.
MICHAEL: Don't worry, you're not missing much.
MISTY: I believed that, I really did. But when I saw you, I wasn't so sure anymore. You seem different. Love for life burns so brightly in your eyes, bright like I've never seen. I belong here, yet I feel out of place. (Pause) Right people, wrong time... wrong dimension.
MICHAEL: Maybe. (Pause) Hungry?
MISTY: Yes.
MICHAEL: Stay for dinner?
MISTY: Okay, then we're leaving.
MICHAEL: We'll see. (Michael gets up and starts to move.)
MISTY: Hey!
MICHAEL: What?
MISTY: You're doing the dishes.
MICHAEL: Of course.
(Lights fade.)
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