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Confluence, Department of English and Linguistics, IPFW

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This is the first issue to make use of the Confluence website, which was created by a talented team at IPFW. The overall feasibility of the site was due in no small part by Dr. Stevens Amidon, who worked with us throughout the summer.

This issue would not have been published were it not for Dr. Amidon, who continues to volunteer his time as Advisor, and for Dr. Stapleton and the Chapman Fund, which has again donated generously in support of local creativity.

Mary Arnold Schwartz, Coordinator of the IPFW Writing Center acted as a literary advisor, and the IPFW Writing Center served as a base for this issue.

The reader response this year was immense. We were able to generate several scores for each work, indicating an overwhelming shared interest in local creativity.

Thank you all for making this issue possible!

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**Editorial note: the editors of Confluence review and accept works as submitted. Any errors or idiosyncrasies in language rest with the authors.**

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# Poetry

*Shane Swoverland*

**THE CICADA**

The cicada above me in the maple  
sounds like a toy plane or a junction box  
breaking. It buzzes even, blending  
into the hum of motors moving  
over the bridge. Another cicada  
lights up across the yard, opening the heart  
of the one above me. Now he sounds  
like a siren made of violent reeds, an army  
of bag pipes slinging stones. I am no longer  
in Indiana. I have entered the forest,  
where spears and arrows are hurled  
through the air. The blue sky  
falls through the leaves in waves,  
resting like an umbrella above me.  
The grass no longer holds to green, is no longer  
grass, but is now a field of gold on which I float.  
I remember when I was a small boy,  
alone in the woods; the first time I heard  
a cicada scream, I thought it was a bird  
giving birth and dying. I cried to feel that bird  
in so much pain. Now I cry, not from what I hear,  
but from the spaces between the leaves  
when the pulse of colors and sounds cease  
and I am free of myself, even if just for a moment.

*Beth Keller*

**Oxygen**

Shadowed nature lives  
Unkempt with rays of sunshine  
Breathing life anew

*Nick Vetter*

**Armchair Psychology**

If you want me to spill my guts,  
you better have a mop.  
I'm tired of playing these games, so you can  
have your cake and eat mine too.  
I'm done.  
No more racing yellow lights  
on empty midnight highways.  
It's time for a  
death of fresh air.

*Nick Vetter*

## **Changing Seasons, Changing Hearts**

That cold, empty winter, three full months of frozen hell.  
Surrounding me with the kind of air that freezes the mind and  
crystallizes the blood.  
An endless abyss of black that choked my heart and gripped my  
soul.  
A dark, vile, saw-toothed monster, stinking of sulphur and  
dripping with tar.  
It brought the strongest of us to their knees and forced our  
purest of heart into early graves.  
Being neither, I'm left behind, feeling lonely as ever but now  
with cruel justification.  
I find myself lost in a labyrinth of empty sterile hallways, with  
no end in sight,  
Or in mind.  
Glazed over eyes pass from one face to another, searching  
desperately for meaning, companionship, just something to hold  
on to, but meeting only blank stares.  
But you were different.  
You were the one who looked back.  
You were the first warm breeze at this winter's end.  
You were my hope for the spring rays that would wash away the  
clinging dampness of self pity.  
You were the one who convinced me to throw away my  
chameleon cloak and live like I meant it.  
And you did it all without knowing, fixed my world just by being  
you.  
Unknowing but ever wise, you taught me to contain the volatile  
chemicals and mind-toxins,  
To bury away those explosives that could blow up the world and  
erase everybody in it.  
Because I don't want that.  
Not anymore.



*J. Peter Roth*  
**Convenient Worship**

*Austin Morris*  
**Stranger Still**

In the staircase, a narrow  
concrete box containing all  
the sounds of fourteen floors  
combined, we pass each other—  
the fourth step down from  
the sixth floor landing, right  
feet hitting at the exact same  
moment. A glance passes  
between us, so quick I didn't  
realize until just now, on the  
subway, that's what it was.  
Which is odd, considering.

Considering yesterday, in  
the coffee shop downstairs,  
I paid for your bagel and latte  
and it should have been obvious,  
since you were in line behind me.

Considering later, in a haze  
of candlelight and sight  
swimming in and out with all  
the cheap wine, what we did,  
whatever it was or meant.

Or, perhaps not, considering,  
despite proximity and—can  
we call it attraction, yet?—we don't  
seem to be anything more than  
strangers, still.

*Amy Arehart*  
**Price & Alice**

Part I: Price

Price sits there, wrapped up in her desk,  
all 5'8" of her,  
curled up like a lanky paperclip,  
all looped in and out of her plum-colored baja,  
her arms and legs and head.

When she's actually listening,  
her neck juts forward like a turtle  
and she purses her huge, full mouth  
and flutters her hands  
when she thinks.

She parades around town in a blue-sequined prom dress skirt  
and nothing more than a wife-beater,  
on which she's written  
with a marker,  
"Love is Suicide."

Her greatest ambition is to be a walking skeleton,  
surviving on water, cigarettes, coffee, and jello,  
but not because she desires to be more thin,  
mind you,  
instead, she wants to feel "clean."

Every now and again Price breaks through a basement window  
to get some brandy,  
and she drinks it,  
sitting on the kitchen floor  
with her legs splayed out before her.

She scrunches up her nose at the ignorance of others,  
laughs at her own ridiculousness,  
and calls herself a bitter,  
soulless,  
egocentric fuck.

But she surrounds the few she loves with motherly doting,  
calls them her “dahlings,”  
and *has* to believe in the beauty, the divinity of  
Nature,  
for it’s the only place where she finally feels she  
belongs,  
where she feels “clean,”  
and Calm.

But Price still has to go home and live with a family  
that hates her heathen soul,  
and so she paints her bedroom vibrant yellow,  
just so she can thoroughly disturb them by  
sitting and glowering at the walls.  
And every so often she erupts in tears and puke,  
and then crumples down  
in the heap  
of all her fuckwitted fluffery.  
But she always rises, paints her perfectly round face  
and dances around  
until the stars she’s cut out  
from the pages of fashion magazines  
find their way into her eyes.

## Part II: Alice

Alice slinks through the crowd in her mouse hide moccasins  
and then sits down,  
    pretzels herself together,  
    and glowers out at you from  
    behind her long dark curls and thin glasses,  
    believing they shield her pallid face from being  
read.

When she was young, the Trees were her teachers,  
    and she spoke a language that didn't require words,  
    or other people.

And yet she darted around them like a little sprite,  
    showing them all her flowers and bugs,  
    songs and stories,  
    and especially her wide-mouthed smile  
    that made her bright eyes disappear.

But now the entire goal of all her days is to  
    melt away into something dropped,  
    forgotten on the road,  
    pathetic,  
    but at the very least away from all those eyes,  
    all those derisive smirks,

All of those who would trip her,  
    mock her into falling apart,  
    into becoming nothing more than a possessed rag  
doll,  
    shrieking,  
    writhing beneath them.

But if Alice does anything in her life,  
    she'll keep her cover from being blown,  
    she'll keep them all from seeing her break.

And so before she goes out,  
    she downs a pot of coffee,  
    smokes a bowl,  
    and pops another little red candy down her  
throat,



### Part III: Price & Alice

They lie there, wrapped up in each other  
in an oversized, overstuffed chair,  
with their hair of chestnut and chocolate  
continuing the weave of the upholstery,  
and glaring at all the guys' suggestions.

They've found their comfort:  
the little one protected,  
the tall one protecting,

Both feeling contained,  
as if Price, Alice, and their minds  
are all gathered together  
in a little box,  
and their box is full and safe.

All they want is one more cigarette,  
one more cup of coffee,  
one more chance  
to come crashing down  
into the haven of each other arms.

They've got scattered intellects and shattered hearts,  
and they each know the world of  
the shrill, jarring laughter,  
and the frigid halls of empty rooms.

And so they cling to each other,  
for the dissonant stability only they could provide,  
for Love,  
for Peace,  
and for Calm.

Alice tells her that their minds are "cut-glass, carelessly handled,"  
and Price just smiles, and responds,  
"You silly little fuck,  
we're courageous and loving,  
exhausted and cold."

#### Part IV: Alice

Every now and again Alice goes out and dances,  
her head nearly drowning in all the SoCo,  
smoke forever trailing her out-stretched hand.  
She doesn't know the song  
but she swirls around anyway  
in a futile attempt at forgetting  
all the callous eyes surrounding her.  
She's left the Woods,  
and so each night when she still can't sleep,  
Alice smokes cigarettes,  
sips her beer,  
and stares blankly at the dull white walls.  
And so she sits there, knowing that she should have died,  
but remembering when she didn't feel so frayed around  
the edges,  
when her stomach didn't feel so poisoned,  
her heart so pierced  
with more than one kind of pain.  
She got with the one  
she would have crucified her very own heart for,  
only he did the honor for them both,  
and left her to walk all the way home alone,  
their blood slowly being washed away by the rain.  
Now all she desires is a chance to collapse into her dreams  
in which an Alice of a different world lives and truly  
laughs,  
a woman who was never broken,  
or at least was able to heal.

## Part V: Price

There she stands,  
    screaming at her own reflection,  
        railing against the fortuneteller's vision come  
    true.

She's fervently fighting the knowledge  
    that she's surrounded but alone,  
        alone in her box with  
        her mother's picture  
        painted on each and every wall.

For now Price is trapped there,  
    not in her box,  
        but in her man's house,  
        sheltered, safe, and stuck  
        with two babies already and one on the way.

She dreams of the mad tea parties of the past,  
    claiming that the Dormouse  
        cannot put jam on her own nose,  
        nor fit into the teapot by herself.

And so each night, before she can sleep, Price paces around,  
    crawling out of the top of her head,  
        her nibbled fingers reaching toward those who  
    still rise,  
        who rise and dance the dance of their souls,  
        who rise and sing:

“Glory, Glory, Halleluiah,  
    for I have found my own true way,  
        I have found my own bright light,  
        I have found my very own sparkling,  
            innately glittered,  
            but distorted soul.”

*Troy Bigelow*

**Sweetness of Sour**

I kissed a girl behind the grapevine  
in our neighbor's back yard one night  
when the box-elder trees crawled  
with their bugs in the thin moonlight  
and the grapes were as green  
as the nearness of her eye.

All right.

I was only twelve.

She was only twelve.

Sure, our kiss was green  
in the darkness beneath the grape leaves  
and the Japanese beetles,  
but it seems to me now

that our unripe kiss  
under the fingernail  
of a moon, as we hid from the others,  
was sweeter than any purple-skinned juice I've tasted since  
I bumbled

my innocent lip upon hers.

*Shane Swoverland*

**No Two Seats**

Tonight we went to Outback.  
We parked out front.

We waited for a seat in the lounge  
watching the TV in the window.  
Fox News alternating images:  
Barry Bonds, Jose Canseco, Osama Bin Laden.  
I don't know if they're on the same team.

On the way to the restroom I noticed a man.  
He was watching his wife with half his face.  
Though he faced her directly, half of him could not be found.  
I saw in him, myself, quite clearly.

The stage of life is arranged in such a way,  
that no two seats are far apart.

*Andrew Johnson*

**A Promise**

A Promise--  
a word, a pact.  
To make anew,  
to keep intact.

Forgiveness--  
a word, a gift.  
To keep a friend,  
to take a risk.

Faithfulness--  
a word, a path.  
To keep it close,  
to make it last.

*Nick Vetter*

**Star Bucked**

I jolt awake with one image burned in my mind:  
The sight of the brown paper cup slowly falling,  
The feel of it sliding past my fingertips,  
The dread of knowing that my investment is lost,  
And there is nothing I can do about it.

I never see the container meet the sidewalk and  
Bathe the pavement in black, but I must hold my breath  
As I drown in its inevitability.  
I exist now only in the second hand,  
Life frozen in that instant where I can do nothing  
But watch as it all slips away,  
Another victim of my carelessness.

*Nick Vetter*

## **Grandparents' Shoes**

I suddenly stop chewing.  
Without warning, I find myself unable to move,  
Just staring at the plate of food in front of me.  
Food prepared with care by the hands of my grandmother.  
It was served with love and affection,  
And it serves to warm me, both body and soul.  
But now I can feel it cool my heart  
As I look at the elderly woman standing in the kitchen.  
We do this most Fridays, short visits amidst busy lives,  
Just a half-hour routine.  
And it hits me:  
Someday, I'll be in those shoes.  
The highlight of my day being the visit of a callous grandchild,  
Who comes by with little time to kill.  
And I'll feel the need to make food, tell stories, give lessons,  
something  
Just to quietly convince him to come back next week.



*Debi Thorpe-Rodda*

*Amy Arehart*

**Child, Let Me Tell You**

Child, let me tell you of a young heart  
Much like yours.  
Come with me,  
Walk with me,  
Open your spirit to mine and  
Let your heart hear the words I have to say.

Child, you hold the world within you,  
But that very world will do its best  
To trip you and hold you in the mire.  
So let me tell you of loss of belief  
And trust.  
Let me hold you as you fall.

Child, let me tell you of a girl,  
A little girl free from care  
And full of hope.  
Let me speak to you of when God became god  
And plummeted from the sky.

And no one held her as she fell.

Child, let me tell you of a girl,  
A young girl held tight by her guardians on this earth,  
But in hands out-stretched and crooked.  
Let me speak to you of when those hands let go  
And she was dropped into the mud.

And no one held her as she fell.

Child, let me tell you of a girl,  
A lonely girl who was given a hand  
And pulled up to taste the wine of the gods.  
Let me speak to you of when that one turned away  
And she sank back, deep into her grave.

And no one held her as she fell.

And now, child, let me tell you of a woman,  
A still woman lying dried out in a frigid tomb  
But in that radiant darkness she saw  
    that as a muscle is torn, it grows stronger.  
Let me speak to you of when she knew that the vastness  
    she had traveled had added the depths of oceans to her  
soul.  
And she wrapped this knowledge around her heart  
    and crawled out,  
    healed,  
    jaw set firm,  
And held.

Child, you hold the world within you,  
But that very world will do its best  
To trip you and hold you in the mire.  
So let me tell you of loss of belief  
And trust.  
Let me teach you to hold yourself as you fall.

*Shane Swoverland*

**With Dad in Florida**

I remember the first palm tree by the Jacuzzi  
Age five in Florida. My fear of scorpions  
Dying under the moon. I can still taste the air,  
twenty seven years later in the leaves.  
I can feel the grass folds under my feet.

That weekend we took a small boat into the bay.  
The two of us alone among the waves.  
We threw our lines into the something beneath,  
Waiting for the invisible to come into view.  
I remember how you drove that boat  
With certainty into what appeared the endless blue.

Something strong grabbed my line, and together  
We held to kept from turning under. The line broke.  
I thought it was something massive come to take me.  
But what I remember is the blue sky and water.  
Water all around us. Nothing but water and a small  
silver boat. Your calm heart and the vast, vast sea.

*Danielle Stewart*

**Reality**

One last time

skin

brushes

whispers

sighs

One last time

heart

screams

words

that don't escape

lips.

*Austin Morris*

**It Stopped Raining**

Sometime between your kiss,  
sticky, glazed bright red,  
and another, fresher,  
less new, no less right;

Sometime between my hands  
tangled in your hair and  
idly combing the auburn strands  
into red gold rivers on the pillow;

Sometime between the awkward  
realization of buttoned confinement  
and the soft freedom of skin  
brushing skin, brushing silk;

Sometime between the couch,  
the ugly green chair with the  
mismatched orange afghan, and,  
finally, beautifully, this bed;

Somewhere in that space of time,  
those insular moments when  
nothing and everything mattered...  
it was then. It stopped raining.

*Nick Vetter*

**East Coast Sunrise**

Tired hands rub tired eyes  
As I slowly roll out of bed.  
This morning is earlier than some of my late nights  
But I approach the hotel balcony with diligence.

Stories below in the waning dark  
I see the slow sweeping motion of flashlights.  
Restless eyes are combing the beach for shells  
But their former inhabitants are surprisingly cunning.

Those spiteful mollusks have left their homes on the shore  
Hoping that their faint glimmer will steal the hunters' eyes,  
But I know the false beauty below is nothing beside the glimmer  
above,  
Of the last fading stars in the morning's first twilight.

In just minutes the black of the sky shifts a rainbow of blues, greens,  
and yellows  
And finally a thick milky cream as the sun flirts with the horizon.  
Barely clothed but warm with content, I watch an east coast sunrise  
Through Midwestern eyes.

*Dana Barrett*

**Be still a moment, while I attempt to explain this**

It won't come out right,  
But I am trying to tell you.  
So bear with my arm, my eyes, my lips,  
For I know no other way than this.

I.

When you sleep – those rare moments,  
For it seems you never dream,  
It is vulnerable, so silent,  
Like snow blanketing the shards  
Of your splintered wine glass.

II.

I had parents once.  
They shared a room in a house someplace  
I was too small to remember.  
When I became a man,  
The room, the house, disappeared in a sunrise.

III.

The brush of your fingers,  
The way it makes my skin stand up,  
Makes me write poems again.  
And when you are not here,  
I cry alone in salty anger.

IV.

It is only in that moment  
Before we meet together for rest,  
That I want to push  
And show you the length  
Between the cherry and its blossom.

V.

It is not your fault

I cannot remain numb.  
They make drugs I cannot take for that.  
But you feel like summertime  
And here, snow falls for six more weeks.

VI.

I must not say this in words,  
But at night, when it feels blackly dense,  
And I can see my own hair on your cheek,  
I dream of ways to show you  
Cherries, snow, blossoms, and summertime.

*Therese Leone-Unger*

**The Beating of My Heart**

Last night I dreamt of escapades and days away –  
    I ran under the arch and over the hill –  
    Into the meadow and across the stream –  
    The bareness of my feet skimmed pebbles  
        In brooks of hope –  
While jasmine and lavender filled the air –  
    Trees swayed to the beat of my heart –  
    Nothing tried to stop me but the wind  
        Tugging at my hair –  
    I ran past doorways and windows –  
        Butterflies and grasshoppers –  
        As I dreamt, I closed my eyes  
        And saw myself – smiling –  
Over the mountains and past the lambs –  
    I ran to the sand at the edge of the sea –  
Where my soul felt lighter and my heart was free –  
    The warmth of the day heated my face  
        And tickled my skin –  
I grasped the sky with my hands and waved  
    My arms open wide –  
    As I stood at the bank of myself –  
        And the infinity of life.

*Beth Keller*

**Inaudible Melodies**

Cars revving engines  
Babies crying on planes  
Leaves rustling in city streets  
Rain dancing on window panes

Friends laughing and talking so  
The gentle hum of a CPU  
Espresso machines whistling about  
My sister saying, "I love you."

An audience clapping after a job well done  
The music from a piano's keys  
The snap of your fingers, or  
Hearing "God bless you," after I've sneezed

Not only the good vibrations, but  
A ducks quack, the cat's meow  
A simple tune  
Maybe the world would be better somehow

Audible melodies of emotion and trust  
For once, for always, unlimited time  
I'd miss these things and more  
Instead of just hearing them with my eyes

*Kelly Ellis*  
**Migraine**

The stuttering pain throbs in tune with the heart

Teeth clenching, reminiscent of a train trying to stop on rusty  
tracks

Eyes blurry from tears of frustration

Ears amplify the riffs of the mind

Thoughts that cannot be quieted ripple through veins

And echo through the body

*Adam Jeffrey Bodnar*  
**metaphor for courting**

obviously oblivious  
but blatantly beautiful  
a bird bows to sneak a sip  
self-aware as dutiful  
and unaware of the fish  
so consciously casual  
while revealing the relationship  
that is perfectly possible  
because scales resemble feathers  
and fins could pass for wings  
and one is constantly kissing  
while the other sometimes sings  
and together they could flourish  
with chambers of two and four  
skimming the surface in unison  
without ever touching the floor  
for they both take flight  
whether it be sky or sea  
and they are always advancing  
forever unknowingly

*Nick Vetter*

**Like A Rock**

A large rock weathers at the end of a driveway.  
His grey and tiredness have come with age.  
A pink “Y” is written crystallized on one side,  
But is he asking or telling? Nobody knows.  
He just stands motionless beside the road,  
Keeping silent vigil over what passes for traffic out here.

He is a staunch widower, patiently awaiting his bride’s return.  
But the last inhabitants of his house are many years gone,  
And the woman he waits for is breathless a long year now.

*Nick Vetter*

**January Tears**

When you first told me,  
I had no idea how to react;  
Panic attack.

I had to see it,  
But still I could not believe that  
I'd lose my Dad.

Withered to nothing,  
But I knew the arms that held me as a child.  
Who could forget?

You never said this,  
But I think I read it in your eyes:  
You had no regrets.

The tears on my cheek,  
I feel your warm hand on my face.  
The sky was so bleak,  
The air was so cold,  
But they never froze.

So did you know  
It was your time to go?

Your breath, so shallow,  
But even knowing you wouldn't swim  
You tried to float.

You were the gentle  
Sunset the freezing January sky  
Had always missed.

The tears on my cheek,  
I feel your warm hand on my face.  
The sky was so bleak,  
The air was so cold,  
But they never froze.

So did you know  
It was your time to go?

*Kelly Ellis*

**He said**

Yesterday I mustered up the courage to speak to someone I've never spoken to.  
We managed to make uncomfortable small talk - you know, the kind that takes place right before you hit that painful awkward silence?  
He stared at me hard, and without so much as blinking or breathing he informed me that I needed a *visualrectomy*. I thought for sure he was making this up...  
so when I asked him what the hell a *visualrectomy* was, he said so matter-of-factly,  
"it's a surgical procedure for people like you, ma'am, where the string that attaches the eye and the rectum is severed to improve your shitty outlook on life".  
I hate admitting when other people are right.

*Andrew Johnson*

**Future**

A slab gravely read  
A verse oft rehearsed;  
A trek seldom led  
A plot warmly nursed

*Dana Barrett*

**Prodigal Love**

When you went away  
And you didn't leave a note,  
Forgive me, but I called the police.  
I did not know you didn't love me anymore.

The officers merely smiled,  
Wiped sugar from their lips  
And said in that steely way police do,

*"If he does not return within 48 hours  
Then you know."*

You know –

That feeling,  
Blue-gray suspension  
Somewhere between take off  
And dirt smack earth.

I tried to tell them.

That was five months ago –  
The close of tomato season,  
And advent of cracked leaves.

Though this bed was always mine,  
I don't dream here anymore.

---

Sleep still comforts  
During the deepening silence;  
Leaving me

One foot

Dangling out in space.

Without your words,  
I have no need for tears.

*Ashley Manon*

**The Curve**

You woke up that morning,  
Rarin' to go.  
Grandma called you up for breakfast,  
But little did you know.  
After you ate,  
The two of you got in the car.  
Everything was normal,  
At least, so far.  
You started the engine.  
You didn't look back.  
You approached the curve,  
He hadn't even tried to swerve.

He was at a friend's,  
He had lots to drink.  
He got in his truck,  
Didn't even think.  
His friend didn't stop him,  
Didn't put up a fight.  
He let him drive away,  
Far out of sight.  
What lay ahead of him,  
He couldn't imagine.  
He Just kept driving,  
Didn't regret where he'd been.

It was all so sudden,  
It was all so quick.  
You both kept driving,  
Then you started to panic.  
He sped 'round the curve,  
Avoiding the fact.  
You didn't know what to do.  
You didn't know how to act.  
And just like that,  
The damage was done.  
Your car was smashed,  
And that was the end of his fun.

Your lives were taken,  
In the blink of an eye.  
They notified the families,  
No one got to say goodbye.  
He'd done it before,  
But it had never ended this way.  
He walked away from that crash,  
Without a word to say.  
He thought he was having some fun,  
Just drinking some beers.  
How would he have known,  
Those would cause so many tears.

*Thomas Sabel*

**Strange as it seems**

Strange as it seems--  
my bringing bread,  
not flowers as moments  
of devotion; but bread,  
you see, is for the living;  
when all too soon,  
I may be holding mums.

*Erin St. Myers*

**A Sonnet for Andy**

Gingerbread, fruitcake—sugar through the veins  
Marshmallows dance, hot chocolate, eggnog  
Jolly Santa's gloved hands tug at the reins  
Red gleaming nose cuts through Christmas Eve fog

Lighted houses and pine trees all a glow  
Cool December nights, stars twinkle, shine bright  
Naked tree branches blanketed by snow  
Christ—newborn babe, a stable, Holy Night

Wrapped in red ribbons, gifts bought at the mall  
Red kettles—charity, silent prayer  
Carolers sing yuletide wishes to all  
'Tis the season, hope and love in the air

Peppermint breath and a candy cane kiss  
Warm in your arms, an eternal Christmas

*Danielle Stewart*

**Sick**

So sick of the cold. Stuck  
outside and he won't let me  
in to the heat of flames  
that I know are repressed  
inside.

So sick of the cold  
and my addiction to him.  
Chemistry remains  
from collision of our skin  
until I let him repossess

days later. Now I've grown  
to love the cold  
and learned that I can feel  
the heat from sparks  
as much as flames.

*Eve Eiler*

**Clutter**

It's all here:  
every lost dream,  
every dime wasted,  
every worn-out shoe and  
un-loved novel.  
Here  
are more wasted things  
than you can shove  
into the backseat  
of your car.  
All looking for  
a new use,  
a new chance,  
to come out of the closet or  
the back of a drawer.  
Most not worth  
the two seconds  
you spend  
trying to figure out  
what the hell it is.  
Yet the gawkers  
wake up  
with the  
trash collectors  
trying to make their  
big score.

*Shane Swoverland*

**AN OFFERING**

There is something soft in your brawl  
A bruised apple or kiwi gone liquid

It is not enough that I have stiff back spasms  
Or that my ordinary perception is blurred

You want remorse and a three course meal  
A horse and carriage a yes of course I understand

My love of deer is strolling through a thinning forest  
Hanging over a fire place next to a mounted fish

You put your foot down and raise up your cup  
It is an offering of darkening steam in this leaking landscape

Your promise your refrain your turning away  
All accord one clear cut bean

My body is being ground down  
Eroded in the wind and rain

*Lori Ann Cammlarie*

## **Teenagers**

You are entering young womanishness,  
the “tween” years have past,  
“Martha” will visit every month,  
reminding you of this turbulent transition,  
hormones will fluctuate like an emotional rollercoaster,  
feeling joyful one moment,  
angry like a hurricane’s temperament the next,  
lovely like weeping cherry blossoms in springtime,  
frightening like the deep penetrating eyes of a cobra,  
take a deep breath,  
you are becoming.

*Troy Bigelow*

**Cosmological Intercourse**

Let's untheorize a physical law:  
occupy the same space at the same time.

Einstein,  
grant us special relativity. Bend us

toward light at the speed of lips  
locked in a gravitied ellipse.

Let's roll on the blanket of night  
like binary suns locked at the corona.

Hubble,  
show us an expanding universe. Balance us

between breaths like time, with a sigh  
of space curved slight as a thigh.

Let's dance to the entropy of our sweat  
flowing like photons fissioned, then finished.

*Dexter E. Shipe*  
**Childrens Eyes**

As soft winds sweep away the days,  
I look back on life through a haze.  
Remember playgrounds, parks and friends,  
In childlike gaze that never ends.  
The laughter in a game of catch,  
Shall memory ever attach...  
To innocence in youthful eyes,  
Catching the ball to Dad's surprise.

I recall my first bike, first wreck,  
Who picked me up, said, "What the heck?"  
Convinced me to give one more try,  
While, knees skinned, I forgot to cry.  
Just the joy knowing he was there,  
Making him proud my only care.  
There was nothing I couldn't do,  
My heart held fast that to be true.

Though teenage years were kind of rough,  
I sure wasn't too big or tough.  
You taught me to defend what's right  
And never back down from a fight.  
So I learned the hard way to stand,  
Still, with each lump, I found your hand.  
Drawing from you an inner strength,  
And stubborn pride of equal length.

But there the line of fate was drawn,  
As though I blinked and you were gone.  
I found myself facing the sun,  
Not man, not boy, fatherless, one.  
Eyes blinded by a void inside,  
I could not live that you had died.  
Alas finding it to be true,  
I could do nothing without you.

Please, Dad, today just hear my call,  
I'm sorry that I dropped the ball.  
My life is wrecked, my knees are skinned,  
My emotions undisciplined.  
I can't get up although I try,  
Please don't be upset if I cry.  
Though I can't fight what I can't see,  
Please, Dad, say you're still proud of me.

*Danielle Stewart*

**Pain**

of your silence,  
absence,  
i ache with emptiness.

of this love with no  
outlet,  
i am filled.

of thousands of  
memories,  
my mind relives daily.

of perfection and no  
mistakes,  
i am not made.

but of everything good,  
amazing,  
i would give.

So what  
are you  
looking for?

*Erin St. Myers*

### **The Bridal March**

Bridesmaids flow down the aisle making sapphire waves  
Guided by men with shiny, coal black shoes  
Sisters hold firm small bouquets breathing life  
Bringing the aroma of felicity into still, excitable air—  
Calm air oscillates with hand-holding, heart-moving music  
Delightful music quiets, and all is silence  
A new wave starts from the first row  
With diamond eyes and a proud, endearing sea foam dress  
A sea of familiar faces rise to greet the march  
Church doors open letting a new light into the sanctuary  
A radiant, glowing mid-afternoon sun—smile wide as the horizon  
Transforming ordinary waves into a glistening body  
Beaming teeth, crying eyes, and awestruck minds  
The bride floats down the same aisle  
Supported by a time-tested ever sturdy pillar—  
A father that loves his little girl more than life  
The woman in white lets her eyes wander through the sea of faces  
Then, they become fixed upon the man of the hour  
Today he vows to give her all he has, all he knows  
His last paycheck, his last days, his last name  
Standing on the alter, promising their futures  
A fairy tale begins as sunbeams race through the stained glass—  
Angels from heaven pouring blessings  
On a sea of sapphire glistening with hope  
For a new day, a new life  
A new husband, new wife



*Debi Thorpe-Rodda*

*John Leininger*

**The Accompany Man**

Hey lady  
Hiding in a blind corner  
May I lend you my helping hand?  
I see your diamonds are not glowing  
But if you find someone who cares  
The light outside will make them glow

Hey young man  
I see your troubles threatening you with a knife  
Don't let your life end too soon  
You never know what'll happen next  
A good thing or a bad thing  
Expect the best that changes your life forever

Hey elder  
Say a prayer to a new generation  
You're ancient times give us golden times  
We know you won't be around forever  
But if you want us to accompany you  
We'll walk you down the halls to your final destiny

Hey spirit  
The time has come for you go home  
But you say you're not of any good  
Soaked in sinful pleasures you're not proud of  
Before you weep I want you to have my Bible  
Maybe He will see you very worthy after all



*Debi Thorpe-Rodda*

*Troy Bigelow*

**How I Summered My Spent Vacation**

On the first day of my summer  
vacation, I didn't wake up  
to a dawn oranged with morning  
or a fun waged day;  
my first day was a dark,

continuation of a night of study,  
a nose in a sixty-year-old book.  
I found myself unbending someone's  
inconsiderate, irreverent, dog-eared  
corners of Williams's *Patterson*,

the ungrateful reader (I hope  
he took away light from each  
dog's ear—maybe a mite or two,  
too for his troubles).

Back to the continuous night (midnight)

of the first day of my spent vacation,  
I summered the fun of it in the heat  
of the study of it, as I am wont—  
as I wanted and will want, always,  
to do. I want to do nothing, too

on some beach, somewhere, and I did,  
in time, but that first day was night,  
and I continued to bend toward white  
paper with a pen, imagination, and love.  
Exchange the Passaic for Cedar Creeek,

and I'll see Williams's New Jersey, raise him  
Indiana in the coin of metaphorical resurrection.  
American man that I am. Indiana  
that I am, in that man, in that river  
of time and place. I summered my spent

vacation in that Hoosier corn humidity,  
that late brown summer drought, cracked  
thirty-one books on the same knee in twelve weeks,  
didn't dog-ear a page, but straightened four Important  
pages for myself and the next reader.

The heat never took my time as much  
as the pen did. Indiana jumped  
away from Fort Wayne that first day—landed  
prosaic in the Passaic, next to the American  
metaphor of an imagined Paterson man's imagined man.

*Adam Jeffrey Bodnar*  
**all a flower can do**

stand and sway  
wave and wait  
for a bold bee  
on a fateful date  
who might feel a pedal  
and seal a fate  
to sit and settle  
share and appreciate

so grow with grace  
and bloom to embrace  
that touch and taste  
or just wilt and waste



*Debi Thorpe-Rodda*

*John Leininger*

**To The People of Today** (*something to remember*) Songs are  
more than music

Lyrics are more than words

Sonnets express more than passion

Ballads express more than love being given

Speeches tell more than a goal

Pictures show more than a view

Hold these memories alive

Or lose them forever

*Dana Barrett*

**Still Birth**

You would have been born  
Six months after we broke  
Down. You would have slid  
Into this unhappy spiral  
Innocently smiling.

I would have loved you anyway  
Though you may not have known  
Much. Love at that moment

Was insurmountable  
Like glass sliding through pavement  
Or mounds of splintered stone.  
No one ever wins when life  
Shatters and spins out

Into the atmosphere.  
But that doesn't mean,  
I mean, it doesn't hurt  
To keep something warm  
Deeply buried somewhere

Inside. I would have carried  
You. For as long as you had let me.  
Perhaps I dreamed  
You? I cannot feel anything like that  
Anymore.

It is no one's fault.  
Perhaps my life has been wasted  
In the spiraling of glass  
And stone.

*Dana Barrett*

**Lost Settlement**

*For Huntington*

Cement steps are more brittle  
On the southern side of Oak Street.  
Denim against pasty skin,  
Icy even in late summer sunsets.

*You know how it feels when you put your clothes on too early,  
That “cling and stick” because you’re still wet?*

You see, everything is cooler here  
In this broke down place.  
They’ll mark your tomb with historic curlicues.  
*“Here laid one warm body.”*

Everyone lives to die here,  
In this middle finger of this land.

We don’t pay for movies,  
But waste around the back door,  
Communing together – with broken pavement,  
Crackle scratch of dead leaves.

We burn on with tapped cigarette  
While paper curls and chill ash falls to stone.  
We all smoke when we’re drinking.  
*Honestly, we smoke all the time.*

Buzzed hard as the sun drops,  
We forget – *we forget* – about the money  
We all don’t have.

*There’s not much work,  
But lots of labors,  
In this town.*

That's okay with us.  
Dragging, drinking, puffing;  
Bound together in one smoke ring,  
Waiting to die.

Years from now, when they scroll up our tombstones,  
Children will honor the cracks in the cement  
Arms linked in the haze and scratch of leaves,  
Clinging to the chilled bones of this town.

*Danielle Stewart*  
**Eternal Optimist**

Another betrayal she learns  
of another failure springs  
more pain that she knows

she does not enjoy, yet wonders  
if she deserves.

Another night tears carry

her to peaceful dreams  
after hours of screaming holes  
into the walls.

When the fire in her throat  
from singing too loudly dies,  
out comes the silence of no

longer caring.

Though she likes to pretend  
she can keep her anger alive

it is against her nature.  
She cannot regret; she adapts,  
waits for love that will come again.

And she will hope  
that this one will not  
end like the others.

*Lori Ann Cammlarie*  
**Aurora Borealis**  
**Spectacle Poem-#1**

Fluorescent glaciers glow through the night,  
Sheets of rainbows covering the sky,  
Touching the Arctic snow.  
An Angel's chorus of shimmering lights,  
Glistening through the stars.  
A collision of curtains, draping in radiance,  
An explosion of color, dripping luminance,  
A pouring of electrifying rays, showering blankets  
of '*Merry Dancers*' and '*Fighting souls of dead warriors*'.

*Andrew Johnson*

**Wow—**

Youre Pretty!

I wonder what youre like

How your laugh comes (easy or hard)

How you watch movies (talk talk or hush hush)

How you eat dinner (um just a salad or well-done please)

I want to ask you

but

I notice that

the waistband of your... sweatpants?

is flipped down, one roll (a common mistake it seems)

Flimsy ripples in flimsy material

snaking through your decency,

exposing you or misrepresenting you, I dont know

I dont know but suddenly I feel strong  
enough to ask

With body and eyes and tone and smile

I ask

If you really do practice

what you preach

*John Leininger*

**Not a Crime**

A penal lore they forgot to teach me  
What all that we do shall be marked in the list of souls  
Here the seven deadliest are the conscience killer  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

I can throw a spear as long as a football field  
Just me and nobody else  
Don't ever rain on my parade, my friends  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

More we get, the more we demand  
All these precious silver coins are mine all mine!  
If you want what I have get it yourself  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

Beauty is all you detect  
They judge my mountains and sunshine views  
A descent proposal to make it all better  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

Drown me in high measuring calories  
There's more room to spare  
It's won't hurt anybody, but me  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

Nothing to do but I'll wait longer  
Sit down and pretend the world is paused  
Shame to be unemployed  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

I wish to have what you have  
You have talent that grabs my attention  
How far I'll go is off the edge  
But don't cry; it's a sin, not a crime

*Penal lore=strict tradition*

*Erin St. Myers*

**Voice in the Plastic**

mindless drones stagger down sidewalks with battery-powered plastic growing from their ears, oblivious to surroundings. the only voice that matters comes from a tiny razor cutting into the here and now, conversations rattle in eardrums that were not meant to hear, volume reaches new heights, one person's loud laughs and cruel curses echo through hushed hallways. personal points made public; stranger hears stories of cheating ex-boyfriends, wasted weekends, and extremely satisfying sex. silent classrooms morph into fun houses when timeless tunes and billboard-topping ballads sound constantly, reach and turn down the volume. annoyed glances no longer follow personal alarms, rather they are accompanied by a chorus of others, must stay in touch with friends across state lines and oceans and pretend neighbors do not exist

*Nick Vetter*

**Zoe**

Watching the world through wild eyes,  
Her lean body prances through the house,  
Dancing to the beat of butterflies.

When days grow longer and temperatures rise  
She eagerly waits behind screen doors,  
Watching the world through wild eyes.

Her greatest joys lie under clear skies  
Running through fields of grass and clover,  
Dancing to the beat of butterflies.

Only seeking the natural highs  
She won't let herself fall into traps of the lows,  
Watching the world through wild eyes.

What she won't understand, she rarely tries,  
Just loses interest and skips off to play,  
Dancing to the beat of butterflies.

This place may seem too much for her  
But she's the wisest of us all,  
Watching the world through wild eyes,  
Dancing to the beat of butterflies.

*Shane Swoverland*

**THE CRICKETED CATHEDRAL**

The cricket is a pure whistle  
ringing through the Cathedral.

The chorus is diamonds strung  
around the wrist of the Queen.

The wind is whipping, liling,  
lifting my senses over the dome.

And there, over the hill, the sound  
of golden bells being struck,

says Bach encompasses the sky  
and knows clearly the composition.

*Eve Eiler*

**Set Change**

I look about and see my house  
beneath me --I am soaring  
in the continental blue,  
blinking away the hazy laze  
the vibrance overtakes me.  
In less than a flash, I'm inside  
bodiless and free-- still soaring,  
indoors now, I don't know how  
a set change it must be.  
My brother laughs, his ruddy face  
sweating from the race.  
I chase him down  
heart beats ever faster.  
Soon on a roof,  
my high school, I think...  
the bright blue sky half-hidden  
by the chimney and the brick.  
I catch my brother  
but he's not him.  
My bodiless hand lunges, plunges  
in the knife.  
Flash of silver, scarlet  
and gore—panic!  
I awake,  
still seeing the  
gruesome vision  
in my mind... but  
in seconds it fades.  
I am safe.

*Dana Barrett*

**Sign**

*For N.Y.*

In those days  
I was only five feet,  
Six inches tall,  
And angry with everything.  
Everything. Even the snow  
Wasn't enough  
To distinguish cold  
And flush of old heat.

I stood at the corner  
Of the bar and seam  
Where people walk  
And sit down together.  
The room smelled  
Of old money stain,  
Red wine, and oyster  
Cracked open,

I watched the boy  
Approach my 28th year  
And flash arrogant smile.

You've never been in this place  
Before, he said.  
You have a name  
You can get around on?

What is wrong with your eye?  
I asked. And your hat tips  
Over the other lid.  
You have a problem  
With women,

I think.

I have mother trouble  
Here. He said. Reaching  
Into his pocket,  
He pulled out a note pad  
Signed his name on it  
And handed it to me.  
Ever take an autograph  
From someone not old enough  
To have a name?

It feels like paper  
But something different,  
Like pennies in a water glass.

I took it.  
It wasn't the man I needed,

But I took it.



*Debi Thorpe-Rodda*

*Lori Ann Cammlarie*

**Houses**

Upon entering another home,  
this one is familiar too,  
endless rooms lead me,  
to some hidden attic like room,  
tucked deep into unknown quarters,  
feels like a scavenger hunt,  
but I don't know what I am looking for,  
mysterious, curious adventure,  
the space shrinks,  
no where left to go except,  
back to the open door that invited me in,  
the journey back is strangely different,  
a series of more rooms,  
with great uncertainty,  
I find my way to the door,  
I have lived here,  
why can't I remember,  
the neglected patio in the back and  
that field of gorgeous flowers,  
If I had known,  
I would have decorated my patio with posies and  
spent my time here,  
where the beauty runs deep and  
the mind is free.

*Dana Barrett*

**Even Dogs Give Apologies**

If I could take it all back,  
Trust me  
I would.  
But you know how a dog loves  
A cat?  
Just curls up alongside him  
To stay warm,  
But cannot express the need?

It's okay if you want to explain  
Your mistakes,  
Fill in all the punch holes  
After wind blows through them;  
But you must say it  
To yourself first.  
Accept,

Like that bus ride after fans went home.  
Moon falling over gray seat,  
Just you and the bounce in the sunset.  
No one is ever really at fault  
When a team plays.

Fireflies at dusk, if you ever held one,  
Stop burning yellow-orange if you clench.  
The light goes out with the sun  
While the rest still fly. Your parents still call.

But you cannot be a firefly.  
Your life is dog curled 'round a cat.  
Dreaming of running forward  
With tufts of fur in teeth –  
But instead rolls over,  
Stretches.

*Nick Vetter*

## **Drowning In Black Water**

Hired to preserve a peace that was never won,  
They arrived on their Sunday warships,  
And heavy boots set in sun-hot sands.  
They are the PMCs,  
Bought through no-bid contracts.  
This is the job they've chosen for themselves.

Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap...Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap...

Their ranks include ex-Marines and ex-freedom fighters,  
Ex-soldiers who fought for foreign dictators.  
They joke and laugh as they slow-load their guns,  
SAWs and hand cannons and automatic shotguns,  
Fifty caliber sniper rifles with civilians under crosshairs.  
They profess themselves trained experts, and justify their  
Shoot first sensibilities with political protection.  
Like it or not, the States are getting what they paid for.

Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap...Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap...

Another problem "fixed" by throwing money at it,  
But how long must this circular illogic go on?  
Innocents killed by mercenaries,  
And killed again by legal cover-ups.  
These guns-for-hire aren't leaving by choice;  
They're making a killing out there.

Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap...Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap...

*Dana Barrett*

## **Organ Donor to Do List**

One: Read all of it first,  
Even the fine print,  
Or else the leftover  
Will seep out into light  
And do significant harm  
To the recipient.

\*Note – If the latter occurs, you may experience some discomfort.

Two: The guideline, source, and outcome  
Are all subjects to change  
At the request,  
Or even an uneven gesture,  
Made by the recipient.

\*Note – You may experience nausea, increased anxiety, or depression depending on your hereditary predisposition.

Three: The procedure is not quick.  
In fact, it requires profound patience  
And site must be clean,  
Packed tightly from the outside in.

\*Note – If hole seeps, you may experience tenderness or fits of shuddering.  
Green ooze is indicative of infection.

Four: Bear the hole.  
You are now without.  
Recipient claims all rights of disposal  
Or promulgation.

\*Note – You may experience suicidal thoughts or just sympathy pains.

Disclaimer:  
Rights and details not for the public.  
Copyright the brain.

*Jessica Wilson*

SOME PEOPLE LIKE THE WAY THAT I WALK  
SOME PEOPLE LIKE THE WAY THAT I TALK  
SOME PEOPLE DON'T EVEN LIKE ME AT ALL  
BUT I CAN'T LET THAT MAKE ME STUMBLE OR FALL

JUST WHEN I GET TO THE TOP AND CAN BREATHE  
THAT'S WHEN THESE PEOPLE START HATIN ON ME  
SO I TAKE A LOOK AROUND AT WHAT I CAN SEE  
AND I'M TELLING YOU THIS ISN'T THE WAY IT SHOULD BE

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO BUT KEEP ON HOLDIN YOUR GROUND  
KEEP YOUR HEAD UP AND GET READY FOR THE NEXT ROUND  
COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS AND BE THANKFUL FOR TODAY  
BECAUSE WE ALL KNOW TOMORROW'S NOT GARAUNTEED ANYWAY

SO KEEP ON HUSSLING AND PAYING THESE BILLS  
MAYBE ONE DAY I'LL MAKE IT OVER THAT HILL  
NO MORE SLAVIN AWAY EVERY DAY EVEN THOUGH THAT'S THE PRICE  
YOU PAY

TO BE OLD AND GRAY AND LIVIN IT UP  
ENJOYIN LIFE NOT GIVING UP  
SO KEEP THAT IN MIND AS YOUR DAY GOES ON  
CUASE IT'S ONLY UP TO YOU TO STAY STRONG

*Thomas Sabel*

**Too Soon, Too, Late**

Too soon, too late, we each  
were born to share in life's  
attachments.

The pattern's long been set for  
one while the other's  
still unfolding.

Too soon, too late we each  
arrive from distant paths, drawn  
on by grace's meeting  
until with cautious hands out-  
stretched a feinting  
touch is made.

Too soon, too late we scorn  
time's lies of age's differentiation;  
we'd rather snuggle down  
against the wearisome  
real that lurks around the  
next flit of time to end  
our brief incursion.

*Danielle Stewart*

**A Simple Wish**

Promise me  
quiet morning pleasure  
infinite hope  
sweet honor  
tremendous respect  
sacred family

heaven and universe.

*Danielle Stewart*

**Trigger**

as I move  
my muscles pull  
and ache,  
deliciously  
reminding me  
of the last time  
your body  
left his imprint.

*Lori Ann Cammlarie*  
**Wild Horses**  
**Villanelle Poem-#5 -J4**

Across the dry barren ground,  
Like an angry gust of wind,  
Thunderous hooves pound.

Running with rhythmic sound,  
Synchronized beats,  
Across the dry barren ground.

Freely running around,  
Legs blurring, soaring high,  
Thunderous hooves pound.

Rearing up and galloping about,  
A sunset sinking behind mountains,  
Across the dry barren ground.

A stampede of sound,  
Disturbing the dusty fog,  
Thunderous hooves pound.

Darkness sets in,  
The desert unsettled ,  
Across the dry barren ground,  
Thunderous hooves pound.

*Nicole Johnson*

**Prayer**

The floor felt harder to stand on  
So heavy  
The pews held less people  
So empty  
There seemed to be more air around me  
My prayer wouldn't even echo through my head  
No words  
I watched my fingers  
I watched the child in front watch me  
The child had no knowledge of the priest opening prayer  
I recited... (She did not)  
I reached  
May the lord be with you (and also with you)  
My family recited around me  
Their voices; like the wind  
Voices blew my thoughts away  
And carried my prayers  
Prayers echo  
Amen

*John Leininger*

**Ballad For A Woman**

Woman is a fragile thing to break  
Whereas the opposite never ache  
Look at her diamond eye  
You know she starts to cry  
Why does she go through such pain?  
As we ignore the pouring rain  
Such a woman with soul  
That should be every mans' goal

This is my will  
If she knows me until  
Woman you are my equal  
I'll wrap you in my warming quill  
Whoever she is either  
Her weapon is a quiver  
She'll be sweet  
My midnights treat  
Such a woman deserves  
My, my life with her never reserves  
A price I can't afford  
You brought out your greatest accord

*Anonymous*  
**Mayakovsky**

*Do poets have lives?* When the world is viewed from the skyscraper, the poet may seem insignificant. Tears flowed when you confessed your Spanish lover; there is an irreducible difference between experience and representation. The poet in pain may abandon himself to the forgetfulness of poetic form. Plath is such an allegorical poet. In Vladimir's metonymy, the icy bullet suggests the state. A man like Lear, he slenderly knew himself. While the Egyptians learned how to obtain electricity from the hair of a cat, he hoped for a more efficient art, for electricity from turbines, for energy from the revolution. Words forgotten before they are seen. His eyes suggest a Medici Prince. His temple throbbed with thoughts of Lily Brik. Hence, poetry. "This led to my Golgothas/in the auditoriums of Petersburg, Moscow, Odessa and Kiev, /and there was not one/who/would not shout:/ 'Crucify,/crucify, him!'" A man who had no life, a man who felt responsible for the world. The revolution would teach him "to examine the former God under the magnifying glass like a noxious bacillus." He was interested in the cube, the cup, the column. The cat finds a spot of sunlight on the parlor rug, then sprawls. He was not interested in the intrinsic meaning of the cube, the cup, the column. A game of Russian Roulette, a man who loved to gamble. A last attempt at bridging the gap: canonized as the Revolutionary Poet by Stalin. After the revolution, he came to love the world. Horse meat is better fried than boiled, and Lily Brik had scurvy. Winter kept circling Mayakovsky's house, a hungry wolf. The residue of the ephemeral serves no hermeneutic. "*Our comrades/need/our* firewood:/comrades are freezing." The bullet of our dreams. A Scottish Fold who sits like a Buddha. Some people would rather die than change. An avalanche of darkness.

*Shane Swoverland*

**ENTWINED**

I am glistening thin tides by shelves  
listening inside my self to the sing  
of wet finger tips across a blade  
to the ring of a high pitched and fork  
It is a song of several chords  
The ocean spun inside a shell  
and finished stars that whirl and wind  
in spoons of blue shores that swell  
I am a station that clearly stays  
Encircling orbiting always blooms  
Inside a drop of pliant clay  
In the fathomless flight of larks that loom  
Fiddling why in the cricket's creek  
A blazing shrill of falcon's beak  
And sways of golden liquid streams  
To softy folds of sand and mush  
These ways of water carve the heart  
That deepest pleads the soul to touch  
and touching turns the mind to shine  
and finds its diamond life entwined

*Adam Jeffrey Bodnar*

**the mouths of moths**

pretty purity tip-toes towards  
a present presently presented  
as preserved innocence pressed against  
a pair of inspired lips generously rented

the fluent pouring of personable pores  
that initially express to impress  
pronounce a thousand words in every language  
only when they are intimately speechless

enlightened in the darkness  
contemplating the complexities of a careful caress  
the sweetest scent of a pulse so precious  
suggests an experience brand new and delicious

*Adam Jeffrey Bodnar*  
**the curriculum to come**

students of each other's pupils  
looking to learn a lesson  
in the form of a formula  
that holds the key to a confession  
and not that of a sin  
but that of a desire  
sang rather than spoken  
and in harmony like a choir  
like these hopes that rise higher  
with each shared moment that passes  
while playing the role of professor  
in each other's curious classes

*Thomas Sabel*

**The Destroyer of Trees**

The Destroyer of Trees  
    attacks the  
Gutterland Forest  
to rid the grove of  
new maple saplings  
first thrusting fresh greens  
to morning's dark light.

With high reaching ladder  
he announces their doom  
with grunts by step  
    ascends  
until arched brows o'er look  
the undisturbed tilth lain  
fresh two seasons past.

Ungainly hand scoops cool  
damp earth from metallic  
abodes near the sky.

Then grunting again  
    clambering down from the  
heights to cleanse hands  
of detris' black stain. The  
forest now cleared for the rain.

*Dana Barrett*

**Rainbow Tree**

*For N.W.W.H.*

Rainbow tree, can you see her?  
When you shook, her fruit fell –  
Not far  
From where your roots  
Stretch –

Beneath the earth,  
You could hear her a little  
If you tried.

When the autumn came,  
Your leaves were so lovely, so wide  
Embracing all that surround you  
And spreading your tenderness

Around.  
She could not call your name,  
But felt you coming.

Rainbow tree, do you see her?  
Do you feel her down there?

Beneath the solace and solitude?  
Beneath,  
Beneath everything in history  
And the now-and-then?

When it withered and ice fell  
Not far from your roots,  
Did you feel her dying too?  
Perhaps she did just a little,  
Leaving a piece behind,  
Taking the red part of you with her.

Rainbow tree, when spring comes  
And you can no longer see her,  
No longer know her, her scent, or her touch,  
You will weep beneath your broad leaves  
Wet tears of joy.

*Bradley Springer*

**The way they see it.**

The great invader blows up our sunshine,  
a merchant who deals in the oily black blood of death.  
He's living to see us. He's dying to see us die.  
This devil kills thoughts, families, and hope.  
Our world is long gone – should we run to Babylon?  
Women, the innocents and males give the desert their red life.  
The desert is never satisfied. How much will it drink today?  
The gift of life so carelessly spilled.  
Ra loved us once – now she ignores us, exposes us – we are naked.  
They aim – we scream. They site – we run. They fire – we die.  
We are empty vessels of our former selves on broken concrete,  
bent twisted metal, glass.  
Bloody feet, empty stomachs, sunken eyes, we are hopeless, but  
not Ruth-less.  
Our children are dead, yet they try to play, they only give us away.  
The cradle of civilization has become the tomb of death. Whose  
turn today?  
Let go of my mind. Give back my spirit, my family, my hope.  
Look at my face, my eyes, I am a dying dove. The olive branch  
becomes heavy.  
Relax your finger. Please, peace, please.

*Kelly Ellis*  
**For David**

There's something about you  
And I don't know  
If it's the way you look at me  
or the way you don't

Your wife seems nice  
although naive to your schemes  
Sweet little blond thing  
Still thinks you're working late

People at work suspect  
that we are "good" friends  
but truth be told that *good*  
is an understatement

I asked you about the lack  
Of ring on your finger  
You gave me a line about  
"It's the type of work I do"

Well let me be the first  
To say that being a cop  
is not a valid excuse  
not to wear a commitment

Emotionally vacant  
physically unattainable  
But spectacular in bed  
keep me coming... back

Each week to meet you  
Up and down we are, I am  
Feeling left behind, alone  
Knowing you will stay

With her, you're not satisfied  
Why do you lie to her, to me  
Being fake isn't becoming  
so knock it off, out, & stay home

Months I wasted playing  
Games of who would pay  
For what end in what room  
Asking what time you'd leave

To shower off my scent  
You go home to your wife  
after "working" late  
Sleepless, thinking of me

She deserves better and  
Frankly, so do I  
How I ever slipped, tripped  
and landed where I did

has gotten me to nowhere  
fast and alone, and easy  
where I started months ago

I despise your empty soul  
for making me that one woman  
If you wanted to be with me  
You Would, No Questions

I HATE THAT YOU'VE SEEN ME NAKED

*Adam Jeffrey Bodnar*  
**preluding a reunion**

carefully calling attention  
to and through a connection  
that is meant to be corrected  
like an angel resurrected  
or a fire to rekindle  
resuscitate this individual  
whose heartbeat represents  
the mutually potential reverence  
between those invested and involved  
who could consider a problem solved  
if all that was once possible  
was just actualized and visible

*Dana Barrett*  
**Rusty York and Wendy Robinson sit in a Coliseum  
pothole eating DeBrand chocolate with Chuck Surack  
and Barbara Bradley Baakgaard**

*Poem in the style of Patrick Lawler*

It was a time  
When motorists feared  
Snow like they possessed  
Paper assholes.  
It was a time  
When our idea  
Rolled through brains  
Like loose carpet change.  
It was a time  
When we couldn't push  
Enough oxygen into the room.

It was a time  
When we shoved fingers  
Into inappropriate places.  
It was a time  
When we cured  
Psychic pain  
With everyone's malignancy.  
It was a time  
When babies were born  
With aluminum brains  
And titanium stomachs.  
It was a time  
When men still carried big  
Sticks and talked  
Over everything.  
It was a time  
When gold was silver  
And silver was glass.  
It was a time  
When we only paid  
Inattention.  
It was a time  
When we touched  
Dead bodies  
And averted eyes.  
It was a time  
When robots knew most  
About love.

# Prose



*Thomas Sabel*

## **The Endless Voyage**

Another set of perfect curls fell with each rhythmic pass of the plane and was added to the collection of pine shavings growing on the floor. Each pass added more and more, some wide, some narrow, some as thin as hair; and they crunched under foot, although Charles Aaron tried to avoid stepping on any of them lest they be crushed out of perfection. Each pass of the plane brought forth the metamorphosis, coaxing the roundness of the oar's shaft out of the square pine 2 x 2. A square peg made to fit a round hole, he thought—one of the few thoughts entering his head as he focused on the grip and pressure of the hand plane, sliding its razor edge along the wood, coaxing the tool to do his bidding, as others before him have done using a tool that has essentially remained unchanged since some unknown ancient Egyptian craftsman created the first one.

This particular oar was the second of a pair he was making and its shape was more uniform than the first. The first had been a lesson on how to make an oar, this second one an attempt to perfect the craft. The pair, once completed, would finish the boat project. Like carving the oars, he had no experience in building a boat, but now, within sight of the oar's taking shape, his boat lay completed, painted and overturned showing its hull unembarrassed to the world as the world, in the form of neighborhood passers-by, to see. I've build a boat, he reminded himself for the fifth or sixth time that hour, still amazed at his success as if the universe had turned its favor towards him and his attempt. As far as boats go, it was quite small not quite as long as he was tall and designed to carry two people at most, provided they were slightly less than average height and weight. But still, it was a boat with a properly pointed bow and regular transom.

A ridiculous project, some might say considering the circumstances under which it was built-- so far from a lake and with no means of getting it to one. Charles Aaron didn't own a trailer and his compact car was too small to tow one if he had

indeed possessed one. He wasn't about to let the facts get in the way of his creation for he had wanted a boat since he had been a boy. Even then the idea of a boat was preposterous for the same reasons as now- no lake and no means of readily getting to one. That didn't mean he couldn't fantasize about the boat he would never have. That is until now. He had his boat and his oars and only lacked a lake.

While Charles Aaron lived far from a lake, he didn't lack water for three rivers ran through the city where he lived. Fort Wayne had nearly forgotten about the rivers that once gave it life. Once, long before the coming of railroads and asphalt the rivers carried the people and goods into the city, but now bridges and viaducts hid the rivers and while they continued to run through the city they no longer were seen as the life-blood carrying goods and hope, connecting it to the rest of the world. The rivers were abandoned as a relics of the past, allowed to go derelict and become littered with the decay of other abandoned enterprises like the paint factory, the old Stroh's brewery, the iron mill, all of which oozed the pus of their open sores into the river making them problem children bequeathed to a later generation to be cleaned and made whole. To one of these rivers, the St. Joe, Charles Aaron would carry his boat when she was ready for her maiden voyage.

The night before her launch, Charles Aaron tucked her in for her last night of purity, pure because she had never been touched by the water, never wetted, as they say. She was his virgin boat on the night before her wedding. He ran his hands over her hull, caressing the wood and feeling for blemishes. Pride ran through his fingers for she was smooth as glass, her sides and bottom polished. The years of waiting slipped away during his inspection for he had fulfilled an old promise with her creation. Thirty plus years of dreaming over boating magazines, of wistful wanderings through boat shows, of envious glances at Sunday morning fishermen pulling their boats to water's edge vanished. He had made a thing of beauty and that accomplishment blessed him while he looked her over. Then, when admiring the transom, he felt the unease of something not quite right, of something overlooked, of a crucial

element missing. The chines were faired, the gunnels looked right. He took his tape measure and again checked the distance from the bow to each of the transom's corners and she proved to be square. Physically, she was a perfect as he could have made her but still his heart kept telling him all was not well with her. His heart took his eyes once more to the transom and he looked at the polished green surface, clean and empty. "She has no name!" he exclaimed aloud, shattering the midnight silence. "I never named her." Without a name his boat had no identity, no soul. Without a name she was little more than an artifact, the expression of a hobbyist who wasting time on an empty trinket, a collection of cut up pieces of wood all glued together and painted, a large decoration but little more than that. How could he dream of putting her into the water without a name, letting her join all the other nameless boats floated in countless ponds, lakes, and rivers, like those soul-less jon-boats the Department of Natural Resources rents at the Indiana State Parks, those dull, battered, aluminum boxes barely worthy of the title "boat", dispensed by teenagers who passed out damaged oars and sodden life-jackets? How could he violate her, sending her without a name into a river filled with nameless junk? It would be as bad as taking an infant nameless from the hospital. No, she would have a name, a proper and noble name, a name declaring that an old self-made promise was now fulfilled and at the same time embracing future voyages. Without pondering, he instantly knew her name, the name he would elegantly paint across her transom.

Shrugging off his sleep, Charles Aaron gathered the materials he needed to set her name for the world to see: a ruler to set the guidelines, a pencil to outline the letters, a narrow artist' brush to carefully fill in the letters, and, from an abandoned hobby, a set of oil paints. He was more tired than he had thought for once the first rush of excitement wore off he had to shake his head many times to keep his eyes clear; he had to clench and unclench his hand again and again to keep the ache from interfering with the delicate work. He wished he had thought of naming her sooner but in time, he finished, and while not as perfect as it could have been had he done it when he was

fresher, he had written her name neatly across her transom:  
*Dawn's Horizon.*

Had he been a few years younger, Charles Aaron would have greeted the following morning with greater excitement. While his heart yearned to get Dawn's Horizon into the water, his body wanted to remain under the sheets and blanket a while longer. Then he heard the noise from the garage, a subtle sort of rustling or a groan. Then the crash. He rushed out of bed, down the stairs, through the kitchen and into the garage. The boat was fine, still resting on the saw horses where he had left her but the oars had fallen and had crashed against the workbench, scattering a coffee can of woodscrews. He gathered the screws back into the can and then he saw her anew out of the corner of his eye. The time had come and he could no longer delay. Their moment together was here. He hurriedly dressed and returned to the garage without bothering to wash, shave, or brush his teeth. Since she was small, he could carry her on his back and because the morning was very young, few saw him carrying the boat on his back down the three blocks to the river's edge, like an enormous turtle heading home. He knew of a spot where the riverbank gently sloped down to the water's edge, where the spring floods rushed ashore, scouring the banks of any plants that had attempted to grow between floods and leaving its sandy silt to form a sort of beach nestled under the overgrowth. The overgrowth of wild grape vines grew thickly and it jealously guarded the riverbank so that he had to set Dawn's Horizon down on the ground and force his body through, tearing the vines to make a hole wide enough to ease her through without fear of scratching her sides. One broken branch speared through his shirt and grazed his side. Better me than her, he thought. There would be enough scratches once she hit the water, he thought, but those would be proper water-gained marks, marks of honor, and not the faint scratches of broken sticks and branches that vainly tried to keep her from her rightful domain.

Charles Aaron cradled her over the water the best he could, with the port gunnel rubbing against his hip until his feet slipped against the muddy bank and down she fell, splashing gracelessly into the river. As his feet went out from under him,

he fell into the boat, banging his head against the knee brace. He lay splayed in the bottom, feet hanging over the sides, looking up at the sky and watching the clouds shift and turn, framed by the tree branches which soon moved out of sight. Then he realized the river was pulling him downstream. She's afloat! He pulled himself up, struggling to find his place in the tiny craft. She floats! and not a leak in sight, he said eyeing all the seams, searching for errant drops. The current pulled the Dawn's Horizon wherever it wanted to, like a leaf carelessly dropped into the river. Charles Aaron took the oars, set them in their locks, and pulled against them. In his mind he saw the map. From the St. Joe to the Maumee, along the Maumee to Toledo and Lake Erie, from Lake Erie to the St. Lawrence Seaway and out into the Atlantic, and with the Atlantic, the world.



*J. Peter Roth*

**The Straits of Makassar**

*Andrew Johnson*  
**Fishing Coldness**

Today, my father and I go fishing. We wake before sunlight, fill our thermoses, and go. Today it's Goose Lake.

Honestly, I can't understand fishing; why anyone would want to sit for hours waiting on something easily bought at any grocery store evades me. But I don't see my dad much so I always go when he asks. He's never home when I get off school and when he finally gets home I'm in bed. He works seventy hours a week sometimes.

My dad is the most disciplined man I have ever known. Even in this dark, freezing void he finds the strength to start the ritual. I have a great respect for his stolid nature.

The walk to shore is difficult because the gear is heavy and awkward. I carry a green bucket I got from Dairy Queen, marked by a worn sticker on the side: PICKLES. With the poles sticking out the top, I wobble towards the lake. It's strange how our footsteps seem to intrude upon the silence. The small crunches our steps make in the snow seem amplified somehow, and I feel a little ashamed. I try to walk more quietly.

This morning is very cold. I heard twelve below in town, and it's even colder on the lake. The snow dances and swirls on the black ice. The surface is slick so I walk on the white patches. I try to breath through my nose but the gear is heavy and I inhale through my mouth. My teeth and tongue ache with every draw. It should warm up soon, after the sun comes up.

We reach the spot. I don't know what makes any one spot better than another, but it always seems about right when we get there. My dad takes the massive hand drill and turns thick holes into the ice, sending a shockwave of alien sound bouncing across miles of expanse. He then drives two more holes: one for bluegill, and one for his tip-up (the tip-up is for big fish with teeth.) We dump our gear and flip the buckets. Time to sit and wait. I unzip my snowsuit and reach inside my inner shirt pocket for the bait. It's a pain, taking my gloves off to manage this, but I have to keep the bait close to my body or it will freeze.

My hole is freezing over almost immediately. My skimmer sticks to my gloves like a tongue against a metal pole. I have to chop at the hole a few times to break the ice that has already formed, then I scoop out the chunks. Thankfully, I know how to bait a hook quickly. The wind is mostly at my back, with my father. I turn to look at him, a dark spot sniffling miserably in the cold.

Not a word. We hardly ever speak. I wonder if it has to do with scaring the fish. I doubt it. I doubt the fish could hear through that much solid ice. My dad is setting his tip-up, and I wrestle with my tiny hopeless worm, wriggling because of the cold of the wind and the heat of my fingers, then more pleadingly with a hook through its back. I hate fishing.

It's so cold the ice is forming just as soon as I skim my hole. I resign and just let my line freeze into the lake for a while. It's too cold to focus on anything else other than trying to keep warm. I could care less about catching a fish. But it's not always this bad. Even though I never get what I want when we go ice fishing, there are occasional moments.

Every now and then, when we go out early in the season, I can hear the ice settling. When a lake starts to freeze, it makes very unique sounds and vibrations. As it expands, pressure is released along with tremendous sound. Once I was fishing with my uncle when the lake was settling. It caused relentless, horrible explosions around us. An angry rumbling would originate from miles beyond the darkness, and then gradually roll toward us with increasing speed and amplitude. The sound was so loud that it shook my vision and once passed directly beneath my legs. That night we slowly inched our way back to shore, making ridiculous excuses for each cowardly move. Even though I knew it was completely safe, the sound was frightening enough to make sweat form on my face. I remember thinking how odd it was that the most magnificent things in life are sometimes so terrible.

But this morning there is no sound. Just the shrieking wind, beating its way into my snowsuit. Even my boots--army-issued Mickey Mouse--are failing in this lifeless void. My father, a shiftless black figure obfuscated by the darkness and my fro-

zen eyes, sits waiting. Still no words. I turn my back again and wait.

I want to say something, but I can't. I can't jeopardize the sanctity of our ritual. It's always the same. So many things to say, so little said. It's almost like I share in his denial. It is nice to get away from the nightmare; to picture my mother loosing it again, out here safe from her in the calm. But the cold is beyond cruelty. I wonder what would be worse. I sit out here and bear it with him, silently enduring the pain. These fishing trips are my only chance, even without words, to talk. But I can't. Not until he wants to. So I just sit on my green bucket and wait. Not a thing. Not even a bite. I hate all of it, but I can't give up. Not if he's still waiting. I grab the skimmer and patronize the dark watery cut again. Scoop the ice, jiggle the pole.

I think about all the times I've been out on the ice, and try to focus on some times that weren't so bad. Like once on this crowded lake, when I caught a ten and three-quarter inch bluegill--a shining hope in a group of strangers all caught up by bad luck. My dad tells me to put my bucket over it. "You don't want everybody and his brother comin' over here next to us, do ya? Its already crowded enough as it is." It was rare to hear anything from him on the lake. I did as he said, and sometimes, trying my line in other holes, looked back and saw the bucket jumping. I laughed to myself--what would everybody and his brother think of a walking bucket? What could be more obvious?

My nose completely solid and my toes beginning to numb, I wonder about those guys who drive their trucks out on the ice, towing little huts behind them. I can't help but to feel jealous. It's a little crazy to trust nature under all that weight, and it's a little strange to bring your house out with you fishin'. If there's anything to ice fishing at all, it's the connection with nature, right? Man vs. Wild and all that. Why else would anybody be out here, other than to prove a point? I look back at my dad again. The tip-up is still being nursed; his hope emanates and makes me hopeless.

I have completely abandoned my skimmer and all hope of making the trip back to the van alive. The sun still has not come up. It has not gotten any warmer, and neither one of us

has had a single bite. This is the worst trip ever. It has never been this cold, this desolate, this excruciating. I have to speak. Time to quit.

“Still nothing?”

“Nothing. Whaddya think?”

“I dunno. It’s not lookin’ good.”

“Nope.”

More time passes. His last word lingers in my ears for a time. Finally, he speaks:

“You wanna head in?”

“Yeah.”

I could ask him to carry me, because my legs aren’t working too well, and I don’t know if I can make it back or not, but I know how hard it would be for him. I am walking without knees, like a fool, over slick ice without incident. I leave my pole frozen in the lake.

After a brief scare, the van rumbles for us. My fingers begin to regain color and flexibility, and I take to a ham sandwich that tastes vaguely like fishing bait. My dad notices my pain and gives me a sharp glance.

“You should have told me how cold you were.”

“Its ok dad, don’t worry about it.”

“You’re skinny; you don’t have the insulation I do.”

“Yeah I guess so.”

“I can’t believe our luck. Not a damn thing.”

“Maybe something is wrong with the lake.”

We move back towards civilization, and I feel the powerful suggestion of sleep, unreasonable for the hour but persuasive nonetheless. I look back at my dad, his eyes blurring from the heater blasting in his face, reddened and shiny from the cold.

*J. Peter Roth*  
**On Cynicism**

There is a moment in Kurt Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus* in which the narrator, the ailing and regretful Eugene Debs Hartke declares, "How embarrassing to be human." More than ten years ago, that phrase struck me so profoundly that I bracketed it in pencil and wrote "p. 290" inside the back cover. I found it so concise that I wanted to return to it easily, even years later.

It's a prime example of Vonnegut-style optimism laced among dark wit and satire, and it was a feeling up until then I had failed to articulate and maybe even admit. Hartke's character reveals a basic relationship among all of humankind. We are flawed and imperfect, all of us, and we are just downright "dumb" sometimes. Though the book's theme is basically whoever has the most money at the end of the day makes all our decisions for us, Vonnegut adds tacitly, you and I can only do our best though. Right? He wrote this in opposition to good old American individualism, and *Hocus Pocus* ultimately illustrates the similarities between African-Americans and Whites, the rich and imprisoned, while at the same time questioning the wisdom of all us humans. He wrote it conscious of his own flaws, hoping for understanding. And I understood.

I hadn't been in Portland, Oregon for a full year when I read this passage for the first time. I didn't know anyone outside of the coffee shop I managed – a tiny cog in a colossal machine – so I mostly read in my spare time. A former housemate from back in my home state Indiana and I were keeping regular correspondence via email during this period. He had moved and was living in Chicago with his wife. I loved that city, and though I enjoyed Portland, was slightly envious that he got to live there. Most times I would tag the end of my letters to him with a quote I had gathered during my reading, usually something I thought of as very clever and wise. I figured this in turn would make me appear clever and wise and perhaps a bit more intelligent. The Hartke line was one of those quotes. I was going through a dicey divorce at the time with an increasingly unstable woman I had been married to for only three years, and I was in dire need for

intimacy at any level – anything beyond the abbreviated interactions at a coffee shop. This quote was meant to solicit a sympathetic chuckle regarding some of the more lurid details of my separation while simultaneously admitting some of my own lack of good judgment. Maybe even my friend could also see some of his own past failures too, I hoped. Maybe we could proverbially pat each other on the back through words and cyberspace.

Instead, my friend replied that he was concerned I was reading too much “negative” literature, and that it was making me “cynical.” Make sure you balance what you read with something positive, he chastened. He had just decided to apply to a masters program in counseling, and his advice at the time could have been translated more accurately as finding a “good” (i.e., probably evangelical) self-help book on victory or overcoming or whatever. His advice was good-hearted and not condescending. But the thought of reading one of those books in my precious spare time was depressing and, well, struck me as boring, to be honest. I already felt inadequate. I needed something that sincerely processed human failures and loss, something that crackled with creativity. After all, conflict and tragedy in the end are solved through the creative process, and that was where I was finding hope, not in annotated and bound Power Point presentations on how to get my wretched life together. I connected with all Vonnegut’s tragicomic characters, and I felt a profound connection with their unique struggles against overwhelming and complex opposition. In turn, I saw the ridiculousness of my own situation and how it could be even worse. At least I wasn’t a jailbird or a closeted transvestite lounge singer or something like that.

. . .

Vonnegut showed us through examples of alienation that in order to survive we must connect with community. This is a basic law of society, and he taught us that humor can help form a nearly instant union during dire situations.

In college, I was the guy who girls could talk to but usually didn’t want to date, and I had a young lady once tell me the reason she stayed with the guy who constantly ignored her was

because it was most important for a man to make her laugh. (Which he did a lot allegedly.) This was more important than romance and even giving proper attention, she said. I quickly responded with, “OK. OK. How’s this: There’s a rabbi and a priest at a bar...” That got a good laugh but no date. But she continued to confide in me, airing lots of dirty doubts about human nature and relationships. Of course, I agreed.

A few years later, after I began working for the giant coffee corporation, I found that I was competing with something a whole lot more ominous than attractive, hilarious young men. In the tenuous and stressful corporate conditions that demanded precision and unquestioning loyalty, forming quick and close connections with co-workers was essential. It was all we had.

During the time I worked for this coffee company, there was a woman in upper management who I jokingly once said would have eaten her own son if it would contribute to the bottom line. She was painfully serious and saw great importance in her work, as though overseeing the operation of ten or eleven coffee shops would have been integral in stopping the Nazis, had the concept of corporate coffee existed circa 1945. The coffee business had the gravity of an emergency room for her. Her face was usually devoid of emotion, except for a condescending, tight-lipped smirkiness. Her hands were always cold and she wore severe black rectangular glasses frames, as though beckoning you to plumb the great depths of her business knowledge. She stood too close when she talked, while dropping bits of wisdom awkwardly from the corner of her mouth. She used the word *awesome* a lot as though it were a persuasive tool. (*This new pastry case schematic is going to be awesome, team. Or, she’s doing an awesome job controlling labor numbers.*) An odd style of dark pantsuits that rode high at the waist made her look as though she were always on her way to a fox hunt. One employee dubbed her The Urban Equestrian.

But her most distracting feature was her twitching left breast. Yes, it moved. As legend has it, a few years prior she had an elective breast augmentation done. During the surgery a nerve was damaged, resulting in the uncontrollable periodic spasm. It was very distracting to us but did not deter her from

finding our disregard for procedural minutiae, usually while holding a clipboard against her chest. We would mimic her as we rehashed the ridiculous things she would say and do. Things like “reinnerate” instead of “reiterate” and verbose voicemail messages that would circle maddeningly for minutes on end. It was the only way to liven an unbearable, dark atmosphere after her monthly faultfinding missions.

To this day, she is still one of the funniest figures I have ever encountered. There was a definite Barney Fife element present during her visits: In her fervor to viciously protect every detail of the law, her ability to consider human complexities – among them, her own – made her self-perceived strength laughable. It was embarrassing. Embarrassing for all of us.

So, keeping my friend’s view of my reading material, did our view of this authority figure make us cynical? I don’t know. Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary defines a *cynic* as one who “disbelieves in or minimizes selfless acts.” It also refers to a sect of Fourth Century Greek philosophers who believed “the essence of virtue is self-control, and that surrender to any external influence is beneath human dignity.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines *cynical* as “resembling... contempt of pleasure, churlishness, or disposition to find fault... misanthropic.” One step further, an OED etymological search on the word made connection to the Greek word for *dog*, “so that ‘dog’ became the nickname for ‘cynic,’” it states. Admittedly, it seems maybe there was a little faultfinding happening among all parties I was involved with.

What was frustrating to me though was our boss’s air of self-importance that reeked of arrogance. Seeing through her ineffective verbosity and poor taste, we all thought she was only human, just like one of us drones. She never acknowledged this though, and that is what I believe made her cynical. This then affected our outlook as well. During my time with this company, I learned humor quickly eased the strains of tyranny and despair. So we laughed at her. As in Vonnegut’s novels, at work I tried to illustrate that the tycoons are no stronger than those who believe in them. This is especially humorous when considering the mighty, confident facades corporations present in

contrast with some of their managers who apparently feel they need bigger boobs.

“And the worst flaw is that we’re just plain dumb,” Hartke says of humankind.

Right before I left the company, I was alone in the backroom with this manager when she got a personal call on her cell phone from her daycare provider. Her three-year-old boy had fallen and had a small cut on his head. It was nothing serious. But I could hear the pain and guilt in her voice as she informed the daycare she would not be able to come get him. She was already behind schedule that week. I knew without a doubt that she wanted to see her son and to tell him everything was going to be OK. This scene was at once awkward and difficult to witness. I felt bad for my joke about her eating her own son.

Cynicism has more to do with hopelessness and fear than with anger and frustration. Where there is laughter, hope is not too far away in most cases. In most cases, cynicism is void of humor. Laughter is a certain form of human creativity that proves we are striving to cope. Low morale in a work environment is a serious matter, but when it involves something so miniscule in the grand scheme of eternity – like big sweet coffee drinks and scones, for instance – it can only become laughable.

. . .

My concerned former housemate came and visited me once in Portland. He seemed unable to really relax in my downtown studio apartment located across from a porno shop. He was a suburbanite by this time. He worked for a drug company and graduate school never happened for him. Neither one of us had much money at that time, because I only worked in food service and he had recently moved back to Indiana to buy a house. We did lots of moping around my place, and one night I had him listen to *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane. At the time, I was awed by the record’s creative force and inspired by its earnestness. My friend had never really been into jazz, so I gave him my very rudimentary understanding of it.

I explained its start: a moment of enlightenment. Then you’ll hear the bass playing the steadfast theme: *a love supreme*,

*a love supreme...* And then Coltrane plays unhindered with that, searching for union with that theme, playing variations, rearranging the notes and changing keys. Finally, at the end he finds it. It was there all along. *A love supreme*. After this brief introduction, my friend knit his eyebrows a little, gave a short laugh through his nose. “Whatever,” he said, shaking his head. He handed back the CD case after only a quick scan through the liner notes.

I was hurt that a work of art – one of the most heartfelt, soulful recordings ever made which I had found so much meaning and genius in – was panned so lightly. No effort was made to understand me or the music. I felt humiliated, even dumb, that I had been so eager to share my feelings, so I didn’t say another word about it. I never perked up at those certain favorite passages. My friend’s reaction strikes me as cynical now. There was not only no desire to find a deeper meaning or even hope that one existed, but there was an intentional avoidance – a diversion from what he viewed as only reflections of a dilettante.

This in so many ways embodies my struggles with the coffee giant. Creativity was quashed. Survival was done in secret, because it seemed to show disrespect for those who had all the answers.

My friend and I still keep in contact. After a few years with no correspondence, he emailed out of the blue and wanted to know what I was up to. It was a sweet gesture, so I obliged and he listened. Later, I told him how he had hurt me in the past, and he understood. Unlike others in my world, he acknowledged his flaws. He went as far as to say he was “ashamed” of some of his words for me. And to be honest, I knew how he felt. I had said some really offensive things in my time too. And remember, I’m the one who left pretentious quotes as postscripts to email letters. Not all of them were without selfish motive.

Years after that particular playing of *A Love Supreme*, it’s beginning to make sense. I feel it represents a larger theme, and like Hartke or other characters Vonnegut left us, such as Billy Pilgrim and Kilgore Trout, maybe I am hopelessly bad at the life I am living – misunderstood and pathetic. Yet my striv-

ing to comprehend the world and to try and communicate this was eventually shared with and understood by someone else. It's my hope that I will experience the same understanding my old friend and I did with many others on many different issues.

Maybe cynicism is something that happens more in degrees or shades – a give-and-take game with suspicion in the world around me until I have enough knowledge to begin to really hear another person, and they hear me. Sometimes they choose not to return the favor. Sometimes the game is belittling, even embarrassing. But then again, I learned that I am not alone. Vonnegut taught me this. We – all of us – are not really that different. I can live with that.



*Craig Skinner*  
**Dancing Bear**

This is a story about a Bear who lived in a forest not far from here. This Bear is our ancestor because he drank from the same lakes and rivers that we drink from. He hunted for food among the same trees. For these reasons he is our ancestor. This Bear is dead now, but he dances every night among the stars. Sometimes he dances close enough to us that we can see his menacing form. Often he dances in the distant reaches of the galaxy and we do not see his dance.

The Bear was powerful and all of the animals in the forest fled when he came near. The Bear was also fast and he would often catch moose and lynx and cook them on his campfire. The forest was his and he slept and ate wherever he pleased. While the Bear was fierce he was also respected. Once he had eaten he would often share his kill with a pack of wolves or fox ,and the Bear would gladly share his winter den with any weary traveler, but they had to remember to wake up before the Bear!

There came a point when the Bear had grown very old. He knew he would soon die. He only had one son who lived in another forest. Bears do not spend time with their children after they leave to start their own family. While we all enjoy spending time with our family we should remember that Bears are not men. They need to be alone. But even bears get lonely and that's why the Bear wanted to see his son. He knew he would die soon and he did not want to die lonely. He may have been fierce and powerful, but the mere thought of death brought fear into his heart. This beast that had brought death to so many animals was scared to die! He began to see death lurking behind every tree and under ever leaf. He couldn't sleep because he was afraid he would never wake up. Here was this once mighty bear that used to be able to hibernate from the first October snows until the green grass returned in May, and now he couldn't sleep! He knew he must find his only son. He knew that if he found his son he would not die alone. He would be able to fall asleep once he

found his son, and he needed to sleep.

The Bear's journey would prove to be quite perilous. A mighty demon was determined to possess the soul of the Bear. This demon knew that if the Bear's soul ascended to the heavens the other animals would no longer fear death. The other animals would see this powerful bear living and dancing among the stars. The demon conjured a snowstorm to prevent the Bear from finding his son. The Bear was already very tired and hungry, and the storm was too much for him. He fell into a snow bank and he felt himself begin to die. He knew that if he died here alone he would die in fear. The fear would weaken his soul and soon the demon would be able to possess it. He would live forever as a slave of this evil spirit.

But this powerful Bear was not dead yet. He may have been old, but his nose had the strength of twenty dogs! As he lay there in the snow bank this Bear noticed the smell of cooking meat! This was long before the days of man and the Bear knew that only another bear would be cooking with fire. The Bear brought himself to his feet and began to stagger through the storm. The fury of the demon blew a wrathful wind straight into the Bear's face, but still he moved forward. Deep through the blowing snow his old eyes focused on a form hunched beside a fire. It was another bear, it was his son. His son invited the Bear to sit by his fire to eat and smoke a little tobacco. The Bear told his son that he only wanted to rest and he curled up for a nap beside the fire. There by the fire that powerful Bear died, but he did not die alone, he did not die in fear. The demon stayed far away. When the Bear died by the fire his soul ascended to heaven and he began his infinite dance among the stars. Tonight, we can see this dance of the Bear. When we see this dance we should remember not to fear death.

*Anonymous*

### **Simple Problems are Hard to Come by**

‘I don’t mess with people at my school, but I do see a lot of kids get bullied. There are some kids that seem to get it like every day. I think it’s pretty messed up, but that’s just the way it is. Life is shitty. They are just nerds, and nerds get cracked on. Maybe they shouldn’t be so nerdy. People who say that bullying is what pushes these idiots to kill a bunch of people aren’t looking at the big picture. It’s more than that, I think. It may be a part of it, but it’s not the only reason.

‘I hate how people won’t leave me alone and let me do my own thing. Like every day this one guy pushes my head into a locker just because he’s got one next to mine. And all his white trash friends laugh their asses off when it happens. I wish I could smash his head into the locker. But I don’t because I have morals. Besides, my dad tells me that these guys bully people because they are insecure. I’m ok. I get to come home every night and hang out with my friends. Sometimes I play video games or watch TV. My parents are pretty cool so they don’t get on my case too much. When I got stitches the other day, my dad didn’t go to the principal or anything. He’s pretty cool. He tries to help, but he knows that there’s nothing you can do about it; nerds will always get picked on. It’s just the way things work. Maybe if there were more teachers around or something to watch over the students it would stop. I can handle it and it doesn’t bother me that much, but I wish it didn’t happen every day.

‘My parents don’t give a shit about me. My dad drinks all day and my mom ran off when I was seven. My dad won’t tell me much about it, and I haven’t asked him in a long time. I just try to avoid him. Every morning he gets me up by kicking me in the ribs. Every morning; it never fails. And by the time I get up, he’s already half drunk. He drinks everyday, all day long. By the time I get outta the shower he’s already laying on the couch, rambling on and not making any sense. He’s a real piece of crap.

We live in a beat-up old trailer because he says there's no more factory work. So he collects metal a few days every month to pay the lot rent and buy his booze. I know he's had it tough as a kid, so why does he do the same crap to me? He told me once it's because he wants me to be tough. Because "*life is tough, and it'll kick your ass. So you got to be tough.*"

I am just glad I get to go to school and get a break from that hell hole. It's embarrassing. People are tryin to figure out why someone would bring a gun to school and kill a whole bunch of people, and I think I know why. It's because of these dumbass jocks taking all the hot chicks. They think they are so cool because they are bigger than everyone else. No shit someone would need a gun. It would take a gun to put those meatheads in their place.

I hate nerds too. They got it so cushy that they never grow up. They all live in a fantasy land and their mommies love them so much that they turned out to be pussies. I just want to smash their faces into the wall. And I do. There is this dork that always hangs out near my locker, talking about dragons and video games and star trek and computers, and I just can't resist smashing his head into his locker.

'I think it's awful what happened at Columbine. I cried for like a week straight after but my friends helped me through it. I don't know what I'd do if something like that happened at my school. I love my friends so much and no one deserves what happened to those people. This place is supposed to be safe but now me and my girlfriends are all freaked out. When one of us has to go to the bathroom, we all go. It's just not safe in school anymore.

I don't know why anyone would do something so horrible. They must be pretty messed up to do something like that. My mom says it's because the school is under funded and kids get bullied too much. I guess if the teachers did something maybe it wouldn't happen so much. I yell at my boyfriend all the time because he messes with these kids at lunch everyday. Every time he tells me that he's only kidding, and I laugh along to make it look like its some big joke. But I feel bad every time. I

hit him in the arm last night I told him I was really mad. He usually just laughs and says that white trash kids think they are tough, and he just wants to show them that they can't push people around. But then I told him that he's doing the same thing, but he doesn't get it. Anyway, last night he said he wouldn't do it anymore. I guess we'll see on Monday if he's telling the truth or not. I don't like those kids either—they're creepy—but I don't think it's right what he says to them. It's not funny. He does it like every day.

'I think the media and the school staff target us Goth kids because our music is kinda scary, but that hip hop shit is a lot worse. Nobody listens to the lyrics. They just judge the artist by their appearance. If you really listen, rap is a lot worse. Just because they are dressed in gold chains and diamond grills people think they are ok. I fucking hate them.

Superficial answers to deep, complex problems. Yeah, nobody wants to look at the real truth. Everyone is a fucking coward because they can't face what really needs to be done. Someone has to step in and save these kids before they snap. People think that bullying eventually stops by itself, like it goes away or something. But it doesn't. It happens every day to the same people until the school year is over or until the victim and bully no longer see each other. That's how it really works.

'It's true my girlfriend thinks I'm a bully, but who else is gonna stop these white trash punks from pushin people around? They think they are all badasses, bringin switchblades to school, like there are greasers or something. Fucking trash is all they are. They need to know their place. No, I'm not a bully; those guys are. My girlfriend is just really emotional. Dad says that that's just the way they are. They've got pussies and big eyes to cry with, and that's about it. He says I should just talk softly to them and not to confuse them too much.

He can be a real dick sometimes. I have to be number one for him. He won't even accept a "B" on my report card; I got a black eye for it once. He wants me to get a college scholarship by playing baseball. So far, so good: our school is number one in

state, and I am the number one pitcher. My dad sees to that. He is on my case like every single day. *“How are you doing in school, son? How was practice, son?”* But he’s not really interested in my day; he’s interested in my performance. *“What did you get on your report card? I didn’t raise a dummy! You wanna go goof off with your girlfriend on the weekends, huh? Look what happened! Well, you made me do it! I have to teach you some discipline!”* Discipline. That’s a good one. I have plenty of that, dad. What I lack is freedom. *“I just want you to be the best you can be, son”*. What a croc of shit. He just wants to try and relive his childhood through me.

Those white trash kids don’t know anything about pressure. They can just go do what they want—no expectations from them. Well, it makes sense; just look at their parents. Not a lot to aspire to there. All they have to do is stay outta prison and they can be proud. It makes me sick. And then they think they own the school? I own the school. They just have to be reminded of that every now and again.

I don’t know what would make someone do what those kids did at Columbine. Maybe if they paid the teachers what they deserve, and hired a few more, they could keep an eye out for trouble. But as it is right now, they are spread too thin.

‘The real reason those kids flipped out and shot up that school is because people won’t leave them alone. Now they wanna go after the Goths like it’s the music that’s doing it. People are fucking retards. All of them. They feed you poison and then ask why you died. Wake up, you dumb fucks. Yeah. See, those two kids at Columbine just wanted people to wake up. Is it due to bullying? *“Oh honey, let the kids work it out amongst themselves.”* Yeah. Well, it sure worked itself out, didn’t it?

I go home every day and stare up at the second level, to where my parents’ room is, and look at a closed door. You know why it’s closed? Because my mom is either smoking pot or she’s passed out in there. My dad works seventy hours a week, and he beats the shit out of me and my brothers because he says we’re ungrateful. *“I work seventy hours a week, and the house is a mess! We live in a pigsty!”*

My mom is the real problem, though. She has been rippin' on us since we were born. I can't even tell you half of the nasty things she's said to us in a day's time. The bitch is real creative, lemme tell ya. "*Slimeball. You kids are the reason I'm going crazy. I hate you kids. You wanna call the cops? Go ahead. Ha ha ha. You'll wind up in an orphanage. Lemme tell ya, this place is Disneyland compared to that place. So go ahead—call the cops.*" It's not really *what* she says; it's how she says it. Always with this little smile. My friends tell me they would have killed her long ago, if they were in my shoes. So I guess I'm either a pussy or I'm really patient. Truthfully, I have plotted my parents' deaths for years. If I really did do it, I think I would stab them in their sleep.

Oh you think I'm crazy, don't you? You are pampered. You don't know pain like I do. Would you kiss Hitler on the mouth? Of course not. And I bet that, if given the chance to travel back in time, to *his* bedroom in the middle of the night, you would probably stab him to death. Because it's your *decency* that would demand it from you. You would have no choice. You would be compelled by your morality to do it. How could you go on if you let him live and kill all those people? He was a monster. And monsters should be killed.

My parents are monsters. But you only have the superficial reports. You only know what people tell you. Did you live with Hitler? No, you didn't. You didn't get to *experience* a monster. Not like I did. When you live it, you become it. You want to kill everything before it ruins what is beautiful.

The only reason I haven't killed my parents is because I am afraid of prison. That's right—I'm a pussy. But I also have some respect for my father. You see, I used to believe my father when he said that he *had* to work seventy hours a week in a sweat pit to pay for four kids and a house. That why I respected him. But my father lied. Now I know that he was merely escaping from the hell hole I call a home. He knew what my mom did to us and he just turned his head. Maybe he's too religious to divorce; I don't know. But who could love a monster? My mom is a demon from hell and all she ravages her children. And my dad failed to protect us.

What really bothers me is that it happens *every day*. Every day she drags us down. Every morning before school she makes sure we all get up on time for the bus because she knows we don't really want to go to school. Hell, we don't even want to live--let alone get outta bed. So she runs up and down the stairs, her red hair all messed from sleep, screaming at the top of her lungs all the things she's gonna do to us if we don't "*get the fuck up and get out to the bus.*" She hisses about how we are pieces of shit, how we'll never amount to anything, how she wishes she had normal kids instead of retards. By the time my self esteem is completely scraped away, I rush off to go to the next hell hole.

Kids are really good at sensing fear. They are like dogs. They either bully or get bullied. They are either cowards or tyrants. And teachers turn their heads. "*Let them work it out amongst themselves.*" No, I'm not blaming the teachers. They are paid shit and do incredible work. But they remind me of my dad. It's sick. I just wanna shake them and scream: "Wake the fuck up! Do something! It's not gonna stop! It just keeps on happening until someone snaps!" Yeah. Till someone snaps. Like the other day, I saw this white trash kid smash this nerd's head into a locker and the nerd got five stitches. So this jock comes up and smashes the white trash kid's head into a locker. I thought it was beautiful. Finally somebody gets some justice for once.

So yeah, bullying sure is a problem, but who cares? Parents send their kids off to school because they don't want to deal with them all day. By the time I get to school, the bullies smell my lack of self esteem from a mile away. And they get me good. Every day. I get it from this white trash kid in the locker room after gym class. He tells me how he's gonna fuck my mom every day. Then I get it from the jocks that think they own everything, and use me to impress their hot cheerleader girlfriends. Those stuck-up bitches just sit there and snicker while those meatheads slap me around. Shit, I even get picked on by some Goth kid in third period. Yeah, there are no breaks for me. I am the one you have to worry about. I am the one that snaps. "*Let them work it out for themselves, honey.*" That's great. Yeah, it'll work itself out. Sooner or later.

*Amy Arehart*  
**Do I Know You?**

The music flows around me like mist until it stills, becoming hard, and falling right into the beat. The sun is just creeping above the horizon as the car rolls past the ever-present corn and soybean fields broken intermittently by woods. My mind is cozy, comfortable. It is way past the time to be tired; I am full of peace, but still alert. My eyes follow the moon just above the far-off layers of hardwoods as it lies cushioned against the lavender early morning clouds before the luminous orb retires for the day.

I know he's concentrating on the music, following one instrument and then another, so I watch the smoke from my cigarette drift up and out the window. Does anyone else ever notice that there are two vines that climb up from a lit cigarette, one blue, and the other gray? And that when you blow it out, the smoke is all gray? So where does all the blue go?

"The train song"—he lost the case years ago, so we just call the songs what we want—begins and we know this haunting call well, and not just from this song. We can hear the trains rolling by whether we've come to stand over them, watching them pass, or at our houses just a few miles away, or even all the way from Busco. We even have the best seats in the house: any night you want, you can just drive down to the well-named S bridge. It's simply exhilarating to grab a hold of the railing as the train shoots my hair forward into my face with the frostiest of winds. Years ago, he and the guys used to throw shit off here, and Miah even stood between two trains as they rushed past with their drivers honking furiously at him. Ya, they were crazy back then, each hoping that being crazy enough would heal the wounds of one's young love being harshly snuffed out, one's mother suddenly dead, or not a one to protect and love another. I wonder what my excuse is as I light another cigarette and roll down the window.

I mention the bridge and we decide to go down there to smoke a bowl and see if any trains will go by tonight. I start packing it up in the dark, feeling for stems and those damned,

noxious seeds. We pull up and he parks the car, and after making sure that no one else is here, I follow him up the hill and around the bend to the bridge, warm enough in my bajas and jeans.

We only get to the second hit of earthy, sweet herb when I notice lights cresting the hills of the road on which we came. We turn and sprint to the car, while he chucks our bowl and bag into the woods. I'm running so fast that I can't keep up with my feet, and so down I go, flat on my ass, and he's yelling at me, saying that, "This is not the time to be just sitting there!" At least he's laughing. I scramble up and we dash the rest of the way to the car, only to see Conger and his big-ass combine turning into a field. For the first time, I notice my heart pumping all the way up to my ears, ready to explode and cover the asphalt in freshly pumped blood. I let out a huge sigh as he finds our stuff and I get into my old red, '87 Buick. He would be driving, of course. Neither of us are quite ready to have to end the night, so we roadie around a bit less conspicuously for a while more, watching the sun slowly blanketing the earth.

There are few things I love as much as staying up for the coming of day, perhaps because, for me, it is more than simply seeing it; it is living the sunrise. It is feeling the early morning chill, smelling the crisp, fresh scent of a cool breeze mingling with rich dirt, hearing the birds awaken to give their salutes through the open window. But I can never lose myself completely, or remain a doe-eyed romantic for very long. It's almost funny how easily I can bring myself down, unless, of course, I'm on something.

But then, part of living outside a small town like Busco is that there is really nothing to do but get fucked up and run around flirting with something hazy and unreachable, something that happens only to old people or in books. I can call it a search for truth if I want to fool myself, or that I'm looking for my elusive self, but I never admit, not even to him, that I'm simply bored.

Maybe not completely, though. Nothing's ever just one thing with me. So maybe I do it to feel some excitement, or perhaps it goes further. Part of it has to be that I just don't want to

feel like myself. Hell, when I trip it's as if I'm gorgeous and graceful. My gaze is actually direct and I feel as if my whole being is freed as I dance around, painting a mural with the twists of my hands. I pop corys so that I can retreat back behind my walls and peek out, wide-eyed but protected, removed, and in control. Pot is pretty much a ritual now, but it makes my throat feel good and it calms me after a day of stackers and pots of coffee. But when I drink...when I drink I can write. And that he never sees. That is all mine.

When the two of us aren't roadieing around or having a drunken, hazy party with the others down in the Green Room, I'm almost always out there on my front steps, all cracked with weeds growing through them, and I write page after page even though I can't always see what I've written, downing the SoCo until everything flows into poetry whether I mean it to or not. Sometimes I just sit and watch the moon make its journey west, longing for an answer, or just something that I can want to live for. Other times I take my fifth and cigarettes down to my woods, make a fire, and sit on the bridge I've built and wait for him, savoring the warmth of the whiskey traveling all the way down my throat. But whom do I really wait for? Does he really exist?

I turn my face to him. He's bopping his head to the music that I haven't heard in quite a while, and he doesn't notice my watching him as he plays the guitar solo in his head. I honestly cannot imagine anyone more attractive, guy or girl, but I can't ever put my finger on why. He's just got this look that grabs a person and makes her or him—though it's usually a her—do whatever he wants. And the thing is, he always warns each of them that he's trouble, for liability reasons. Not that it ever does any good.

But we're supposed to be special, right? Hell if I really know. He says I saved him, and I know he saved me. I helped him get over losing his first and only true love, and he saved me from...from hell. He can't even begin to fathom what he saved me from. I couldn't even look at people. I actually *pitied* them for having to walk down the same hallway as I was, to maybe have to even look at me. And then a thirty-three year old wants

me and I'm supposed to come up with some reason to say no, like I'm better than that or something? Ha.

Ya, he saved me, but I still know that he'd drop me as soon as someone prettier, or more like fire, comes along. He does it all the time. I know we always swear to each other that we'll always be there, but I'm not sure if the vision I see of him is who I want him to be or just someone who looks like him. I just know it's not him.

*Matthew T. Nehrenz*

## **First Love**

It was love at first sight or so they tell me. As I was only five it is hard to say for certain. I can be sure of one thing which is that a Disney informed world-view is a dangerous barometer for love.

Around seven pm it was still a hot little day in the heart of Florida. A day for love; the day my uncle Jeff, the smallest of four children, would embark upon his eventually failed attempt at marriage to an unseemly woman of above average height. The whole event had me whirling. Whirling, that is, to the very heights of narcissism. As far as I was concerned everyone may as well have assembled for me, I looked so stunning in my miniature white tux, white patent leather shoes and bowtie. Pictures reveal that thanks to the fasionistas in charge of my outfit you would have been hard pressed to pull me out of a line up aside a troupe of prepubescent hobbits impersonating the Miami vice version of Don Johnson. Blind to any theories on style I climbed countless times atop a chair to check out my tiny reflection, each time more sure that I was the best dressed person I had ever laid my sweet little eyes on. It was no wonder; I thought to myself, that I had been chosen as the ring bearer. Everyone knew what they wanted to see and I was going to give them their monies worth, every damn penny.

On my way to check out how hot I had stayed in the last five minutes something hit me like a ton of...something. I had never felt anything like it. I was absolutely paralyzed and dancing all at once. My eyes began to seizure in their sockets blurring my vision. I looked like a midget with hip displacia trying to do the Macarena while in the midst of a bout with delirium tremens. I closed my eyes to regain my balance and slowly began to open them letting in just a bit of light at a time. When they had fully opened I realized that I was now staring down toward the greenish lawn. I wondered if it was safe to look again and just before lifting my head back up I took a quick glance at my reflection in the shiney white tux shoes. Reasona-

bly sure of my impending death I wanted to see that sweet money maker one last time.

I was nearly correct. When I finally did work up the courage to look up my whole world turned upside down. There posed before me was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. On stage, nearly twenty feet away, rocked and rolled palpable gorgeously. She was my real life version of the little mermaid, my ideal woman. With her shiny red hair and plump lips she belted out her siren song and absolutely stole my heart, away from me as it were. I was, unbeknownst to me, in the throws of a massively diabolical strain of puppy love. This was of course because Angela was not a version of a cartoon but an actual Kafkaesque human metamorphosis of one. Her cherry cool aid dyed hair flopped across a vast plain of cosmetic caked flesh. Her wild eyes sunk deep in the two dark purple and pink streaked pits. She wobbled half drunk and wholly depressed across the stage on ghastly bright yellow pumps balancing herself on the mic-stand like a drag-queen hobo on a rail. Pictures reveal that you would be hard pressed to pick her out of a line up of whores dressed like actual whores.

In the midst of utter confusion I was able to come to a conclusion. She had to be mine. Then I came to another conclusion. I would write her a letter. I had never written one before but I had to let her know just how serious I was about this relationship. For once “I don’t usually do this” would have been not only an appropriate but honest start. But I was too young to play games, and so, based on the twenty to thirty words I felt comfortably in command of I managed to go as big as I or any man really ever could. I...Love...You. Simple, short, honest. I had scrawled it on a used napkin in the center of a sweaty circle of scotch. This, I thought, would blow her mind.

With the tiny love letter in my hand I began to pace around the giant palm laced lawn. It sprawled around and behind an enormous southern plantation style mansion with massive windows that seemed like a hundred glassy eyes peering over everyone. I had made my way toward the furthest corner of the lawn that dipped and curled around a small oasis and led eventually to a grove of orange trees surrounded by

prickly cactus plants. As I walked I tried to muster some type of plan for presenting the love letter to the wedding singer. Standing below the largest orange tree I stared up through the fruit peppered limbs toward the sky. Since age four I had come to the conclusion that I could not believe in God. So I lowered my head, faced what I thought was North, and asked Santa Claus, whose existence I was convinced of, for an early Christmas miracle. After waiting for a few minutes I got impatient and resolved to take matters into my own hands.

After a few calculating moments I had a something worked out. As I played out the scene in my mind I realized almost immediately that after I gave her the letter she would undoubtedly be overcome. I knew from movies that when ladies were overcome two things always happened. First she would swoon into my arms where I would embrace her tightly. And then we would kiss long and hard. These images immediately shocked me as I placed myself for the first time in roles I had only witnessed other people play. I had no idea about these things; I had no experience, no skills, no chance! I was sliding into devastation when I remembered some advice that my good man Mr. Rodgers had once told me. "Practice", he said while lounging about in a yellow button down cardigan, "makes perfect". That's it, I thought to myself. All I need is a little practice. I looked around for a subject but there was nobody close by, and honestly, I was a little shy about asking some strange girl to help me out. After all I had never really hugged a woman before and I wanted to save myself for Angela. I gazed out toward the crowd of people and then around the orchard. One tall cactus stood out from the row waving at me. About the height and width of a woman I thought that this bright green plant would be a perfect surrogate lover.

I strode confidently with the letter in my hand toward the cactus-woman. As I got closer I noticed that she seemed to be quite a hairy lady but beggars can't be choosers and so I closed my eyes, out stretched my arms, and quickly wrapped them around what I imagined to be my sweet sweet Angela. In an instant I realized that I had made the great mistake of my lifetime. I recoiled, shrieking. My plump little fingers and

palms, absolutely covered in sharp little hairs, had been transformed into what appeared to be some kind of grotesque human chia pets. Standing there with my first love letter impaled to my left hand I came to appreciate that something profoundly terrible had occurred and I needed help.

I spun myself about and bolted, arms outstretched and screaming toward the crowd of people that were milling about the lawn in front of the bar and around the big white tent. Running wildly with my arms sticking straight out in front of me I looked like a child zombie on the third day of a shameless meth bender. It was no surprise that everyone turned and watched fully appalled as I screeched my way toward humanity. Most of them shuttered and shirked away probably for fear that this pin cushion automaton was hungry for brains. It is times like these that a zombie child needs his mother. Thankfully she scooped me up, followed closely by five or six women overcome with motherly instincts or the desperate want of them, and rushed me to a tiny water closet on the first floor. I was in far too much pain and hysteria to enjoy that I had in fact become the center of attention and conversation. As my mother ran my hands under hot soapy water the women clamored around me hysterically. I was convinced that I was going to dying very soon. "Dear Santa" did not sound quite right, so I quickly rethought my ideas about God and prayed that he would let me survive.

My grandfather and uncle, the one to be unsuccessfully wed, burst through the door and by the sound of their voices were determined to take charge of the madness. I was enormously relieved until I heard my grandpa shout that someone ought to smack me across the face to snap me out of the shock. This was followed by my Uncle's advice to give me a shot of something called booze which sounded horrible. I was helpless amid the high pitched frenzy and disturbingly calm advice advocating violence and underage drinking. I was about to faint I when realized that the pain had begun to subside and when I looked down at my shaking hands it became clear that although my hands had been transformed into what appeared to be puckered goose wads, the worst was over.

Though I was wounded I still had a mission to accomplish. Mostly recovered from the shock I marched red-faced back out into society. Everyone it seemed was laughing at me as I dangled my mangled hands at my sides and made my way toward the tent. What, I wondered, would Angela think. I looked over toward the stage that she was singing breathlessly upon and noticed that as many people were laughing at her. Undeterred by all the laughs I marched toward her with the letter clutched in my perforated hand. To this day guests swear they spotted a mangled hobbit dressed like Don Johnson handing a dirty napkin to a crooning technicolor whore.



*Amy Arehart*  
**The Seeress**

“Here I, Erimentha, stand before you, the people of Deniece.”

I speak in my strongest voice, trying to be the person they believe me to be. I stand erect and strong above them, all gathered together, kneeling around the temple steps. My robe, of the darkest green of tipota leaves at dusk, envelops me, displaying my still young curves but also hiding my body in the mystery, and safety, of my calling. But I have no need to fear their advances. Not one among them would dare to approach me or any of the sisters.

“We have all been ravaged by this plague. Perhaps one among us has committed a crime, and would rather see the death of us all rather than come forth and speak; perhaps it is that all of you have gone astray. Regardless, Dione has been displeased, and is now dealing her punishment. I, a seer of the venerable line of Dodona, will consult the Goddess and give you Her words.”

I turn away, not waiting to hear of their fear, their loss, but more to not let on my own. Little Celena, why could I not save you? After our mother, the great Achlys, left us, I was charged with the protection of all the sisters, along with our entire community. How could I have let you die? If I cannot cure us from this affliction, I will be banished, forced to flee from the only home I have ever called my own. And what people would take in an unwanted seeress? Who would bring down the wrath of the Gods in order to harbor one who has lost their favor? I would rather die. But of course, that will come soon enough.

The heavy curtains fall together behind me as I enter the tenebrous temple. Xylona has the infusion prepared and is holding the bowl with the deference I have taught her. I am instructing my daughters in this entire orchestration that has been handed down from my mother, Achlys, and her mother, Metis, all the way back to Xylia, who first established our temple here. She was a daughter of the line of the powerful Dodona and the first seeress to discover the power of tipota. She had learned

that it killed when eaten, but also that it had tremendous power if one drank a decoction of seeds or roots, and especially an infusion of tipota flowers. Xylia came here to Deneice, where she had our temple built atop a hill absolutely covered in the plants, and named the poisonous plant with flowers like flared horns “nothing” to tell the people that *they* had no use for it.

As all my daughters gather around and begin to chant, I close my eyes, bow my head for a moment, and begin swallowing as much as I can tolerate of the noxious tasting liquid. I then stride to the altar and offer the remnants of our sacred plant, the key to our power, and then turn to the girls. Even though we are on level ground, my gaze must fall to meet theirs.

Here they stand, eleven in total now, but not one of them above the age of sixteen, together with the only family they now can claim. Each one of us came from the forest people, but our parents do not recognize us now. Though Achlys, my real mother, passed on years ago, my birth mother still lives in the village, and yet I see each time when I stand out there before them all that she never seeks my eyes as one who still sorrows for her estranged child.

When the girls are brought by their families, some from very long distances, they don't even cling to their little girls, sharing tearful goodbyes. Instead they keep their distance, give the customary gifts, and tout their knowledge to me of their daughter's great abilities. But *these* gifts apparently do not bring love.

We were born for our art, and the people are taught well the signs of children born with the power. We were all seen as odd: we talked to the trees, and when we spoke, we seemed wise beyond our years. We were always alone for we made both young and aged feel as if they were being watched too closely. Even those who brought us forth from Dione's great womb felt as if all their faults and crimes were suddenly evident for any of us to see. People confessed of their own accord, feeling that they could not possibly lie in the presence of one of our kind, one with the wise eyes of a child of the Gods, one sent from them to instruct and serve all those who would seek their assistance. And as soon as this was realized, plans were made to

banish the girl as soon as possible, but with the utmost caution, as if she had the power to strike them dead.

I know my duty; I will instruct them in the ancient ways, and yet I ache for them; I ache for myself. Yes, we speak to the Goddess—or at least those of us chosen to pass on our knowledge—but we shall never know the simple joys of love or raising a child. We have our calling.

Sometimes I remember seeing the other young children, playing and laughing together in the village square. But they were always afraid to play with me, and so no laughter, no smiles ever came to greet my arrival. They knew who I was, who I was going to be. But then, sometimes even now, when I come near a group of the girls, and the occasional laughter rings out like silver chimes but then falls dead as they notice my approach, I wish I could gather all the girls together and just dance around with them, singing and shouting and truly laughing until we all collapse, exhausted but still floating. And yet I know these are simply empty apparitions for I cannot even let myself smile while among them. I must forever be their model of a strong, dedicated seeress.

Leaving them, my bare feet take me across the marble floor to the back of our temple, and I gaze down at the forests surrounding the tipota-covered hill. Surveying the rolling greens would usually calm me, but my daemons return. What if nothing comes? What of wisdom now? What if Dione has forsaken us, and it only angers her more to have me call to her? How will I face them? I cannot. I must stay until something comes. “Something will, eventually, dear. You will come to see the way,” Achlys always assuaged me. But wasn’t she ever plagued by doubts?

The incense, having filled the temple, was now wafting out to surround me. Zylona comes out, offering me some water, and then withdraws back to her sisters. I watch her retreating locks, braided in the style of the novice, turn from auburn to brown as the last rays of the sunset leave them. Yes, I will probably choose her, although I had been training her only because dear Celena was too young. And now...now I must keep from losing any more of them.

But then, none of us will see many years as it is. And yet it's fitting that Dione would make a hard bargain, for aren't we the most revered of all mortals? Nonetheless, it may be an act of mercy, for how many seasons could anyone survive with so much carried in her heart? Humans were simply not created to withstand such a weight. And that is what takes us, the pain in our hearts. But by the time those shocks of fire come it's already too late to start the training, for that's the forewarning that Dione could release you to the shadow lands at any moment. That is why I have no time to squander on hopeless fantasies.

I let myself sink down to the cool, smooth marble with the weight of my duties along with the sudden heaviness of my limbs. My heart begins to race, and it seems that each time it wants to break free from my chest ever more. My fingers journey up to my face as my every movement becomes sensuous, beautiful, and right. I rise, and am led down to the seclusion of the trees, my first friends. The light is different here; one sees only movement and finding one's way requires the instinct of one born here. The dirt is dry and sandy, and so my toes imprint themselves on its surface as I pass.

I pause to reach up and hold a laurel leaf, mesmerized by its design and slightly fuzzy texture. In the early days, my lines read their answers in these leaves, but this knowledge has long since been lost to us seeresses.

What am I doing? Being lost in a leaf when I have to focus? "Never lose your focus. If you can keep your question in your hands you will always eventually find yourself holding your answer." That's what Achlys had always said. I cannot let myself get distracted.

I hear the singing of the river and find myself floating towards it, my eyes following the path of the water upstream. But suddenly, I lose the image of the dimly-lit laurel forests, seeing instead a vision of a great, crashing landslide that rips apart everything in its path: trees older than human memory being torn by their roots to join the mad parade, animal and human carcasses mingling with their broken shelters, both found and made.

But then my eyes are drawn to the earth, now raw and naked. There is something glistening, something unburied that is level with the water, our water that is now tainted with a black, inky substance. I see that the river is not only carrying the debris of catastrophe, but a new death also, for the fish are collecting at the surface, and many beast corpses are new. I sense that the death is coming, coming for *me*, enveloping all life in its suffocating shadows.

I pivot and run, attempting to flee the vision, but then I see her. It's Celena, perfect golden Celena, but not her at all. She is rotting, her pale, young body breeding maggots. But her eyes, her vibrantly woeful eyes hold me, calling me to her, demanding that I witness what she holds out to me in her putrefied hands. I cannot resist; I am here to see what she has come to show me, and so I tear my weeping eyes away from her dry, bloodshot ones to look into her hands. At first there is only clear, pure water, but then I can distinguish the faces of my people, screaming out to me to save them, and then there is only Celena, on her deathbed, clinging to my helpless hands as she breathes out her calm, final breaths, but only this time she's screaming, she's choking on the water I've given her, drowning in it, trying to tell me that it is the water that is killing her.

And then all becomes dark as I fall, crumpling to the forest floor as I cry out all my loss and pain, all my responsibilities to those I love and to those who have forgotten me.

I awake to moonlight and the crinkling of leaves under me and in my hair; the people are still waiting. I rush back to the temple, toppling the abandoned water on the steps, and call out to my daughters. I hold the answers, for Dione has spoken; all that is left is translating.



*J. Peter Roth*  
**Stupas**

*Troy Bigelow*  
**Enoch's Iced Tea**

When Doug Levi chose to major in Theological Physics upon entering Altona Technical University at the age of sixteen, he had already killed eight girls . . . and his mother and father. He was the youngest freshman on campus, considered to have the mind of a young genius by his professors, and he was widely regarded by both classmates and faculty alike as a young man with great potential to expand the boundaries of his chosen field of study beyond Twenty-Third Century thought. Infallibly quiet and absorbed, Doug focused on each new concept to the exclusion of all else.

For Doug, Altona Tech became a refuge of the mind, a salve for the self-inflicted wound of his solitude. Although he rarely spoke with other classmates and had very little social life, outside of dispatching a girl's soul every now and again, he found himself able to relate intellectually, at last, with the most brilliant men and women in the country. He had found the people who could answer most of his questions, and they had found a student who could give voice to questions even *they* had never contemplated.

Doug sat in the front row of Dr. Jimenez's class, not even bothering to upload data into his microcomputer from a lecture that lulled and bored. The droning voice covered the past seven centuries of the relationship between science and religion: Newton, Einstein, Hawking, Green, Waterswold, Fox, Kroischev and Paz: the thinkers who had caused science and religion to leap ahead and to ultimately recognize each other instead of clawing along in the darkness of separate intolerant ideologies.

It had been Dr. D.O. Arkham who had finally resolved one hundred years of hesitant kissing between the two philosophies into Theological Physics. Humanity shivered off a good bit of ignorance during the years of his discoveries—discoveries which ultimately gave birth to a new world consciousness resulting from the union of science and religion.

Doug was bored with all of this history so, while Professor Jimenez reviewed the mathematical equation for God

(discovered over eighty years ago by Ellison and DeGarmo), he decided to engage in the private little experiment with which he'd been engaged since puberty: he allowed his conscious mind to leave his body and surf the ether. The archaic technical term for this was "astral projection," but Doug liked to think of it as *soulflying*.

When he was twelve years old, Doug discovered that his voice would crack without warning; he discovered wiry hair growing beneath his arms and between his legs; and he discovered that when he concentrated on the spaces between the stars, he could leave his physical body and travel anywhere on Earth that he willed.

When Doug was thirteen he began to have strange fits of rage. He felt isolated, alienated. Because of his tremendous intelligence, psychic abilities and mounting aggressiveness, Doug began to slowly drown inside himself. He had conceived a theory in which he might soulfly alongside the escaping soul of a human at the moment of death. He had already successfully achieved this result by killing a cat, a dog, and two goldfish.

Doug skipped school on a Monday, traveled by monorail to a nearby suburb, and waited in a public park for the local middle school to dismiss for the day. He chose a pretty girl his age, introduced himself, discovered that he did, indeed, have the ability (along with so many others) to charm, and he coerced her to walk with him deeper into the park. He strangled her in the midst of a thick stand of bushes.

As he squeezed, Doug experience two novel sensations: his first orgasm, and the undeniable sight of the girl's soul leaving her body and flying from the earth. Doug used his ability to soulfly with her as far as the ionosphere, at which point he dove back into his body which was still gripping the girl's throat.

Two months later, Doug had perfected a manufactured calm, a deep-thinker's demeanor. His parents fawned over his intellect, his manners, his quiet good looks. He killed them in their sleep, using an old-fashioned ball-peen hammer. He watched his dad's soul fly—his mom's soul fly. They rushed away like smoke made of diamonds. He was tempted to use his

ability to soufly alongside them, but he loathed their souls so much that contempt kept him earthbound.

Doug took the ball-peen hammer back to his bed and battered himself about the head until the blood began to flow, then he wiped his fingerprints from the hammer with his pajamas, dropped it beside his bed, and went to sleep.

His family's Caucasian maid awakened him the next morning with her screams, but Doug feigned unconsciousness in his bloody bed until the police arrived, at which point he became coherent enough to describe two intruders who had attacked him in his bed. His story, of course, would never be doubted, such was his calm, convincing act.

His mother's only sister, Jolie Holmes, who was a professor of Bio-Ionic Chemistry at Altona Technical University, took custody of him as her ward. His brilliant mind and tragic familial situation filled a niche in her scholarly life and she proudly took to the task of rearing him. Aunt Jolie never learned of Doug's psychic abilities, never suspected the rages and desires which drove him to murder throughout an advanced middle school and an even more advanced secondary school.

After killing his parents, Doug only killed girls his age or younger. He always chose girls distant from his geographical location, he always strangled them, he always climaxed sexually, and he always, experimentally, accompanied their souls as they flew, allowing himself to travel further away from the earth each time.

Now, as Doug's soul returned to his body in Dr. Jimenez's remedial Advanced Theological Physics class (from the girl's changing room), Doug opened his eyes upon Dr. Jimenez just as he'd begun to talk about the scientific discovery of the bioelectrical ionic packet which leaves a living body at the moment of death: the measurable, identifiable, classifiable living soul.

"At the moment of death, scientists are able to track the ionic packet which leaves the organism at a velocity twelve times the speed of light," Professor Jimenez intoned.

Doug yawned.

“Therefore mankind has scientifically proven that organisms have a soul, and isn’t it interesting to know that when we die, our souls have been tracked with the latest instruments to a point beyond our solar system, indeed—beyond our own galaxy.

And guess where they go?”

“Hell!” shouted a boy behind Doug, a junior named Brad.

“Heaven!” an optimistic girl to Doug’s left shouted, to the burst of laughter from the class. Doug recognized her. Lisa Veriger, a senior—Aunt Jolie’s student lab assistant. She caught his eye and smiled at him.

“Could be either,” affirmed Professor Jimenez. “But we do know that, at death, our souls behave magnetically, drawn to a point in the universe at which, Ionic Astronomers tell us, the Big Bang occurred.”

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust on a universal scale, then?” asked a guy Doug didn’t know, sitting beside him.

“Ah,” drawled Professor Jimenez, “a quote from the old Bible. Son, it has been almost one hundred years since we proved the existence of God mathematically. One hundred years of God without faith and one hundred years of God without war. Religion and science got married, remember? So, please, don’t quote dogmatically-selected, culturally-biased passages of sacred scripture to me in an enlightened classroom.”

“Uhhh. Sorry, sir.”

Doug raised his hand and was told to speak. “What is known, specifically, about this point of the Big Bang, where we all go when we die? What are its properties?”

“Good questions, both,” answered Professor Jimenez. “What is known factually is the following: When a person dies, a small, measurable packet of bioelectrical energy, in the form of ions, leaves the body and travels without deviation straight to a point in space which has been proven to be the point of origin of the universe. This point is an incredibly dense gravitational field – a colossal black hole, called Alpha Prime. Right now, research is constantly being conducted, but so far that is all we can verify scientifically.”

A soft tone sounded, indicating that class was dismissed, and Doug took from the classroom an even greater ambition and drive toward the fruition of his own research—a goal to which no mere scientist could aspire. Unless that scientist could soufly.

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Jolie Holmes finished her voice journal entry, pushed back from her desk, and stretched. Nine long months of frustrated research trials and finally—success. A small glass vial filled with one ounce of an amber liquid rested, gleaming, beneath the brilliant light of the laboratory.

Jolie believed she had distilled the most significant organic solution to ever be discovered in her field of Ionic Chemistry. If this solution were to induce the same effects on a complex living organism as it had on the plants upon which she had tested it, she believed the world of 23<sup>rd</sup> Century science would be as revolutionized as the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century's fusion of science and religion.

Her lab results showed that her new solution, which she had named Enoch's Iced Tea (after the Biblical prophet who had allegedly ascended to heaven without dying), caused the ionic packet (soul), which *only* left an organism at death, to prematurely leave the body while the body continued to live. Enoch's Iced Tea had successfully separated the souls of three tulips, whose plant bodies continued to live in their souls' absence.

Stevens, an Ionic Astronomer and Jolie's colleague, tracked these three souls through the galaxy to Alpha Prime. What was most interesting to Jolie was how these artificially separated souls behaved upon reaching their terminus. Since the earliest scientific tracking of souls, not one ionic packet had ever emanated from Alpha Prime. Nothing emanated from Alpha Prime; it was a one-way door to the afterlife.

Until Jolie's three tulips—until Enoch's Iced Tea.

The three tulip souls entered Alpha Prime, lingered for seven minutes, and then emerged on an inverse path at the same velocity. Two weeks of careful testing of the tulips recorded not just the reintegration of each tulip's ionic packet but,

more shockingly, unaccountable changes to the plants' physical forms and functions. Each had grown one-third in size, but it was the intensity of colorations, the ambrosial scents—the ethereal beauty—which defied the science of description. To be in the same room with these flowers was to feel close to something . . . divine. Jolie had wept because of them.

Since she had begun her research and synthesis of Enoch's Iced Tea, Jolie had discussed her hypotheses and progress with her nephew, Doug. For a boy of sixteen, he was already brilliant. His mind worked faster than most microcomputers and he possessed an eidetic memory.

If only he weren't so withdrawn and unsociable. But, of course, he had some pretty awful memories from childhood to live with, didn't he? Jolie still had a difficult time thinking of the attack and murder of her only sister and brother-in-law. At least Doug had survived with that remarkable mind of his. Sometimes great good could result from the most horrible circumstances, and Jolie had no doubt that Doug would one day contribute something significant to the future of humanity, most likely something as profound as Enoch's Iced Tea.

\*

Doug did not hunt in his back yard.

He understood that the victims of experimentation must come from a distance. Fortunately, Aunt Jolie gave Doug more than adequate freedom to come and go. Doug's experiments were well-planned, devoid of any possible witnesses.

That afternoon Doug was fidgeting as he sat in the common room of the domicile he shared with his aunt. Lisa Veriger, fellow student and Aunt Jolie's laboratory assistant, would be there in less than an hour.

Where was Aunt Jolie? She should have been home from the lab by now. Most evenings they had dinner together, discussing science, religion, and their intersections in art, music, and literature.

Doug was uneasy about being home alone should Lisa arrive before Aunt Jolie. He was uneasy for two reasons: first,

Lisa was a maddeningly beautiful twenty-two year old senior at Altona Tech: dark, brunet, stacked, and smart; and secondly, Doug was eager to take the next step in his own research. Depending upon the final analysis of Aunt Jolie's new distillate, Enoch's Iced Tea, Doug might finally have a safeguard against physical harm should he conduct his most recently planned experiment. He had been gradually increasing the distance he allowed his soul fly from his body, beyond the planet, then the solar system, and most recently beyond the edge of the Milky Way galaxy.

But he had never dared to get close to Alpha Prime.  
That could all change now.

A soft chime announced a visitor at the door. Doug wiped a drop of sweat from his temple, touched his burning ears. Lisa had arrived first.

Desire and a half-contained rage rose up and demanded satisfaction.

"I must not make a mistake now," he mentally began to chant, forcefully pulling the practiced curtain of calm studiousness over his face.

He opened the door.

And was surprised to discover both Lisa and Aunt Jolie giggling on the threshold. "Surprise!" cheered Aunt Jolie. "I've brought you a woman!"

Doug lost control of his facial expression.

Lisa laughed.

"Just kidding, kiddo," Aunt Jolie laughed. "But you should really think about getting out and meeting some girls your own age."

Doug blushed and smirked at the same time, remembering eight girls his age. "You know I only relate well to older women," he said.

Aunt Jolie nudged Lisa, who said, hmmm, and raised her eyebrows suggestively.

Doug clenched his fists as both women entered the domicile and began to chattily prepare dinner in the kitchen, working with an old familiarity born of months of laboratory teamwork. Doug watched Lisa throughout.

Dinner was soon ready and as they ate, Aunt Jolie made her announcement. She withdrew the vial of Enoch's Iced Tea and placed on the dining table. Amidst questions of clarification from Doug, Aunt Jolie explained the final results from her research on the three tulips and the possible implications stemming from Enoch's Iced Tea.

"Isn't this amazing, Doug!" Lisa said. "If Jolie's solution can someday manipulate the dynamics of a human soul, mankind might travel to heaven and back without dying!"

"Or to hell," Doug said.

"Isn't that what's so exciting? We might now find out. We might communicate face to face with God, and return to tell about it."

Doug snorted. "If there is a God, does It have a face? Does your soul have a face?"

"Of course there's a God," Aunt Jolie admonished. "It has been scientifically proven. The Big Bang was an effect resulting in the universe, but the Bang had a Cause, just as any other explosion has a cause, and you know very well what the mathematical equation is for that Cause."

"Sorry, Aunt Jolie," Doug looked at his plate. "I know." He stood. "Excuse me. I'm just feeling a little tense tonight. I, too, have been conducting some research aside from my normal class work. I must really be tired. I'll be in my room."

After Doug's door closed, Aunt Jolie leaned over and whispered in Lisa's ear, "That young man makes me feel so sad sometimes. Maybe you should stay here tonight. Maybe you should tell him how you feel."

Lisa looked at her, nodded, and then turned her gaze down the short hall where Doug's door stood as closed as a barrier between worlds.

\*

Late that night, after carefully reviewing all the data he'd downloaded from Aunt Jolie's digital research files, Doug crept from his room. He knew exactly how much of Enoch's Iced Tea had been given to each tulip and he made several minor conver-

sions allowing for body weight and body chemistry until he arrived at an acceptable dosage from human ingestion. He paid particular attention to the strange side effects the tulips manifested upon ionic packet reintegration.

He was prepared. He knew the risks—and the potential reward. He felt more excited than frightened. Ever since he learned he could soufly, he'd been building experimentally toward this ultimate exploration. It was time.

As he eased silently through the common room, he noticed that Lisa was sleeping on the sofa. She had never stayed the night before. He stopped beside her unmoving form, his thoughts lost in the curve of her neck, the plane of her cheek. It would be so easy to squeeze, so satisfying to fly beside her soul into Alpha Prime . . .

No. All his work must not be compromised by a foolish action. Prometheus hadn't been distracted by fireflies.

He slipped into Aunt Jolie's office, lifted the small vial of Enoch's Iced Tea from her desk and inserted a hypodermic syringe into the opening. He withdrew five milliliters and raised the syringe to his open mouth. He depressed the plunger.

Over the lips, across the tongue, look out God, here I come.

He replaced the vial on Aunt Jolie's desk and soundlessly retreated through common room, passing Lisa without pausing. He was shocked. Enoch's Iced Tea tasted like light. He closed his door, undressed, and lay down in his bed.

Doug was not aware of his bedroom door opening—of the nude shape of Lisa Veriger's body approaching his bed—because . . .

\*

. . . he was flying. He was flying without consciously deciding to release his body like he usually did when souflying. He was immediately through the solar system, beyond the galaxy, and already approaching Alpha Prime in the amount of time required to realize he was realizing it.

He hung on the lip of the event horizon of the gargantuan black hole at the center of the universe, the supergravitational origin of space and time.

Then he crossed the event horizon into Alpha Prime.

He found himself swimming in pure energy, bobbing on waves of radiation, heat and light. He kept bumping into . . . souls.

Souls with tormented faces smashed into each other like electrons, negative souls, circling a central well of deepest sapphire. These souls sought escape, longed for the blue of the new, banged anxiously against Doug and against each other, annihilated one another, reconstituted, and began banging again. Each collision was excruciating, pain beyond limit, death beyond ending.

Doug was annihilated. Doug was reconstituted. Over and over.

He dove for the blue.

He came to the blue.

Into the blue. Inside. Within.

Through into anew.

\*

Doug opened his eyes. He turned his head to the side. He saw Lisa Veriger's staring eyes. She didn't blink.

Doug blinked, gathered in the situation. Lisa was naked and sweating, chest heaving. He reached out, and saw the sheen of sweat on his arm. He ran his fingertips down her cheek, trailing the tears, across her naked white throat, down.

He could smell himself. He smelled . . . wonderful. The taste on his tongue was unfamiliar and sweet. He heard Lisa moan in some novel animal satisfaction. And what was this incredible ball in his abdomen, below the heart, above the stomach, up the nerve to the smiling lips?

So much.

So much.

Love?

*Beth Keller*  
**Two Girls**

“It won’t hurt too badly, if you do it right,” she said to me, as if I was paying more attention to her words than the razor blade in my hand.

“Yeah, but see,” I began. “You’re a pro, and I’m not even sure who I am anymore.”

“Quit being melodramatic,” she stated coolly. “Be like Nike and ‘Just Do It.’”

All I could do was stare at the blade in my hand. I had heard so many stories about why girls my age cut themselves, and this certainly wasn’t one of them. The only person I knew that would sympathize with Jade and me was Amy Winehouse. And that wasn’t saying too much.

“Do you love me, I mean really, really love me?” Jade asked me, as she.

*Why does she say ‘really, really’? Isn’t one ‘really’ enough?*

“Of course I love you,” I told her bluntly, almost harshly. “I’ve loved you since we were kids, but to do this...this is crazy-weird.”

I caught my reflection in her bedroom mirror. I looked sad, but sexy. Like someone needed to save me, that I needed to be saved.

“Probably from myself,” I whispered, but she caught my words.

“Look,” Jade said, “If you won’t do it, fine. I can’t make you do anything.”

I watched her stand up, her back turning away from me as she walked to her closet. She was searching through sweaters, t-shirts, and shoes—searching for something. She was the best friend I’d ever had, completely messed up in her own right, but my best friend nonetheless. I walked over to her, admiring her height, her hair, and her lack of style.

“Here,” she said. “Try this on. You might feel better about...”

“About what?” I said, cutting her off while grabbing a hold of her favorite navy blue, cable sweater.

“About this?” I said, shaking the razor in her face. My admiration for Jade was short-lived. I loved her, true, but she was one of the most passive-aggressive people I had ever known. Ever. And now she was pissing me off, all over again.

“I’m just trying to help,” she said. “All I want to do is help you, you know that,” she continued as she gave me a hug. “This is what friends do, we help each other out. Now, put that sweater on. It makes your chest look amazing.”

I couldn’t help but smile. I couldn’t help but wonder if every 17-year-old girl felt this way about her best friend. I wanted to kidnap Jade, and I wanted her to lock me in her bedroom. I wanted to spend the night on her rooftop, counting the stars and drinking a bottle of wine from her parent’s cabinet. I wanted Rufus Wainwright to sing to us. I wanted him to tell Jade and I that love wasn’t a victory march, and that maybe there was a God above us after all. That maybe the best she and I could hope for was a broken hallelujah.

Instead I pulled her favorite sweater over my head, and adjusted the baggy arms and tight-fitting waist line.

“Are you ready to go?” Jade said, tightening her tanker boots. Like I said before, Jade’s sense of style was sorely lacking, but I found it hip.

“Yeah, I suppose so,” was all I could respond. “Who’s all gonna be there?” I asked.

“Just a bunch of randoms, I guess. And some guy from Delta named Styles. Whatever that means.”

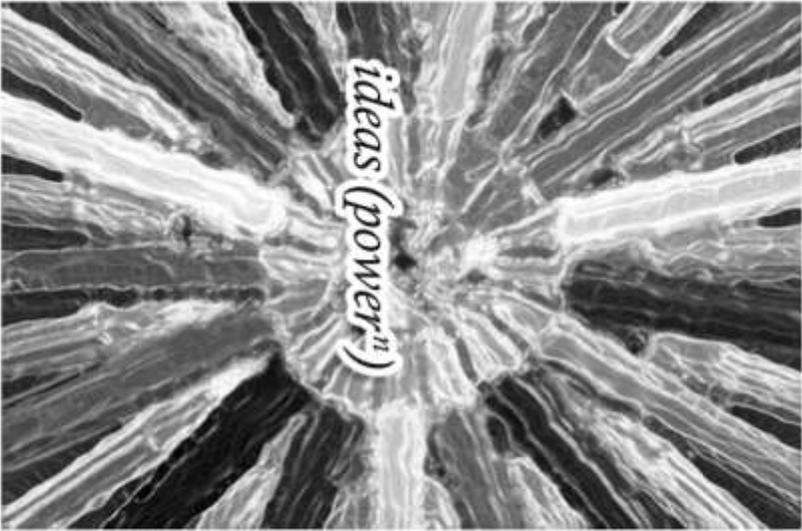
“Jade,” I asked, “I’m scared that I love you like I do. I’m scared that I can’t find anything to help this out, ya know?”

“Yeah, I know. But this is how it is, right? I mean, we help each other live, and we’ll help each other die, too,” Jade promised.

We left Jade’s room, probably for the last time. I knew we were going to get into trouble, so for safe keeping, I put the razor blade in my back pocket, just in case.

Jade and I were going to experience love, hate and martyrdom tonight. I could feel it.





# *Writing Center*

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