

Metaphor, Weber State University's interdisciplinary journal, is published each spring semester, giving voice to the creative community on campus for twenty-six years. Metaphor is staffed entirely by WSU students.

Funding for the journal comes primarily from student fees. Metaphor is distributed free of charge.

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Printed in the United States of America by Weber State University Printing Services.

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1201 University Circle
Ogden, UT 84401-1201

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Metaphor accepts submissions in art, poetry, fiction, academic literature and music from students of Weber State University and students who submit to the National Undergraduate Literature Conference.

Metaphor uses a blind submission process. The author of each piece is unknown until that piece is chosen for publication.

Cover Design by Kory Fluckiger.

Metaphor

VOLUME XXVI · 2006

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Poetry



Poetry

Poetry is nearly impossible to define. Some say it is art in words, others say it is truth. Whether villanelle, sonnet, or free verse, poetry is no longer definable. It will not be controlled by labels. Poetry is elusive, but it can be tracked down.

It can be found in a paper cut from a Mary Oliver book. We can Dig it up in a graveyard. The Desert wind blows it toward us. It is hidden in tablecloths, magpies, oranges and even in a crust of bread. We just have to find it. In any form, poetry can be caught.

To those who were brave enough to hunt for poetry, thank you. It was an honor and a pleasure to share in your journeys. We enjoyed the experience. Keep hunting.

Editor

David Thacker

Staff

Cynthia Loveland

Mario Chard

Shannon Loveless

Yulia

Ryan Sherman

We have spoken here in whispers,
With sun-soaked hair,
and swelling lips;
found hopes forgot still beating in the carpet.

We have dared to follow footsteps,
Into forests, frost touched needles,
And chipped away for thoughts
In frozen puddles.

We can find in fifteen minutes,
Secrets buried deep below long years,
that pricked the fears of couch-crept, window's nights.

Our days are almost-wakings:
Seeds that push bellies of stones.
We struggle against seatbelts
Beneath these traffic lights.

Wet with Life

Ryan Sherman

Like stacked fleshy funnels,
the veins of the soil,
wet with the squirm of life

And the give of the ground,
Flesh caverns beneath,
Waiting to grow little bones

Like a gash in the moon,
The bursting below,
Spilling out onto rippled fields

And the fields that shudder
With the clutching of fingers
clawing away at the carpet.

Like the attempt on the garden,
The grass scent of sovereignty,
But an ankle's snatched by the concrete

And the ooze of defeat,
Is gravel speckled, red-soaking pink,
And the gnashing of little, loose teeth,

Like the swelling of fleshies,
And the stare in the mirror
Fist-clenching, power-swelling,
knowledge.

And the horror of hallways,
Locker folly and urinals,
And the odors of teeth-licking

desire.

Like sun-blistering backs,
the swelling of muscles,
the iron of Adam's small window

And the worms and the shovels,
The dig, dig, digging out,
of gods underneath fingernails

The stacked fleshy funnels,
the veins of the soil,
wet with the squirm of life.

Travis Park, Wyoming

Rykki Olson

the sun sets
on the crust of snow
where grass
lies yellow, dead
and frost coats limbs
of barren trees
that stretch passive
over a fence chilled,
with fragile
crystal patterns

darkness turns
the white to
grey-drenched blue
at edge of town
where few would pass
at end of day—
empty swings
and a long-forgotten
baseball field

and lamplight at the corner
reveals a wooden sign

this is Travis Park

in some small town,
now a refuge
for the pronghorn

Softer Light

Rykki Olson

sometimes we go back
to where our feet
stopped going.
somehow all the rules
have changed
when the lights go out.

at times, we whisper things
to those not there to hear.
the want for company's
stained everything, and
the cold seeps in while
you're at your loneliness.

it may be better to remember
in a softer light, so that those
who've gone, can still
give the comfort
we risked this to receive.

or so we can give it
to ourselves, but in their name.
and their ghosts can rub our stomach
as we lie awake at night,
with their breath upon our neck.
and with dry eyes, we go
on and apart, still visited
by those gone,
kept here in softer light.

Living Room Floor

Rykki Olson

he lies
on the living room floor
like an old coffee table
with her draped across it
in her tangles of gold

he'll have fallen asleep
with fingers through hers,
trying to warm them,
staying at the scene
of his failure,
humbled and frozen

she'll remember him
saying her name
as if it were fragile,
a crystal of ice
that would melt
on his tongue

a few inches away—
but heat doesn't transfer—
he just holds her cold fingers
in the silence of morning
on the thick brown carpet
of the living room floor

Termination

Cheyney Wheelwright

(for Marie)

Four weeks is not much time
in linear regard
To finish up the business of living
Cram the fullness of life
wherever it will fit, in cracks
gaps, and the holes in their smiles
Mind the roadsigns and
brush my teeth – a laughable habit, now.
Just where that doctor found
such time—scooped it out
A gift for me, solemn and sad.
Surely he could retrace his steps
find four weeks more, or so-
Present them with a smile this time
Wish me a happy journey,
or offer to come along for the ride.
If I had his skill in knowing time
I could have lived it
different, intense, with perfect cadence
and spent my weeks in thankfulness,
unfrantic and with peace.
My sons' smiles and laughter
memorized, indelible, packed away safe
Inseparable from my soul
for the passage in four weeks.

Between Waking and Sleeping

James Gabrielsen

Between 400 threads per square inch
and the right arm of my wife
(her pulse unnoticed on my back),
the downstairs neighbor's fight slowly drowns,
and my brain balances on a fulcrum:
the bed disappears
and I
fall.

Doctors say it is an impulse,
a reflex,
a stray bolt like the electric fence
I grabbed in first grade
that burned my hand and kicked out my feet
and strangled every nerve.
They say it is normal;
just the brain keeping count,
making sure it is still in charge.

Entanglement

James Gabrielsen

I learned today that time travel may be possible;
"spooky action at a distance"
(Einstein's words, not mine)
communicating faster than photons
zipping through glass wires.

But speed is a rate
(distance over time)
and the father of relativity
failed to account for time's absence
in the equation.

No matter.

In a few years,
I can just pull the lever
of the new, inevitable machine,
watch its arbitrary lights flash
from the digital time-keeping device,
and go set him straight.

Disneyland

James Gabrielsen

Place your fingers
between mine
and clamp,
and I'll carry you
piggyback
to a pink castle
that looks bigger from far away.
And though I will walk
on broken ankles
(I may cry out and falter;
I am only a man)
I will carry you
through town,
and we will ride the teacups.

James Gabrielsen

October Autumn

Anne Probasco

Brittle bits of molasses-ugly color,
graceful yet, as they slide.

Something more than experience
brushes this hybrid of elegance
and strain.

I do hope they fall on me.

Wamsutter, WY

Clark Cornia

I bought gas at a Shell station
in Wamsutter, WY
and the clerk was having a conversation with
a customer about cats

the clerk was from Illinois,
a scar directed you to his face.
airplane beacons and gang signs don't say as much as that
scar
an open book with drama and hardship
love, hate, and sex with alcoholic women
met in low down bars on the south side of Chicago

Cats are the topic of conversation.
the oilfield worker is an expert in a life spent working
in the muscle stripping Wyoming wind and Louisiana
humidity.
but cats are what unite them

the clerk loves and the oilfield worker respects their inde-
pendence.

must be lunch time
the oil man buys a hot dog, chips, and cheap cigarettes

"see ya tomorrow" they say
I pay for gas and sunflower seeds
and the clerk says
"I need to burn one"
he lights up in the store and says
"be safe"
and I say

"you too"
and I leave wondering how a man from Illinois
with a scar like that ended up in Wamsutter (pop. 56)
talking
cats
with an oilfield worker.

the man that gave Grandma five kids

Andrew Blodgett

His name was George Lee Miles.
I didn't know him. But as
I look at the crib that holds
you, at the stack of blankets
that mom placed inside, at the walls
holding your wooden initials,
at the toys waiting for your growth
and at the piles of diapers
hoping to be filled, I think
of him, well not of him, but
of my grandma he left
and my mother he deserted
and I wonder if her crib
woke him up at night, if her
worn blankets made him cold, if
he was embarrassed that she
shared his name, if her one doll
called him names and if he knew
that she hoped, even today,
that his emptiness would be
filled. So as I look at you,
George Ryan Blodgett,
I think, You were named after
my father, not him, but then
I realize he is with you too
or at least the absence of him is.

If I were a “choo-choo” would you notice me?

Andrew Blodgett

You follow your train down
the wooden track, across the
plastic bridge where it stops
as the box car loses
its magnetic grip on
the incline of the track,
you attach it back onto
the engine, back down the
hill it goes and hides within
a tunnel and then it
hits the part were you tried
to make two track pieces
fit that couldn't,
it derails and you look
through me to find your
mother as if only she
is able to fix the train.
and as I look on
wondering if this is
how my father felt when
I held my mother tight.

Parentalization

Andrea Kunzler

The sapling boughs say
that I should bend in the spring
while my trunk is moist.

I cannot agree with them.
The boughs are young, I am old.

To Be Democratic

Janice Stringham LeFevre

On the bus
yesterday,
I saw
a lady wearing a cased
violin
upon her head—
cinched with a wrinkled ribbon
tied beneath her chin.
The instrument's neck
pointed forward,
like a baseball cap.

In her hands,
a bowl of crunchy cat food
topped with chocolate syrup.
With extended pinky,
she spooned it
dainty
into her mouth.

She smiled
Hello as I dropped
beside her on the seat.
(It was the only empty one.)

Her noisy chewing
sputtered
small flecks of brownish
matter,
which landed in my lap.

Embarrassed,

she reached over and
tried to brush them off,
leaving
smudged brown tracks on
my new white skirt.

She looked up at me,
cringed.
I guess she was waiting for
a slap.

I wanted to yell,
ask her why she was so dumb.
Instead, I said,
"Don't worry.
I'm an artist.
I'm always looking for
new designs.
It's gorgeous."

She beamed,
leaned towards me,
and drooled henna
on my sleeve.

the unpainted

Andrew Borgstrom

she would paint
if she could afford a brush

she stares at these people
as if they are her models
at their surroundings
as if it is her canvas

she walks a world unpainted
and would

if a two dollar shake
and a visit to her hairdresser
were not the highlight of her months

if the cost of a paintbrush
were less than her soul

words someone circled in a book I bought in a
second-hand store

Andrew Borgstrom

there are no dogears
the spine is not rolled
not cracked
just circled words like
praxis on 58
exegesis on 63
recondite on 72

eructed on 84

i wonder if she turned each page
in hope of finding these words
searching for combinations of letters
that were new to her and circling them

there is no bookplate
the endpaper is not marked
not inscribed
just circled words like
atavistic on 92
adamantine on 101
lacunae on 132

carminative on 133

did she do anything
with her circled words
use them in conversation
circle them in her dictionary

there are no annotations
the text is not highlighted

not underlined
just circled words like
rachitic on 144
heterodox on 153
protean on 167

nimbus on 178

i wonder if a paragraph
in which she knew all the words
caused her to question its meaning
if she thought of circling it

of dogearing the page

An Example of Violence Solving Nothing

Matthew Cranford

A hand goes through a mirror, all the way through the glass, breaking everything, skin and bone. Through a broken mirror, images are distorted in the same way a hormonal teenager confuses this unreasonable way of dealing with anger with the realities of a more plausible conclusion.

But from this fit of hysterics can only be concluded the inevitable results of not thinking things through, which seems most often the case when, in anger, destructive habits make short work of bone. When in such a state, pain is often confused or replaced with adrenaline, causing distortion

of sound rationality, giving proof that distortion of functional reason leaves no false conclusions, that only in cases of a severe confusion (something everyone will suffer through) certain desires carry the weight of petrified bone and certain emotions do not respond to anger.

In violence, the corrupted truth of anger breaks a stark sound of deceitful distortion freezing the blood and chipping away at the bone. Reaching a conclusion through absolute confusion.

The methods of instilling anxiety and confusion have left a metallic flavor, the taste of anger, and blood, and resentment, and loss of hope through an age of filtered shit and pure distortion;

and sifting through all of it, there are few conclusions
that make as much sense as feeling skin split by bone.

And when the skin begins to heal, the bone
begins to mend itself, stronger than the confusion
this time, protecting itself against dangerous conclusions.
This is a process that repeats itself in moments of anger
feeding on the chaos of distortion
and letting all the brutality through.

Something fragile through which a fist exposes bone,
seeking only that stinging breath of air, confused and distorted,
finds that anger becomes its own impotent conclusion.

Hero Worship

Matthew Cranford

I lied—
my dad is not my hero
and neither is Jesus.

He was there,
sitting across from me,
happy.

I had lied so well
on Father's Day.
It was all he ever wanted.

I felt sorry for my dad
because he couldn't tell
I was lying.

I felt sorry for myself
because heroes are
so hard to come by.

The Novel's Lament

Cynthia Loveland

I, "that kind of novel"
Pages worn and loved
Loved hard and loved soft
bursting with unbound passion,
too naughty for some
and too angelic for others.
I, the vixen.


Penned with carefully chosen adjectives
and vicarious liaisons
of a countryside rolling in flowers
in a desert drenched in sun
on a sweat-stained pirate ship.
Bound in leather against my will.
Bound to love some misread ruffian.

Closed.
Worn pages curled at the edges
Fighting for space
I don't sit quite right on the shelf anymore
Where I lie forgotten
Resting awkwardly
And unsure—

I am "that kind of novel"
who should be caressed and adored
Touched and touched again
Consumed in large breathy gulps
More...more! Please god, more!
Pressed hard against
strong chests until my spine almost cracks...

Not.
Here on this shelf.
Forgotten.
Discarded in favor of something
Newer and less creased with wear.

Music



Silently, sweetly, music seems to slip in and out of the course of our daily lives. It glides on the wings of a soft summer breeze, gently reaching the ears of friends on a front porch sharing a comfortable conversation on a muggy summer evening. It trips through the air via sound waves, using the art of collision to propagate.

To some, music is notes, pitches, melodies, and harmony. To others, it is rhythm tapped out on a hard surface, or even the sound of a baby's laugh. On a crisp spring eventide in Italy, music is the echo of a lone saxophonist dedicating his soul to the night. Music is the recognizable sound of something appealing. A select few find music to be the voice unheard by others, willing them to create masterpieces of blending chords and moving tempos.

In this issue, we celebrate those who have heard their music and committed it to paper. The patterns and progressions of their notes on a page are frozen in time, an expression of life, loveliness, and the forever essence of being human.


Editor

Mario Chard

Staff

Paul Clayton

NULC



When, in 1985, Weber State University professors Mikel Vause and Michael Meyer conceived the idea of gathering Utah's best undergraduate writers for a conference dedicated to providing students with the opportunity to present their creative and critical works in a wider academic setting, the idea quickly exploded into the only national literature conference in the country for undergraduate students. Since 1985, students from over one-hundred-and-fifty different colleges and universities across the country have gathered in Ogden annually for the National Undergraduate Literature Conference (NULC).

Not only have thousands of students attended the Conference, but many of the best contemporary writers and poets have demonstrated their support of undergraduate writing by speaking at the NULC. Over the years we have been honored by such artists as Norman Mailer, Maxine Kumin, Tobias Wolff, Tim O'Brien, and Jamaica Kincaid, among others. These writers have sent students home with the reassurance that although reading and writing makes for a difficult life, a life filled with contemplation of the human condition, it is a life worth pursuing.

Editor

Ashley Remkes

Art

Art makes you feel things. What a person feels depends on the person: fifty different people can look at a painting and feel fifty-one different things. The point is, the interpretation of the art rests on the viewer.


Good art needs no commentary. We, the viewers, provide that ourselves.

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Academic Literature

Text



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You Will Excuse Me If I Do Not Begin to Cry

Andrew Borgstrom

Melancholy and Mockery in Thomas Gray's "Ode to a Favourite Cat"

The eighteenth century English poet Thomas Gray wrote a poem for Horace Walpole in 1747 that elicits sorrow and laughter—and that's just after reading the title. "Ode to a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold-Fishes" contains the themes of death, loss, and deception prevalent within Gray's earlier poems and adds to them a light-heartedness that is quite satisfying. Gray proves that melancholy and mockery have more in common than alliteration.

Selima, the feline in Gray's poem, was well known to Gray. Perhaps a comma should be placed between well and known. Gray wrote to Walpole upon hearing of his pet's demise, "it would be a sensible satisfaction to me (before I testify my sorrow, and the sincere part I take in your misfortune) to know for certain who it is I lament. I knew Zara and Selima, (Selima, was it? Or Fatima) or rather I knew them both together; for I cannot say which was which. Then as to your handsome Cat, the name you distinguish her by, I am no less at a loss, as well knowing one's handsome cat is always the cat one likes best; or, if one be alive and the other dead, it is usually the latter that is the handsomest. ...Till this affair is a little better determined, you will excuse me if I do not begin to cry: 'Tempus inane peto, requiem, spatiumque doloris'" (Mack 350). Gray's response to Walpole, upon being asked to write an epitaph for his dead cat, is full of sarcasm. He uses blatant irony to inform Walpole that he is not sorrowful, he makes fun of Selima's size by referring to her as Fatima (perhaps a link to the poem when he writes of her "round face"), and he concludes by comparing his sorrow to Dido's madness in Virgil's Aeneid. It is not likely that Walpole was offended by Gray's response since Walpole's sorrow towards his deceased pets was typically short-lived (Mack 349). His request for Gray to write an epitaph for his cat appears closer to the sharing of ideas between writers than a salve for an

unbearable wound.

Gray responds to Walpole's invitation with a seven stanza rime coulee. In the title, Gray classifies the poem as an ode instead of an epitaph. This classification elevates Selima's fate, thereby mocking it. Gray wrote epitaphs for soldiers and children that are no longer than the first stanza of Selima's ode. While Gray's ode is similar to his epitaphs in its content of untimely death, he chooses diction that is exalted and sublime, that begs to be sung (likely in falsetto).

Gray's diction can be classified by a word from the first line of his poem: "*Twas on a lofty vase's side*" (italics added). Initially this language is used to prop the cat up as a figure worth mourning over—"a Favourite." This is not to say Gray departs from all melancholic diction; stanza one contains a bit of foreshadowing with the homophone "dy'd" and compares Selima to a melancholist by labeling her "pensive." In stanza two, Gray uses language that suggests Selima is alert, satisfied, wise, prosperous, elaborate, brilliant, superior, and precious. In good literature, such a character is bound to fall. Especially when vain is included to the list—the description of Selima is her own, while gazing at her reflection.

In stanza three, this "lofty" diction is used to elevate the fish above Selima. The goldfish are compared to angels, genii, and nymphs. Their color is described as a "Tryian hue" which is defined in the next line, and in history, as purple—the color of royalty. Yet it has a "golden gleam," the color often sought after and possessed by royalty. Thus, even though Selima sees her reflection as superb, she sees something beyond her reflection that is otherworldly in reference to the angels, genii, and nymphs and elite in reference to royalty—all of them being out of reach for the majority of humanity, and felines. Selima's "round face" from stanza two identifies her as a creature that is filled/full (or fulfilled), a creature who is used to getting what she wants. Accordingly, Selima attempts to attain that which she sees as beyond mortality. Ironically, this is exactly where her failed attempt will lead her.

In stanza four, Gray introduces a technique he will conclude the poem with: the comparison of humankind with the cat—"What female heart can gold despise? / What cat's averse to fish?" Gray's sense of mockery has been taken as disdain for, not only felines, but females. Mack says, "Many modern readers take offense at what they interpret to be the underlying (and surprisingly gratuitous) misogyny

of the poem - a misogyny that is at best casual and representative of the larger views of society at the time with regards to the proper sphere of woman's activity, and at worst (at least to followers of Gray's life) the spitefully catty and unintentionally venomous product of an embittered and perhaps increasingly lonely homosexual man" (352). While the culture of Gray's day was oppressive towards women and the literature can easily be criticized from a feminist standpoint, it does not seem evident that Gray intentionally (or, for that matter, unintentionally) sought to further the oppression. If nothing else, this stance can be supported by line 35 where a male receives the harshest title of anyone in the poem: "cruel Tom." It is obvious that Gray intended to mock, but a close reading shows he was mocking a school of thought and type of literature that he was fond of employing, therefore, mocking himself more than anyone else. Not to negate everything I just argued, but to show modern readers that their so-called insights are not so new: Walpole joked with his friend Wharton before Wharton was to get married telling him that Gray's poem was a warning against female avarice (Mack 353).

At the midpoint of his ode, Gray invites the reader to join the poem. This is no longer the sad tale of an eager feline but a quest for that which is beyond reach. In stanza five, Gray mentions a "gulf" that stands between the prize and the contestant. The gulf is alluded to as death when he writes, "Malignant Fate sat by, and smil'd." Not only will many die without attaining their gold but it may only be through dying that any real gold will be found. However, it is not the name of God that is capitalized in this stanza but "Malignant Fate." The road to supposed wealth is labeled a "slipp'ry verge" and a capitalized-being sits by and laughs at our folly, it does not sound like gold is in store for this poor soul (but at least she can dry off by the fire).

Stanza six begins with Selima "Eight times emerging from the flood." This phrase may infer that Selima is drowning her ninth, and final, life. However, it may be a biblical allusion to the eight survivors of God's flooding of the earth in the book of Genesis. This allusion could infer the cat's death as a result of sin (vanity or, as with most cats, slothfulness). On the other hand, it could be an attempt to compare the death of one insignificant creature to the epic nature of the bible. If it were not for the full title, "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes," the location of the drowning would be uncertain. Gray refers to the water as "tide," "stream," and

"flood"—hardly the nature of water in a fish tank. Although Selima is drowning, Gray inserts references to the fantastic and the mythological. The "Dolphin" that does not rescue the cat is an obvious allusion to the story of the poet Arion who was rescued from drowning by a dolphin (Hamilton 427). The "Nereid," friendly sea nymphs from Greek mythology (Hamilton 41), are out of earshot from Selima's cries. The continual use of such lofty diction in describing an otherwise melancholic event serves to elevate the situation, the poem, and even the cat into something enduring, something that will be read hundreds of years after its publication, something that will be critiqued by undergraduates, maybe even something that transcends.

Immediately after the cat perishes, Gray pours on the "morals of the story." The reader learns that it is more important to be a friend than a favorite, that a false step may not be taken back, that our eyes may deceive us, and that all that glistens is not gold. Although the concluding line of the poem about fools gold is so cliché today that it has lost meaning to most readers, it was obviously less so at the time. However, the phrase had already been seen in literature for five-hundred years previous—Insulis in the thirteenth century, Chaucer in the fourteenth, Lydgate in the fifteenth, Greene and Shakespeare in the sixteenth, among many others (Apperson 6). The idea that "one false step is ne'er retrieved" is less of a proverb and may have held more meaning for Gray but both of these statements are obvious poetic conclusions when considering the floundering feline and deceiving goldfish (plus, a good proverb may be another form of mockery). Of these lines of counsel, there was only one line that Gray decided to change after sending it to Walpole and after its initial publication in 1748: "A Fav'rite has no friend!" first read "What favourite has a friend?" (Gosse 13). This was obviously the line that Gray thought about the most and, likely, the line that had the most affect upon him. Transcendence is defined as a higher plane of living, this higher plane may be achieved by knowledge and therefore may be a plane which separates more than unites, that is favored but friendless.

I think it is proper to conclude with the image of Walpole placing the fish bowl on top of a pedestal where he had the first six lines of Gray's poem inscribed and to hear him say, "an ode 'On a favourite Cat, call'd Selima, that fell into a China Tub with Gold-Fishes in it & was drown'd'" (Mack 352-53). I would like to repeat a word mentioned in the opening paragraph, a word I would like to replace

with mockery—lightheartedness. Perhaps the greatest thing to learn in this melancholic mortality is the ability to approach serious matters with a light-heart, to be able to say often, “You will excuse me if I do not begin to cry.”

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How to Unwittingly Preserve Yourself for Thousands of Years

Michael McQuilkin

Sphagnum Moss

Introduction

When Irish detectives inspected the remains of two mutilated bodies found within three months of each other by peat bog workers, their first suspicion was that of IRA involvement. Hair, eyeballs, skin and fingernails were almost flawlessly preserved. Due to the exceptional condition of the bodies found in the bogs, the detectives' hunch seems reasonable until one learns that an international team of experts determined that the bodies were murdered and dismembered a short 2,500 years ago (Raymond) (10 Ways to Make a Mummy).

One can easily understand the allure of bog bodies. Previously lying dead for thousands of years, these bodies were so well preserved they were mistaken for victims of modern violence. Previously, researchers had assumed it was merely the acidic, anaerobic environment that kept the bodies this way but, although these conditions help, it's actually the biological composition of the peat, the same portion that dyes their hair red and the skin coffee brown that preserves these bodies so well (Glob 73) (Deem 17). The steps in the decomposition of human remains are not pretty, but due to the extraordinary capabilities of sphagnum moss, these long dead bodies can give us almost the final thoughts of these long dead people.

THE BODY

When the heart stops beating or when the lungs stop breathing, quite a few changes begin in the human body. Since the blood is no longer being delivered to the cells of the body and no pressure is pushing the blood through the vessels, blood starts to settle in the lower portions of the body (due often to gravity) (Decomposition). Because our cells are dependent upon aerobic ion exchanges, we become unable to generate our homeostatic biochemistry.

Three hours after this happens, rigor mortis sets in. Calci-

um ions are an important fuel for muscle and, when a body initiates rigor mortis, excess calcium ions start to leak into muscle cells. To contract muscle, our body allows calcium to diffuse into the muscle fibre whilst simultaneously using energy derived from the blood to pump calcium ions out of the muscle to keep the muscle fibre lower in calcium ion concentration relative to its surroundings, allowing calcium to diffuse into the muscle (Decomposition). Since no energy via blood is being delivered, the muscle can't pump calcium out, thus a continuous state of contraction leads to the aforementioned phenomenon (Decomposition).

Although interesting, this is not what bio-degrades bodies in non-peat bog locations. Bacteria and insects are the name of the game now in putrefaction. While a human is living, bacteria located both in and on our bodies are essential in order to continue that living state. They help us digest and absorb our food, keep other nasty bacteria away, and other various functions. In death, they act like a greedy multinational corporation, intent on devouring all it can as quickly as possible. The bacteria spread from our intestines and gradually move to our internal organs. Enzymes located intracellularly and in our digestive tract help degrade our cells and cellular connections (Decomposition).

Depending upon where the body is located (which is the primary interest of this writing), insects begin to lay eggs around the nutrient rich areas of the body: eyes, nose, mouth, anus, genitalia, and open wounds. These eggs hatch within 24 hours and the ensuing larvae then move inside the body (Decomposition). Bacteria, which multiply greatly given almost unlimited nutrients and no constraints, break down cells and cellular connections while simultaneously releasing liquid and gas byproducts. Methane, cadaverine, and hydrogen sulfide are just a few of these gases which, when detected by insects, draw a myriad of arthropods to the scene (Decomposition). Although there are many species laying eggs on the now deceased corpse, maggots should not be underestimated. They can consume 60 percent of a corpse in less than a week. Bacteria will take over and finish if the insects are driven away, however (Decomposition).

When most of the soft portions of the body are gone, beetles become the predominant insect in the decomposing body. Predators and parasitoids are present throughout the putrefaction and

no exception remains here, including parasitoid wasps which lay eggs inside living maggots. Once the body dries, moths, mites, and microorganisms continue the process albeit at a much slower pace (Decomposition).

As mentioned before, the crux of this paper is where the body decomposes. The difference between a body being well preserved for a few days maximum versus thousands of years is the secret of the following section. Although decomposition occurs in some form regardless of place, the placing of a criminal and/or human sacrifice into a bog can, unbeknownst to the perpetrator/victim or the ancient people who buried the body, ensure that professionals thousands of years later, in great scientific detail with the most sophisticated instruments available, can examine that long dead person's facial expression (Deem 14).

The Peat

Peat, often left out of soil science books, is neither soil nor litter but somewhere in between. Because of its unusual composition, it is difficult for scientists to examine peat without using unusual methodology. Figure 2 shows the anatomy of Sphagnum, or peat moss. Under the correct conditions, the individual sphagnum grows continuously with the top portions moving forever upward and the lower portions decomposing into peatbog (Gobat et al 306).

Not all bogs are equal, however. A mire or peatland is a marshy biogeocoenosis in which the soil is composed of peat, comprising specialized animal and plant communities. (Gobat et al 311). A mire is a bog or fen, but a bog or fen is not a mire. Fen peat can preserve objects equally well as bog peat, but fen peat allows bacteria to multiply thus human bodies decompose in the fen (Deem 16). The raised bog is our primary subject. As the name suggests, it can appear raised when compared with surrounding sloping terrain, due to the accumulation of the organic matter (peat) which is produced by the aforementioned sphagnum (Gobat et al 307).

Actual bog peat is quite interesting. Under a microscope, it constitutes woody twigs, pine needles, whole and fragmented stems and leaves of sphagnum palustre but many portions of peat can't be seen under the microscope (i.e. water, methane, CO₂, organic mol-

ecules, etc.) (Eslick) (Gobat et al 308). The largest objects in peat bogs, other than perhaps bodies, would be ancient tree trunks and stumps which are used for dendrochronology.

Concerning the Animalia kingdom, there are no macroinvertebrates in the peat but saprophagous nematodes, enchytraeids, and dipterous larvae do help in the detritus chains (Gobat et al 312). Microorganisms exist in large numbers in peat, especially fungi. Bacteria are found in minerotrophic and eutrophic peats with a neutral to alkaline pH but in general, little is known about how these microorganisms interact and affect the peat (Gobat et al 310). Peats that still contain living tissues are quite difficult to examine due to the need to separate the products of humification and the cytoplasmic liquid (Gobat et al 311).

Sphagnum does quite a bit on their own to modify the peat-land environment. They can concentrate basic cations from dilute soils or rain, thus contributing to the acidification of the bog. Sphagnum also retains water strongly in special cells and micropores that lend peat its strong water retention (Gobat et al 315). Although 90 percent of the bog peat is water, this sphagnum moss is the most fascinating material described yet.

Early Europeans took advantage of the capabilities of this moss. From 1200 B.C. through World War I, bandages made from the moss were used to treat wounds, often even exceeding the capability of cotton bandages (Deem 15). A Gaelic chronicler even mentions the use of sphagnum at the battle of Clontarf in 1044 A.D. Soldiers stuffed their wounds with moss along with Highlanders in other battles who used a combination of moss and light grass (Grieve 308). Even deer who become injured drag their wounds along sphagnum moss. The Lapland matrons took advantage of sphagnum moss as a type of diaper for children and for the last thirty years, sterilized moss has been used as a surgical dressing in Germany (Grieve 308). New experiments by T. J. Painter show that it can even preserve fish meat.

This antibacterial quality of sphagnum is quite remarkable. Sailors often took bog water with them on sea voyages due to the fact that it stayed fresh much longer than other types of water including spring water (Deem 15) (Painter 89)! I'm waiting for a stylish bottled water line that's "Fresh from the Bog!" From the preservation of fish meat to the dressing of battlefield wounds,

people have used this moss to ease life for thousands of years (seeing patterns?). It is then easy to imagine why people thought the bogs were connected with the supernatural (Bog Bodies).

Preservation

Originally, the preservation of human bodies in peat bogs was chalked up to these three reasons: the bog water was anaerobic, very acidic (pH 3.5-4.5), and very cold (Sibley). Although there is essentially no molecular oxygen anywhere to be found below the top 30-50 cm in the peat bog, anaerobic bacteria can digest human remains just as well as aerobic bacteria (Painter 89). The acidity of raised peat bogs, which has often been exaggerated and is rarely found to be lower than pH 5, wouldn't necessarily stop bacteria (Painter 89). Many wines and ciders are a result of anaerobic bacterial fermentation around pH 3.0-3.8. Although peat bogs do have their own micro-organisms like every other place on Earth, *Pseudomonas* bacteria, which is most prevalent, grows on nutrients from the peat and bog water instead of human remains (Painter 90) (Gobat et al 308). Scientists attributed the bonelessness in some bog bodies to the acidic bog water and part of that thought is due to the common example of fish bones dissolving in vinegar yet preserving the flesh, all due to the acidity of the vinegar (Mummies, Disease, and Ancient Cultures 239) (Painter 91). In actuality, it is a polysaccharide that is derived from 5-keto-D-mannuronic acid (5KMA) which decalcifies the bodies (Painter 90). This substance (sphagnum), under mildly acidic conditions, gathers multivalent metal cations so efficiently that it will dissolve rock (Painter 95).

When bog moss dies, sphagnum is released and becomes dissolved in the water of the bog (Mummies, Disease, and Ancient Cultures 238). Sphagnum contains reactive carbonyl groups in the 5KMA residues and these reactive carbonyl compounds that are capable of tanning collagen are the very same compounds that are used in the leather tanning industry. T. J. Painter describes how tanning creates >bridges= between amino groups on different collagen molecules and these >bridges= act like a spider=s web that traps proteolytic enzymes that degrade the body, like a web traps a fly (Painter 95).

The dark, coffee color is very characteristic of sphagnum tanning. It

is the product of the >Maillard= reaction, which is a complex chemical transformation that occurs when carbohydrates react with amino acids or proteins in combination with a mildly acidic environment (Painter 89). The browning of toast, and the color of beer, caramel, chocolate, coffee, and maple syrup are all derived from this reaction. This coffee color tanning of the bodies is so characteristic of peat bogs that oftentimes, simply the lack of this color can let researchers know that a body was not preserved in this fashion (Painter 96). In the Meenybraddan Woman and other bog bodies, deposits of adipocere were found on the body and under the skin. Adipocere is a mixture of soaps, fatty acids, and volatile substances which become physically squeezed out when the muscle contracts during tanning, and thus preservation processes (Decomposition) (Painter 95). Scientists have thought adipocere contributes to the preservation of bog bodies, but anaerobic bacteria actually break down the adipocere and form the soaps and volatile substances (Painter 95).

If bacteria cannot engulf something which it wishes to bio-degrade, it can release enzymes which will finish the body off. Experiments with sphagnum holocellulose has shown that these enzymes (including enzymes released by the human body) lose their activity in 3-10 days at the temperature of 20 C (Painter 97). Although enzymes bound to bacterial cell walls can bio-degrade substances, this entire process occurs much slower in peat. Adipocere is an example of the continuing process of decomposition but, due to the binding and inactivation of these enzymes, the putrefaction process described earlier in the paper can be stopped almost dead in its tracks.

With so many companies vying for the business of people who want their remains preserved in the afterlife (cryogenics, neomummification, normal internment, etc), who would have guessed that simply dumping a loved one's body into a local raised peat bog would achieve the same result. This is easier said than done due to the rapid disappearance of bogs. In Denmark and the Netherlands, which were once covered by bogs, only one percent of bogland still remains (Deem 36).

Conclusion

Sphagnum moss is clearly an incredible biological entity. It can

heal wounds, be fashioned as diaper in haste, and directly connect us through one of the most basic of human relations to a person who lived and died thousands of years ago. Despite the entirety of ecological entities on this planet, a simple low nutrient pooling of water and moss can almost completely hold off a key cycle of nature, the cycle of death.

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Creative Writing

The writing found in this year's creative writing section offers a wide variety of styles, themes, and views. As we scrupulously read through each submission we found ourselves being pulled from the streets of Seattle to the inner feelings of a Satanist and the emotional and political conflicts of a woman in Tehran.

The selections found in this section present general themes in new ways that not only kept our interest, but made us reevaluate our own personal stance on prevalent issues in our society. We are pleased to present an assortment of both fiction and non-fiction pieces that expand the boundaries of everyday thought, and we are sure that they will serve in expanding both the mind and souls of our readership.

Editor

Adrian Stumpp

Staff

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A Cocktail and a Confession

Camden Bennett

Now, please understand, cocktails aren't something I can just let go Crossed legs. Light smile. Mid sixties. They are—how should I say it?—part of me Looking aside. Relaxed. Gray hair. Gray beard. Of course I would never hurt anyone Eyes forward. No, no, not an addiction. Let's not confuse our terms here. Chuckling. Repositioning. Yes, I suppose I should recount that day, the day I nearly swore off them Nodding. If only to explain what I'm about to do Smiling. Raising eyebrows. Settling.

I heard the first shout before daylight, just outside my window. I was rinsing utensils at the kitchen sink, by lamplight, and with the acoustics of Italy's stucco and stone architecture the voice was practically beside me. I dried my hands as I walked to the window.

A car in flames was rolling into a narrow street intersecting mine. Flames roared through the sun roof, I could hear them from where I stood, and as it gained momentum they slanted back like a tuft of hair in the wind. I couldn't see the entire street from my window but I knew it was a tight, plunging thing that dropped down to the piazza.

There were youths leaping around it, their shadows looming on the walls of buildings—with the fire in the dark it looked almost primitive—and they were shouting and trying to stop it. But the hill was too steep and the car too hot so it took off, lighting its way down that tunnel of a street and the youths gave chase. Above them the walls were blinking as lights came on, and people appeared in windows like living busts and their voices poured into the melee and made an incredible scene!

I backed into my apartment laughing and clapping while cries rose on more distant streets. I'm not one to make light of another's misfortune, but this car belonged to the youths from the apartment below mine. They had been like sand scraping my skull from the in-

side all night. In fact it was the worst night since my arrival a month before. Music and laughter, coming and going . . . I had to quiet my nerves so I had mixed a cocktail.

There had been other fires lately, three that I'd read of—in fact I had kept all the newspapers with the stories—and the authorities were suspicious of a single culprit, although they didn't know if it was a man or woman, local or tourist, but they did know that every fire had been started with some sort of homemade incendiary device involving gasoline. They called the maker of these devices an expert in the paper.

I walked into the street and paused at the precipice where the car had plunged, looking down the cobbled gauntlet. Concrete doorsteps jutted at intervals beneath dark doors and there were balconies with iron rails and red flowers that looked blue in the low light. At the end of the street I saw a slice of the scene where a crowd churned around the glowing car.

An aging nun was trudging uphill toward me. I figured that, at her pace, she must have been on that street when the car passed. It had left deep gouges in the walls on both sides of the street, it was that narrow, and I didn't know how she could have survived it. I'm glad I ran into her instead of a priest, however. Priests always know things you want unknown, or at least they appear to. I feel like my thoughts are running around in the natural when I see a black robe or one of those rope belts or white collar pieces they wear. I stopped going to confession years ago when one of them figured out that I'd stopped confessing my cocktails.

When I passed two men inspecting the damage on the wall farther down I started feeling guilty because I knew they didn't deserve this trouble. And here I had been laughing and making light. I looked at the sky as I passed them to avoid eye contact. The walls left only a strip of sky and smoke from the car had found its way in and filled the gap like a roof. There was a tall space at its end where the buildings stopped, like a gateway from dark to less dark. A figure stood there watching me approach, an officer of the polizia.

"Do you know what happened?" he said. "This car, it comes in the street where you are."

I told him I had just come down to see what the commotion was. I was stroking my beard with one hand and looking over my shoulder up the hill. A white and blue car with a flashing siren ap-

peared at the top and stopped near my building. The officer asked again if I had seen anything. I said no and shrugged. He hesitated, but finally waved me past with a curt gesture.

The crowd was a mix of tourists and locals, late nighters and early risers. Several were tossing their opinions about with every gesture in the Italian arsenal. The polizia kept the curious away, but I think the heat would have done the job.

The car was a two-door hatchback, a Renault, I think. The windows had melted so flames leapt from every orifice and it was poised at an angle that made it seem ready for flight. Of course it couldn't go anywhere because its nose was wrapped around a light pole.

I saw one of the youths who lived below me as I moved through the crowd. He kept walking between the car and several other youths huddled on the curb. I wouldn't have thought much of him, but the way he lamented, it just stopped me there in the middle of it all. His every feature spoke of agony, his eyes, outstretched arms, his face, everything. And he was saying things like *perché* and *dio mio!* I passed it off as Italian flair thinking he was the owner of the car, but the thought hit me, what if someone had died?

I began to feel bad in earnest and my insides churned and I couldn't help but squint into those flames expecting to see a charred corpse staring at me, or worse, pointing. There is the one who laughs! There! I drew a hand over my eyes to erase the image but it lingered even while I dropped my gaze to the street to make the crowd faceless.

I was aware that over my head that little Renault had become an atmospheric phenomenon, visible from space for all I knew. It seemed then that the entire weight of it settled on me. And the bell tower of the church nearby—the one that always made me dizzy when I stared up at it—rose in the corner of my eye like an accusing witness. Of course, I always felt it accusing me of something, I think that was the idea behind those monoliths in the first place.

I was heading for Bar Milano across the palm-lined piazza. I always took my morning coffee there beneath the white-lettered awning. The bright doorway seemed warm with the waiter framed in it. His cigarette was an orange pinpoint that moved in occasional arcs between his mouth and side, beckoning.

When I was near enough, I told him I'd take a cappuccino

and sat down on a plastic chair at a plastic table. They have nicer tables inside, but I liked the piazza view from beneath the awning. There was a group of youths at another table with leather pants and short skirts. They were thin and had their limbs strewn and dangling about. I wondered if they had been at the apartment below mine and narrowed my eyes at them just in case. None saw me. While I waited I tried to shake the idea that some soul was in that hatchback burning to a finer crisp.

In the piazza a breeze stirred the palms. They shivered and swayed, calling up the fiery dawn. I noticed the pall of smoke had shifted and was drifting high overhead. City workers in orange vests swept the piazza with brooms that looked more like uprooted saplings and behind me in the bar the espresso machine was screaming in a tin frothing pitcher.

Then I noticed another man in the piazza, and I should have gotten up and left the instant I saw him. My intuition told me to but I stayed. He swayed and stepped on panino wrapping paper and puddles of gelato that had coagulated during the night. His hair was black, shoulder length and curly, but his eyes were his strongest feature, dark and sad beneath deep brows.

He stood over me and said, "I am Giuseppe," much like a bloodhound might, his tone was that despondent. He dressed like those at the other table but looked older and several undone buttons showed a gold chain and cross buried in chest hair. I introduced myself and allowed an awkward moment to pass hoping he would leave. He didn't, even after the waiter had brought my cappuccino.

"You have seen the burned car?" He said. I told him I had. I picked up a packet of sugar and stared at it because I didn't like the direction he was taking. He sat down across from me.

"I am sad," he said.

"About the car?" I crossed my legs under the table.

"Si," he said.

"Was it yours?"

"No," he said. He was muttering strange things and looking at the awning. I heard him say Dio and Santo and things like that. He pulled his cross out and clutched it and kissed the fist it was in.

"Do you know the owner?" I said. I had to clear my throat several times and spilled a lot of sugar when I poured it.

Giuseppe said he knew the owner and, holding his temples

with his forefingers, he told me it was his mother's car. I coughed a little. It was worse than owning it himself.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Sorry to hear that, of course." I added that last part so he wouldn't get the wrong idea. My cappuccino was bitter so I reached for another packet of sugar. "And that is why you're sad?"

He said, "I am sorry because it was the car of my mother and also because my mother . . ." He paused there and whispered a little more about Dio and etcetera and then he said, "Because my mother is . . . morta."

I went cold when he said it. Death just affects me that way, no pun intended. I spilled more sugar and clenched my fist around the empty packet hoping I wouldn't need a funnel before it was over. I told him I was so very sorry to hear that. My knee was bouncing under the table, but the real shaking was somewhere in the pit of my belly. I have no pity for misfortunes with property, but with life, especially a mother's, well . . .

He said, "Mamma! Poverina!" and I could have almost joined him in his tears if I hadn't been so busy stirring my coffee and wishing I hadn't laughed at the incineration of a dead woman's car. It could have been Giuseppe's only connection to her! He muttered heavenward, and whether the saints and God were in the awning or up higher didn't matter to me, I only hoped they heard him.

I lost my father when I was a teen and I know that the feelings, even years later, can well up like it happened yesterday, but Giuseppe's grief struck me as fresher than a memory like mine. He seemed to be in that process of learning to accept the death rather than mourning as a long term process. I asked him as gently as I could when his mother had passed away. He didn't answer immediately and I took a sip from my mug.

"Last night," he said.

I choked and spit foam and he buried his head in his arms. His shoulders shook and so did the table so I couldn't set my mug down. When he raised his head his eyes were very red. Redder than weeping should make them, I thought. Inside the bar they must have been making paninos because I smelled onions.

I didn't think much of it at the time because I was too concerned with the only question that remained. I coughed and cleared my throat and couldn't speak much above a whisper but I said, "How

did she die?"

"In the car!" he said and threw his arms up.

"No!" I said. I grabbed my head with both hands.

"Si!" he said. He stood, weeping. "Come! I will show you!"

"No!" I said. But I was standing, too.

"You must come," he told me. He grabbed my arm and drew near, and again I smelled onions where I should have smelled liquor. "For my peace in the heart you must come." And then he said he had told no one but me about this!

That was too much and I yanked my arm away and said, "I don't believe you! I saw the owner of the car already!"

Almost before I had finished speaking he said, "How do you know he was the owner?"

Just as quickly I said, "I don't!"

"Then you must come. My mother is waiting."

The sun was touching the top of the bell tower across the piazza. I considered looking up as we passed it, thinking maybe I would fall over and get a trip to the hospital instead of to visit Giuseppe's charred mother. I was loathe to believe she was really there, but what sort of man would lie about the death of his own mother? This reasoning kept me moving, but I also wanted to know the truth with my own eyes.

The spectators had cleared by the time we arrived. The fire truck was there, no more than a hose reel on a flatbed pickup truck, and two firemen poked around the smoldering shell. I was about to ask if they had put any water on it, but Giuseppe, as if reading my mind, said they hadn't because it would have washed her away. The firefighters stood back while Giuseppe led me near.

"There." He pointed. They had opened the back and I had to shield my face from the heat with both hands while peering through smoke. I didn't see anything at first.

And then I did.

I swallowed hard and stepped nearer while fragments of bone took shape in the ash—part of a skull, a jaw with teeth, a longer section of limb bone—and they were all in a neat pile like they had been dumped there from a bucket. What a tidy lady, I thought. Even in death.

I kept my feet until I caught her eye socket staring at me. My knees gave and my flesh screamed on that hot pavement but she

had endured it and so would I. My mouth must have been open, too, because I could taste burning rubber and upholstery and, somewhere in the acrid mix, I thought I must be tasting the odor of Giuseppe's burning mother.

"Why was she back there?" I said. "Why?" Anger, guilt and sorrow vied for dominance within me.

"She likes cocktails," Giuseppe said. Why did it have to be cocktails? Of all things. The sun was up by then and I could see his long shadow shaking its sad head on the pavement. "She always drank them in the back of her car."

"That's ridiculous!" I said.

"It is her car!" Giuseppe said. "Doesn't she have the right?" His shadow was waving its arms.

"I mean ridiculous because there is no room!" I said. But who was I to criticize the fetish of a senile old woman? The evidence was before me and I could only think about her poor, crisp body as it must have jarred over cobblestones and smashed the sides of the car with every collision. And I had laughed and thought it must have looked like a flaming pinball! I wept like I seldom had in my life and lifted my eyes with the smoke to follow her black path to the heavens.

Barely above a whisper I said, "I'm sorry." I hadn't ever felt so miserable and guilty in my life.

"Sorry for my mother?" Giuseppe said. The shadow of his head was near me and his voice was tender.

"I'm sorry because I didn't see anyone in the car!" I said. I looked at the bell tower in full sunlight and let the tears find their way through my beard. Giuseppe's shadow stood upright and I saw its hand bring something to its head. Then, the crackle of a radio and his even, sober voice.

"Abbiamo un confessione."

We have a confession.

As they took me away Giuseppe stopped us. "Do not feel so bad," he said. "You are not a murderer. The body in the car died long ago and was cremated."

I couldn't speak even though my mouth was open so they put me in the car, but he stuck his head in before they shut the door. His face looked bright and clever, I expected him to smile, but he didn't. In his hand I saw a broom, a dustpan and a bucket.

"Just so you know," he said. "It was my mother."

And he shut the door.

Standing. Walking to cabinet.

How did I get out of it? Smiling. Well, it wasn't immediate, but let's just say I have always included myself in certain social circles . . . Taking bottle from cabinet. Half full. I rented this new apartment for a specific reason. It isn't where I usually stay, and after today I may never return to this town or country . . . Smiling. Popping cork. Inserting cloth. Today is much like the morning I just recounted. Once again I have cause to mix a cocktail . . . Reinserting cork. Cloth hanging outside bottle.

One Signor Giuseppe happens to live downstairs. Placing luggage near door. He happens to have just gone out. Placing tickets in pocket. His car, with an open sunroof, happens to be just outside. Walking to window with bottle.

My cocktails work . . . Lighting match. Lighting cloth. Like this.

A Pair of Painter Hands

Emily Ryujin

The heat came in through the rolled down windows the summer I drove to Eden with my brother Sebastian. It settled around our heads like halos and we excused our blunderings, blaming it on the dry wild grasses.

We were gypsies, my brother and I. It was a choice he made, and it was out of total devotion to him that I followed. In those early times we wandered from place to place, finding fairs and contests for Sebastian. We slept in our run-down Jeep Cherokee or at the homes of women he'd charm and seduce for some warm soup, a warm bed and a shower. He was a painter.

I didn't expect to stay in Eden long, although the name was hopeful enough and I was becoming restless. Half of the time I longed for roots to take hold of my feet and plant me in the ground. I wanted steadiness, something familiar. The rest of the time I looked for birds to teach me how to fly away. It wouldn't have mattered at all if I could have followed Sebastian always, but greatness is fleeting and impossible to cage.

Eden was the most unlikely of places to put on hold our transitory ways, but the people liked my brother and believed in God's service. The countryside was full of lonely families and Sebastian traded portraits and excitement for a room with a window. I wanted so much to be an artist like my brother. I'd steal scraps of paper or thrown away drawings and draw the birds and trees. I'd draw how the mountains looked at mid-day or anything else I noticed, right over his drawings of the wife or the family dog. I didn't want Sebastian to feel obligated to teach me so I tried to keep it from him. One day he found me sitting on some large rocks drawing a sunflower patch.

"God Lu, is this what you run off to do all the time?" He took the drawing out of my hand. I looked down at the charcoals in my hands; I'd stolen them from his bag.

My face flushed; my jaw clenched, "I'm sorry Sebastian."

"What could you be sorry about?" He looked out at the sun-

flowers, noticing how the sun made the deep shadows on the trees, how it kissed the petals with light and warm values. He looked back at the drawing and smiled, "And Mrs. Brown looks much better with a sunflower growing out of her head."

After that he was generous with his supplies. We'd draw each other drawing each other. Mine were not very good though, even after some time. And suddenly I didn't draw or paint anymore. I'd sit for hours staring out the small window that overlooked a grove of willow trees. I was withdrawing into the shadows of those trees; I was living in the crevices, making myself small. He continued to draw and paint me when I became that way. Sebastian tried to find the place I went to; looking for it in my eyes, in the way my lips protruded out, in the way my eyebrows shifted.

"Where do you go?" He asked after a long sitting one day.

"Sebastian." And I looked at him, a blurred figure. His dark hair blended with his eyes, his clothes, and his arms that were reaching out toward me. He was just a daze. I was crying; tears, tears, like an unexpected drip. "The question is too big for me and I'm giving it up."

"The question?"

"Yes, why paint? It's too big for me."

Sebastian took me by shoulders gently and looked into my eyes. We could have been twins, although he was five years older and stronger and more beautiful.

"Maybe it's not big enough. Not only must you ask yourself, why paint? You must also ask yourself, why write stories? Why play instruments and sing and dance? Why breathe and wake each day? It is all the same question. Then the answer becomes obvious."

"But it can't be that easy, can it? It would be because we must, to survive?"

"Not just survive Lulu, to live! And there's nothing easy about that."

"If you never picked up a brush again, you'd live still."

Sebastian said, "But what about my soul? My soul would shrivel up and my insides would turn black and my brain would suffocate," he was smiling, "and that is why I must keep painting."

"Well that is why you are so good then, your life depends on it," I said solemnly.

"I only need three things in life. You, painting, and my coun-

try lovers.”

I started to laugh.

“What does your soul need Lu?” He asked and he was serious again. I couldn’t think of an answer.

Gone. Gone, but I remembered him so clearly now as I walked into the gallery. It was a small enclosure of a room. The walls were white, the lights on the ceiling shone on four large canvases. I stood in front of the painting titled, “The Tree Woman”. It was a portrait of a redhead from the shoulders up. Her long hair melted into the branches of the tree, or the branches melted into her hair. Either way, they existed in a seamless way with leaves in thick greens and yellows and oranges. The colors of a fall morning that fades with the heat; burning the colors, turning them to ash. Her complexion was fair and she had intense green eyes. They were muddied in the center like little specks of golden fog. Her expression was sullen and veins of the earth in blue and green flowed through her face beginning at her chin and reaching toward her hairline.

I was in fact the woman in the painting. I shared her old eyes. Sebastian said I had them ever since I was a baby, like I already knew too much of the world and that’s why I cried so much. I had the same full lips and the same temperament. I wondered why he had turned me into “The Tree Woman”. Was it because like trees my moods changed with the seasons, becoming dark with the uncomfortable heat and darker with the unbearable cold? Or had he somehow known my thoughts as I used to stare at the trees in Eden?

A man approached the painting, standing beside me. He was very tall and he wore jeans and a button up flannel shirt. His thick dark hair partially covered his eyes and occasionally he moved his head to one side as if he had a song turning in his ears. The man seemed deep in thought but I could sense that his attention was not focused on the painting. Finally he spoke, “Excuse me, but are you a model? This is you isn’t?”

I looked at the man and then looked at the canvas. In the low right corner was the signature of Sebastian Tallow. I looked at the woman again; I saw those eyes every time I looked into a mirror.

“I’m a painter.”

“You must have known him though.”

“Yes, I did.”

“He was incredible,” he moved close to the painting, “how

did he communicate such grief? I wonder, was it your grief or his own?"

I stood with my hands against my stomach, I pulled at my fingers and picked at some dried paint that had burrowed in the creases of my fingernails, "Perhaps it was shared between us."

"Michel Alexander, I'm a painter as well." He said and he held out his hand.

"Lulu Tallow, Sebastian was my brother." I took his hand in mine and lingered there a moment.

As a mediocre painter, I have great company. That does not comfort me. I'd trade anything for a pair of painter hands. They're something you're born with, I think. Sebastian had them, and I coveted his long slender fingers; the way he held a brush. It doesn't matter why he is gone, only that he did not leave his hands for me.

Michel's hands were large and strong. I wanted to see his work immediately and wondered where he was going.

The Altar Man

Kenny Higgs

Married to the silence and loneliness of the altar, which love has never come, but left nonetheless, the altar man stands a silent stillness in the echoes of peace as he dreams of the once love which never seemed to find him, but never left his mind. The details of his love depart from his view and separates the real from the mundanely serene, and hope fills his soul as his thoughts stir in remembrance of former loves never coming, but never leaving.

A man walks with a serpentine staff twisted under the pressure of Hawthorne, which guides him through the murky forest of confusion. His shirt is brightly colored and appears to have been thrown on from a flower's tears, which sink through his soul without repose in his emotionless heart. Fitzgerald brings this shame. His lonely heart feels no mercy, but desperately seeks the mercy from those who are outside the tree leaves in a pleasant café. He cannot hear, but doesn't need to—his mind knows too well what Hemingway has in store. He turns on heel to face his hate and sees the figure of darkness lifted by light to arouse the questions of innocence associated with the lips of Bambara. His movement is purposeful and his stillness a curse towards the same, inevitable fate. He waits for the time of death to define his time of life and strikes in a moment of anxiety. His disturbing happiness deriving from his cruel obsession for stillness forces the movement in his own life. The heart of his tempter ever beating from under a room of Poe's delight. The hands which grasp his coat and wrench the staff are dry and worn, figureless to the passersby, but holding more meaning than the hope that conceals the hate of the same people. His robe is not for warmth, since none is ever felt, and the fire of passion dissolves those caught in it to destruction. His robe is there for ice, ever clinging to his body, without relent to his terrible curse, and Frost defines his destruction twice over, for fire is never felt and ice is always destroying. So is with his robe a destruction of passion and gatherer of hate. But on his feet is shod the light which holds up the darkness above, and supplies the questions of hate to another,

robed figure, grasping a staff in a passing glance of fear.

The altar man sees this man as he stands at the altar, married to silence and loneliness, and turns to meet him. How his bones creak and crack at the movement so long forgotten in his placement of hate! But his turning only wakes his determined mind and revitalizes his committed heart to quite the room and soften the motions of time.

He faces the enemy who invades his ceremony of life and sees the robe, staff, heart, hands, feet, and soul of the robe before him. All but his face are viewed, but the face is not important. He stares into the empty hood of darkness and commands the robe to depart from this place that he may enjoy his bride with peace. The robe just stares and remains motionless. And just as the blood is boiling and the temperature rises in the face of the altar man, the place is seen in which he looks. He stares not into a procession of empty chairs, or a doorway with festive décor streaming down, he stares into a large reflection of the bridegroom. The face is unimportant, for it is his own. The two sides of his life, separated by an invisible layer of choice, beckons each to leave that their conflict might be resolved. The man at the altar is dressed in white, but yields dark shoes, and has a warmth of determination about him that rises to anger on frequent occasions. His death shall be by fire, his reflection shall be by ice. And thus Frost has his answer, as the two stare into the oblivion in which each exists.

The altar man stands in light, with the company of peace at his aid, the robed man wanders in darkness with hate in his hands. Continually facing each other, disturbing their purposes and commitment, but always separated by the value of choice. Thus they exist forever, determined to outlive the other and remain in their splendor of satisfactory peace, or hate.

Such is the dilemma of a choice. Such is the purpose of mourning. Such is the separation from a naïve waiter to a deaf, old man. Such is the war which never ceases in the confusing forest of darkness and witch gatherings. Such is the lost taste for health at the sight of a lone, pink ribbon. Such is the confusing, audacious conflict between the altar man and the robed man.

Where can such a man exist in his relentless purpose for satisfaction that each exist simultaneously apart? Such a place is here. For, such . . . is my mind.

Chainsaw Massacre

Cheyney Wheelwright

At the sound of the truck's engine, Vesta moves to the rear porch, taking position for another skirmish. It's been a long war, but she is determined that her cause is just. Far from battle weary, she looks forward to the fight, just as she has every day for the past month.

The battlefield is the property bordering her backyard—a farm since the days of her childhood. It recently sold to a developer. Her tranquil view of the cottonwoods along the river, the crowds of birds in the trees, the peaceful green of the fields, and an old three-tiered hay barn will be replaced by condominiums before summer's end.

Vesta has learned how to take care of herself in her many years as a widow. She's made countless transitions in the name of progress—uses a debit card and writes e-mail messages to her granddaughter. Most townspeople call the new condominiums “progress.” But certain things she's not buying.

She'll never be comfortable wearing jeans, and is half convinced that cell phones cause cancer. She's entirely convinced that condominiums in her backyard are an evil not to be tolerated. It's time to stand up, to be a voice for the trees, a spokeswoman for the green spaces. Someone needs to save the old barn and its history before there's nothing left.

That's why she'll stand here, every day if necessary. From her doorway, she watches the truck pull up next to the barn. There he is, emerging from the driver's seat—a young teen-aged boy with a shock of red hair. Ah, there you are, Red. What will you try to destroy today?

She makes sure that he can see her; wants him to know that she's watching every move. This is war, and intimidation is key. Her frown deepens when he flashes a smile and waves a hand in greeting. Don't try to sweeten me up, Red.

He doesn't know her name, and doesn't care to learn it. In the meantime, he's assigned her a moniker – Pink Robe—in honor of her

favorite attire. Like clockwork, she appears in her doorway, frowning and stock-still, an angry pink statue. It's only Monday, the beginning of another workweek. He wonders, as he dons his work gloves, just what that crazy old lady has in store for him over the next five days.

Last week, she was particularly feisty. She locked the gate with an old bike chain, and hid his hammer and crowbar in the long weeds. Somehow, she figured out that his boss left instructions for him on notepaper under the tractor seat, and they disappeared—along with yard signs announcing the new development.

That wasn't all, not by a long shot. She was constantly watching, taking notes in a small hand-held notebook. Even now, she was scribbling away as he unloaded the tools from the back of the truck. I don't know what you're up to, Pink Robe. Sure enough isn't poetry. Maybe it's a grocery list? Info for the FBI? An article on demolition? Screenplay? In any case, you're gonna love what I've got for you today. You're gonna have writer's cramp.

The boss's instructions are clear. Take down the old barn by Friday. This is what he's been looking forward to. He'd cleared out the old fence weeks ago; had moved rocks and rusted farm equipment. The trees will have to go, but he is saving them for last. The barn is old—two stories and a hayloft above. It will make a terrific crash when he pulls it down with the tractor. The sound will probably knock Pink Robe right over.

Vesta notes the date and the time in her notebook. She also notes the equipment being used, but pauses when Red pulls out a chainsaw. This is the day she has been dreading, the day when her beloved trees are killed in cold blood— to be replaced by brick, mortar, and concrete. The time for action is now. She charges out the door, letting the screen door slap closed with a sound like rifle fire. I'll tell him how it is. I'll hit him where it hurts.

He sees her out of the corner of his eye, a pink shimmer in the hot afternoon sun. He's surprised she's left her sanctuary, but then he notes the look in her eye. Casually, he moves the chainsaw between them. She's breathing heavily, her lips pinched together in a tight line. "Those aren't your trees," she says, eyeing the chainsaw.

He knows she wants to say more, but perhaps she has forgotten the words. Old people are sometimes like that. "They aren't your trees, either," he replies. He has sisters; he knows how to argue. He can tell by her face that he's already won—she's losing control of her

temper.

I'll make him worry about something he cares about. Silly, stupid, destructive boy. Vesta draws herself upright, prepares herself mentally. "You listen to me, Red. You so much as touch any one of those trees, I'll cut off your parts." She blinks. Did I just say that? His parts?

"My parts? Are you serious?" To her horror, he begins to laugh. "Whatever you say, lady." He turns his back on her to retrieve the gas can. Her glorious charge is ruined. She retreats quickly to the house, horrified at her behavior and his laughter. She feels dirty—wants to take a bath. Sometimes war is like that.

He chuckles as he walks the interior of the barn, planning his destruction. It's hard to take threats seriously when you're 17 and being bullied by an 80-year-old woman in a nappy pink robe. I'll tell the boss I need a bodyguard before I touch those trees, for sure. I don't get paid enough to fight off old women.

Vesta's heart is pounding when Red emerges from the barn. He looks in her direction, then with exaggerated movements pull-starts the chainsaw. He drops his sunglasses into place, revs the throttle a few times, and gives her a thumbs-up signal. She watches helplessly as he kicks the barn door open and moves inside, out of sight. Stupid boy. Only likes destroying things. He ought to be spanked.

Once inside, he touches the chainsaw to every other post, cutting halfway through each to make sure he won't have to come inside again. With the support system weakened, he will easily pull the barn over using the tractor and chain. As he finishes with the last post, his eyes fall on the heavy center poles. Surely, this is a problem. There are two; one ought to do the trick. The saw eats through half the pole in a matter of seconds. He steps back, leans against a side beam in order to survey his work. With a sigh, the barn crashes in on top of him.

Vesta feels the noise as a concussion in her chest, watches as a column of dust and debris rises up in place of the barn. Without taking her eyes from the scene, she reaches for the phone, dials 911, yells at the operator, "I just saw a man die!" The battle is over. She has won, but there is little glory in victory.

She's still clutching the phone when he pulls himself from the wreckage. Through a cloud of choking dust, she's the first thing he sees—a pink apparition at the end of a tunnel. Either it's a miracle,

and I'm alive—or Pink Robe really is from Hell. Could I be that lucky? He limps to the back of the truck, checks for broken bones and blood. Miraculously, everything appears to be in order.

Suddenly, Pink Robe is at his elbow with her pen and notebook. "You're alive," she stammers. "I just called 911 and told them you're dead. I can't believe it! Are you OK?"

Write this down, Pink Robe. "It appears so. You better call them back... tell them everything's all right. I survived... I'm alive," he says, flashing her a pained grin. "And at least for now, I've still got all my parts."

Jet Star Bit my Mullet

Jeff Zivcovic

It was the early 90's and I was ten-years-old, so you can't hold it against me if I had a mullet. I also had a bright red nose from a pimple that needed popping. I also had an obsession with Aerosmith.

It was the first year I was tall enough to ride the big rides, and for me, that was a year later than most of my class. I was supposed to like these higher, faster, dangerous-er rides, so I leaned against my seatbelt, held up my fists, and yelled, "C'mon. Let's go." When the chain caught the belly of our car I immediately dropped my fists to clutch a deathgrip on the sides. The coaster began with an upward spiral to bring us to the first drop. I tried to think about anything besides an important bolt rattling out of place when we were upside-down, the loop snapping in half, plummeting to the bottom, breaking our necks in the rungs, and the next car rear-ending us and smearing us like paint. I smelled oil and hoped that was normal.

Our coaster car fit four people in two single-file seats. Mike and I were in the front seat—I was basically sitting in his lap. After only one lap up the spiral and my shirt and my mullet were already sponging up Mike's stinky sweat. It was just after noon and the sun was angry like the one in Super Mario Bros. 3 that dives down at you. Mike said the same thing in line for the Jet Star that he did for the Screamer, "I need to sit behind you since I'm taller. It's for safety."

That fartknocker wasn't even taller than me by a whole inch. But Grandma Z said, "Ohh, that's a good point."

And so I was in the very front as our car poked its nose over the edge of the cliff, giving us a bird's-eye-view of the path it was about to rush us through—all the beams and bolts and brackets. Grandma Z was tiny, waving at us, but I didn't dare wave back.

"Don't forget to scream," Mike yelled at my mullet.

We dropped. I couldn't scream; I'd sucked in all my breath. But I could hear Mike though, his wide-open mouth louder than wheels crashing down rails. "Holy flippin craaaaaaaap."

We dove into a short valley and turned right back up, sharp.

Mike's head whiplashed against his headrest. Mine, against Mike's face. There was a spark in my neck and the back of my head like when somebody punches you on Double Dragon, but I'd already forgotten the sting a second later when we crested the next hill. The rushing wind pulled watery noodles from my eyes. Butterflies were playing Super Contra in my stomach.

Mike didn't scream anymore after that first drop, but I didn't realize that until the end. We slammed to a stop; there was a metal screech, a hydraulic hiss, and then Mike wailing behind me, one long continuous exhale. The ride operator girl came running towards us. I smiled at her because she was hot but suddenly she threw my seat-belt off and yanked me out by my arm. Grandma Z came marching towards us, her hands over her mouth in shock, "Oh dear, what happened?"

I took the cue that I was supposed to be concerned, "Yeah Mike, whassa matter?"

But really, I didn't care. I was rubbing the back of my own stinging head. My hair was matted and wet around the bull's-eye of my cowlick and when I pulled my hand away, it was sticky with blood. Mike's stupid chin must've cut me. My fingers strayed back to my head wound on their own and discovered a solid chunk—a scab. I tugged at Grandma's elbow. "Hey Grandma, look what happened."

But Grandma and the hot rides girl were busy helping Mike crawl out of the car. He was still wailing. This snotty ribbon of blood draped over his chin and swung in the air, stretched halfway to the ground, then stuck on his t-shirt. The ladies tilted his head back to examine his mouth. His teeth were solid red but you could still see they weren't all there. He'd started the day with only one incisor missing and now that gap was about two teeth wider.

An EMT arrived and barked questions at Mike about his teeth. Mike was bawling hard so you couldn't tell if he was speaking in English or Bassett Hound, but the EMT eventually gathered that the canine—Mike called it his vampire tooth—was a baby tooth, already loose. That tooth was easy to find: Mr. EMT noticed it stuck to the fly of Mike's shorts. The one we couldn't find was his front tooth. That one was a permanent.

"Hey!" the EMT yelled to my rides girl, "shut this ride down right now! We gotta find this kid's tooth if we're gonna reattach it." He turned back to Mike. "Where did this happen at?"

Mike started howling again so I answered for him, "Right at the bottom of the first drop." Then I explained, "You need to put the tooth in some milk until we can get to a dentist." That's something I'd learned from a cartoon dinosaur. I was incredibly excited that something I heard about on TV was actually happening.

Mr. EMT patted Mike hard on the shoulder, "Don't worry, cowboy. We'll find your tooth."

There were five employees of Lagoon Amusement Park out there, crawling through the steel haystack for the toothy needle. Rides Girl was on top of the track, climbing that deadly first hill like a ladder, poking in the corners made by the rungs. Why was Mike getting all the special treatment? I got hurt just as bad as that jerk. I pictured myself standing on the track with rides girl to show her my wound and her being uncontrollably impressed by how tough I was. I told her, "That's nothing," and put her on my back and we ran through the whole course on foot.

Mike had his hands clamped over his mouth. He'd finally stopped wailing but tears were streaming down over his hands. He fidgeted and stomped in place. I didn't know if that's because his mouth hurt or because he was so nervous about whether they'd find his stupid tooth.

I asked, "Do you really think they'll find it?"

With the ride not crashing around, the place was creepy quiet.

"Oh dear, oh dear," Grandma Z said, "we'll have to trust that the Lord will take care of us on this one. I wouldn't blame your parents if they didn't let me take you again."

They looked for the tooth for probably fifteen minutes. Mr. EMT explained to Grandma that they could keep searching if she wanted them to, but there was almost no chance of finding it and it was still important to get Mike to a dentist soon. "I'm sorry," he told her, "but cowboy here is just going to have to get a false tooth."

Mike started wailing again.

I sniffed the air. Cotton candy. I wondered when would be a good time to ask Grandma if she'd buy me some. Mr. EMT was still explaining stuff to her, something about signing some accident reports before we left, but I was done listening by then. I was lost in a hair-follicle forest, fiddling with my head wound. I have to be honest; I was actually kind of excited about having such a huge scab.

The only thing more satisfying than a good scab-picking was finding all the hearts on *The Legend of Zelda*. But with this scab, I couldn't manage to get my fingernail under the edge. How had it dried so fast? And why was it so smooth? I pinched it with finger and thumb like tweezers and it squelched as I uprooted it. I held it in front of my eyes to examine.

"Holy shit!" the EMT shouted. He snatched Mike's tooth out of my hand. Flat and square, chipped off at the root. It was covered in gunk that used to be either my head or Mike's mouth.

I read a *Highlights* magazine in the waiting room at the dentist's office. The dentist told Grandma it was a good thing we kept the tooth moist with blood.

Mike came out, pouty-faced, wearing a stupid retainer that he'd have to keep in for a month until his tooth grew back into place. He couldn't eat anything too tough in that time. I decided I didn't mind being short.

Promise

Scott Tuckfield

A bright flash of adrenaline whites out your vision for a millisecond as your body hits the cold asphalt. You vaguely register the snapping sound of bone breaking. It will turn out that it was the snapping sound of 13 bones breaking—femur, epitrochlea, both clavicals, ilium, a lumbar vertebra, the zygomatic arch in your face, and six ribs, all cleanly snapping like dry sticks—but at this point you're not even sure what's happened.

Your breath steams out of your mouth in a sharp burst as the other car speeds off into the night. Drunk or just scared, you'll never know. The road feels like frozen sandpaper. The wheels of your car are still spinning, your car that's now resting upside-down on a frost-bitten slope somewhere along the dark and lonely expanse of Highway 84. The sound of the other car fades into nothing. Now all you can hear is the beating of your own heart.

Reality comes back into reluctant focus. Pain. Blood. Tears. Snot. Bent metal. Oh my God. Son of a bitch. Just drove off. Dear God. He just drove off. Dear Jesus. Son of a bitch just drove off.

As the 8 degree night air starts your flesh to shaking and as the blood seeping out of your ear and crumpled face hardens into red ice crystals on the pavement, one thought creeps into your mind. And won't leave.

That was the last thing you said to her. Dear sweet Jesus, that was the last thing you said to her.

Blurry flashes of the night stream through your head like a highlight reel, cut and edited with all the pleasant, unimportant stuff left out. You remember that hurt look in her eyes. The tears that welled up but that she was too stubborn to let roll down her cheeks. The way you tried to act like none of it hurt. Tough, proud, and stupid. Both of you.

The blood in your mouth tastes the way drowning in liquid copper must taste. Oddly enough, you think of the wine you shared with her over dinner last Saturday. When everything was perfect. She

wore that black dress you like so much.

The pleasant evening is pushed out of your mind by the memory highlight reel of 45 minutes ago. And by the fact that you're beginning to feel your broken femur. At first it just feels like your leg's the size of an oil barrel. Weird pressure all throughout your thigh. When you manage to actually focus your eyes on your leg, you see the glistening bone sticking through your shredded pant leg. Like a candy cane sucked into a sharp white spike.

That's when the pain hits. That's when you feel the unhinged bone shards shifting around in your quadricep fiber. The massive, breaking waves of ache flooding over everything. Nausea. A threat of fainting. Tears stream down your bloody, broken cheeks, but it hurts too much to make a crying sound. Incredible, indescribable pain.

It occurs to you briefly that you probably deserve this.

There had been a fight. Through the overwhelming pain, you can register that much. There had been a fight. Another little spat. Something stupid. Something needless. And you left. For some reason.

And then you got shattered by a car.

What had been said? What had it even been about? Your splintered cheekbone comes into awareness. So this is what it feels like to break your face. Huh. Teeth wiggle around loosely in the pulp inside of your mouth. You feebly spit out a mouthful of dark, sticky blood and whine like a small dog. It wouldn't be so bad if you could get rid of this regret swirling around in your stomach. It wouldn't be so bad then. But you can't. So it is.

You just seem to like your friends more than me, she said. Why don't you go with your friends instead, she said with a sneer. Don't worry about me sitting at home alone, she said, I'll be fucking fine.

So you forgot that you had made her a promise. Not a huge promise, simply that you'd spend tonight with her and wait until tomorrow to see your buddies. And you forgot. Not the end of the world.

Your eyes widen as you hear the distant sound of an oncoming car. In the distance, headlights appear over the horizon. Oh my God. Someone else on this God-forsaken highway. Your heart speeds up. Hope. Finally, a bit of hope.

The car drives by without even slowing down. Did they not

see you, or did they just do what you would've done, and assume it was somebody else's problem?

No. No, don't leave. Don't leave. For the love of God, come back. Please, just come back.

Was that what she was thinking when you stormed out like an idiot? Probably. Karma once again spitting in your face.

You were sorry you had forgotten. You really were. You weren't a monster, after all. But she had called you an idiot. Stupid, she called you. Because you made a mistake. That must have been towards the beginning of the fight.

No, I didn't mean that, she said. I was just hurt and insulted, I swear to God. I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't have said that. She said.

Shut up, you said. Why should I have to put up with this shit, you said. Because your feelings were hurt. Because she had called you stupid in a moment of weakness. Real big man you are.

You were in control, damnit. You were strong. You weren't going to take that. You weren't going to cave and let that slide. You were strong. Like a man should be. So you said have a nice fucking night and stormed off. Like a child. Like a crying kid on a playground. Because you were strong.

It never even crossed either of your minds to say, this is ridiculous. Let's fix this. Tough, proud, and stupid. Both of you.

No, that would be weak. Far better to hurt like hell inside and ruin a night and hurt the woman you love than to be weak.

Far better to be right than to be happy.

Have a nice fucking night.

You said it to hurt her. That was the only reason you said it. To hurt her.

And now you're dying alone on the side of an empty road. You're lying there like a fetus, too hurt to move, hoping another car will drive by. You're crumpled there in a pile like a piece of broken pottery, wondering why this, of all nights, had to be the night you died. You're dying there, thinking of how easy it would've been to avoid this.

You could be falling asleep in her arms right now. You could be whispering, I'm sorry, into her ear. She'd probably whisper, it's okay, I'm sorry I said those horrible things. Or something. Who the fuck knows. But you sure as hell wouldn't be here.

Promise you'll do things differently if you get out of this one. Promise, and don't forget this time. This one's too important to forget.

Such a waste.

You clench your eyes shut but tears stream out anyway.

You loved her. You loved her. So. Damn. Much.

Apparently not enough to swallow your pride, though

Well, sonny boy,

Have a nice fucking night.

The Fly

Ryan Sherman

The fly lurched from its perch into empty space, plunging forward into a blurry universe that reflected in its multi-surfaced, greedy stare. This universe was the front room of Mr. and Mrs. Hampton of 475 Backston Street, who at this moment were doing completely different things. Mr. Hampton was at the kitchen table, hunched over a model airplane aviation manual. Despite his enthusiasm and long-time commitment, he was in fact terrible at this particular lifelong passion, and had a long history of climbing up trees and struggling over backyard fences. On the other hand, he had, since graduating from the local community college, become a moderately successful accountant—had indeed done quite well for himself and his wife in their small town.

Mrs. Hampton, a flabby woman with a fleshy face and grey sweats, was impatiently channel-surfing on a muted screen, with her bag of puffy Cheetos, kicking her legs up and down one-by-one as she waited for her favorite television program to come on. The only other sounds were the wrinkling of her Cheeto bag and the crunching into of soft orange.

The front room in which she sat on the sheet-covered couch was dimly lit with yellow light, and was dominated by a large window that spanned most the wall behind her, reflecting back the front room on its lucid black surface. The wall of fluid-like glass seemed to dwarfed the room, making Mrs. Hampton appear to be simply another domestic item, on which a massive outside world was peering down upon.

The only company in the Hampton household tonight was a housefly, who had just landed upon a delightfully cheesy surface, and was now sanding up on its hind legs as it picked up a cheesy crumb and spewed out preparatory saliva as it spun it into a cheesy mush ball with its front legs. Mrs. Hampton, prompted by a tickle, instinctually waved her hand, and the insect was flung back into a zig-zag buzzy flight around her pony tail.

“Daaarryl!” she said loudly, straining her neck around one

way, and then the other, attempting to glimpse the pest.

"Daaarry!!?" She said louder still, her small eyes darting, desperately trying to follow the buzzing.

"DARRYL!"

"What is it honey?" Daryl called indifferently from the kitchen.

"Gaw-dammit Daryl! Come here!"

"Just a second babe," he answered.

After a few moments of not-hearing wood legs pushing across linoleum, she glared in the direction of the kitchen and screamed again, "DARYL! Quit ignorin' me, Daryl! Daryl! A fly Daryl! A filthy fly! Get off your ass. Bring the swatter!"

"Coming darling."

A few moments later Daryl entered the room. A well built, but slightly bulgy man, with the signs of middle age subtle but clearly visible. He was holding a fly swatter in his hand. "Where is it?" He asked gently looking down wearily at his squirming wife.

"Daryl! Don't ask stupid questions," she answered, swatting indiscriminately in all directions with her short arms. "Kill it."

Daryl moved closer, waving his forearm a few times in the air above her head. "Come on Daryl," she said. "Put a little effort in it, will you?"

"Alright honey," he said with a sigh.

"Here," she said, after a few more unenthusiastic waves. "Give it to me."

"No, no. I can do it. You just relax there baby," he answered, holding the fly swatter out of her reach.

"Look. Just give it to me."

"No, no, no. Don't be silly. Look. Your program's starting. I'll take care of it."

"Let me have it," lifting her self up with one hand, and straining toward the swatter with the other, "Just let me....have it."

"Don't worry about it." Daryl said, stepping back, now watching her wriggle beneath him. She stopped suddenly, and they looked at each other for a few moments without speaking, suddenly oblivious to the buzzing fly between them.

Mrs. Hampton said quietly and stubbornly, "Stop looking at me." He didn't appear to hear and continued staring at her without expression. She lowered her head slightly, and opened her eyes a little

wider. "Daryl. Stop." The buzzing suddenly ceased, and the in the now conspicuous silence, Mr. Hampton saw that the fly had landed on his wife's forehead. In a flash, his fly swatter arched high in the air, and smacked down quite hard on his wife's wide-eyed face.

"AHHHHHHHHHHH!!" She squealed, jumping to the floor, peering cross-eyed up at the large a squashed fly in the middle of her forehead.

Daryl looked shocked for a moment, and his wide eyes moved to the swatter in his hand. "Oh my God honey. I'm sorry! I'm so sorry. It was an accident. Pure reflex. Oh, I'm so sorry! God. Let me get a napkin or something. Just a sec." And he escaped into the kitchen, leaving his wife now standing motionless, still peering up, with a horrified expression on her face while a large white rectangle was now reddening and becoming visible. Mr. Hampton reentered the room with a paper-towel, a cloth, and a bar of soap, and moved closer to his wife. "Here. Sit down," he said, gently nudging her onto the couch. Once they were both sitting down he wiped the burst insect corpse from her forehead with the paper towel, then rubbed the spot with the damp cloth for a moment before switching to the soap, and then back to the cloth. When he was finished he kissed her forehead, and then he said, "I'm sorry honey. At least we got that damn fly finally. Teamwork, eh?" he said, attempting a smile. She didn't speak and just looked back at him. He looked down quickly, and then suddenly stood up and said, "Let me throw this away really fast. I'll be right back."

He was gone for a few minutes, and could be heard moving about in the kitchen, opening and closing drawers and cupboards. When he came returned his wife had resumed Cheeto eating, and had turned up the volume on the TV.

"You alright baby?" He asked fidgeting.

She was quiet a minute before answering. "Yes. Fine. Could you get me a Coke while your up."

"Sure," he answered, moving into the kitchen and returning a moment later with a can of Coke. "Here you go," he said, holding the can out as he popped it open with his index finger.

"Thank-you," she answered without looking up.

Mr. Hampton looked down at her for another moment, then shifted his gaze to the reflection in the large black window behind the couch. He stepped closer, trying to make out the street beyond. A car drove past, it's headlights silhouetting the trunk of the oak tree

in their yard, before once again plunging the outside into darkness, turning the black surface back into a shadowy mirror. Mr. Hampton's hand moved slowly up to the wall light switch next to him, and the room suddenly went dark, opening up the night outside.

"Daryl. What'd you turn out the lights of for?" His wife asked distractedly after a few moments, without taking her eyes off the screen.

He seemed not to hear, and looked up at the stars in the moonless sky for a few moments and sighed, with a blue-flicker on his face from the reflection of the tv.

It was the sigh that made Mrs. Hampton turn. She looked up at him, and remained looking for a few moments before looking back down at the Cheetos and soda in her hands. Suddenly she threw the Cheetos on the floor and stood up resolutely switching the TV off with the remote control. The window was now completely clear, allowing Darryl to see clearly the starry sky spreading out around the silhouette of the oak tree. Almost immediately, he became nervous and stepped back from the window, switching the light back on.

"What are you doing Daryl? I was just about to come stand next to you."

"It's cold over here." He answered, rubbing his shoulders. "What about your program, baby?" Daryl said quickly. "Your Cheetos. Here let me get those for you."

"No thanks," she answered, but when he didn't stop, she said, "No! I don't want Cheetos." He hesitated for a moment, and picked them up anyway. "I'll have some then. What were watching? It sounded funny." Daryl plopped down on the couch, picked up the remote, and switched the T.V. back on. "Oh yes. I like this show. Come sit back down baby. Can I have a sip of your coke? Thanks." She sat back down, and he put his arm around her. After a few minutes she reached her hand back into the Cheeto bag as leaned her head on her husband's chest. Presently the program ended, and Daryl stood up.

Mrs. Hampton said, "It comes on again, baby. They put two on in a row on Wednesdays. Every Wednesday."

"Oh. That's alright," he answered, glancing at the kitchen door. "I think I'll finish up my reading and go to bed if it's all the same to you. Here. Let me throw those away for you." He grabbed the now-empty can and Cheeto bag, and walking back into the kitchen. She watched him go, then looked back at the television, and turned

up the volume a little. Meanwhile, Daryl pushed open the back screen door and tossed the can and bag into the garbage can that sat next to their back porch. He looked back up at the stars a moment before hurrying back into the house, closing the sliding screen door behind him. But just before the door shut completely, a fly, drawn to the yellow light, darted in and began lurching hungrily through the empty space.

Not Horses, Nor Men

Clayton Gerrard

"I sold my soul today."

"Oh, yeah? How did that go?"

"Good."

He turned another page of his newspaper. All she could see of him were his fingers around the edges.

"Did you hear me?" she said.

"Yes. You sold your soul today, and it went well."

"Do you want to hear what I sold it for?"

"Damn. The NASDAQ dropped again. Remind me to call William."

"I sold it for sex."

"Another Google buy out. There's a corporation with too much money."

"Did you hear me?" she said.

"You sold your soul."

"For sex."

"With whom?" he asked. "I hope it was someone famous. Maybe you could cry wolf and sue him for rape."

"You don't even care, do you?"

"Not really."

"I sold my soul. I had an affair. And you don't care."

He lowered the paper to look at her. His glasses, low on his nose as he peered over them, dissected his angular face. It was old, that face, with deep wrinkles on brow and cheeks. Crows feet dug into his temples like the cracked surface of a dry river bed. He was handsome, though, in a sturdy way, as though no matter the gale it would be weathered. His dark eyes, although glaring at her sharply, had a gentle but firm quality that she had liked so much all those years ago. The only thing that detracted from his seriousness at that moment was the red and green flannel robe he wore, open in a V to his sternum where curly gray hairs spilled through. Toe robe was faded, and threadbare. But still here and here to stay, she thought, equating

the robe to him. She had purchased it for him as a Christmas gift in 1983 when Elizabeth was fourteen and little Richie was only eight. Initially, he had been disdainful of the robe, but their children had a thought it a wonderful, festive gift. He had worn it every morning ever since, even though Elizabeth now had her own children, and Richard Jr. was finishing his second PhD at Princeton.

"You didn't sell your soul, my pet," he said. "That's an old-wife's tale, and it doesn't truly happen. And you did not have an affair. Have you looked at yourself lately? What man, on earth, would touch you?" He disappeared behind his wall of paper.

"Maybe I had an affair with a woman. Did you think of that . . .?"

"Kenneth Planter was awarded three million in a lawsuit against Platinum Properties . . ."

"She touched me in ways that you never would . . ."

"Don't we have stock in Platinum, dear . . .?"

"The things we did, Richard . . ."

"Amazon up. Yahoo down . . ."

"Can you understand what I'm talking about . . .?"

"Remind me to call William . . ."

"I'm sure you have no idea the things I felt . . ."

"Damn! Apple up 34.86. I knew I should have bought before the big iPod craze . . ."

"It was incredible. Like electricity all over . . ."

"Electricity, huh?"

"Yes."

"What color was her hair?"

"She . . . I . . . blonde."

"Right."

"She was blonde," she demanded. "I really did have an affair, Richard. I really truly did."

"Where?"

"I . . . uh . . . here."

"And you say you sold your soul for it?"

"That's right."

"Interesting." He came out from behind the paper again. "Because, one: you said you sold your soul today. And two: it's barely eight-thirty, and you haven't left the apartment yet. There: you've been sitting here, squawking at me since you woke up, darling. I fail

to see when you had the time for this devious transaction and sinful act, here in the very apartment where I have been with you."

She rubbed a finger along the edge of her coffee cup, as she stared through the mahogany table.

"So," he said, "when did you do all this, dear?"

She rose from the table and gathered their breakfast dishes. Faberge china they were. Nothing but the best for Richard and his wife.

"When, love-lump? When?"

As she rinsed the dishes and stacked them in the dirty dish rack for their housemaid, Sabina, to handwash later, she noticed her hands. When did they get to be so old, she wondered. There were deep, abyss-like, wrinkles between the knuckles (who knew wrinkles could form on that part of a finger?), not to mention the bottomless black slits on the knuckles themselves. And their color, dear lord, their color. Like the great, fleshy hide of a rhinoceros, only not so hardy. Well, maybe she exaggerated. Her hands were wrinkled, though, and had a slight gray tint that seemed to emanate from under the surface and saturate the flesh. They looked so frail. She imagined that if she were to flop a hind onto the marble counter, it would shatter into a hundred pieces. All the kings horses, and all the kings men, so to speak.

What was most remarkable to her was the suddenness with which her hands had aged. She knew that it had been a gradual process, but she never noticed the process, only the results of it in a freeze-frame moment, far removed from when she had last truly paid attention. How long had it been since she had last paid attention? Since before little Richie's birth, at least. Had Richard noticed the process? Or had he looked at her one day and recognized her as a gray, wrinkled, fleshy beast? And how long before she noticed it did he? Thirty years, maybe. At least.

"It's amazing," she said to Richard, who had long since returned to his paper, "how you can pay such deliberate attention to everything I say, so as to repeat it to me verbatim, but you never really hear me."

"Squawk. Squawk." Richard screeched. "Such a pretty bird. Say it again, pretty bird. Daddy so likes to hear you repeat the same damn things all the time."

Henrietta held her breath as she left the kitchen. It passed

quickly, it did. The biting pain she felt at Richard's remarks. Once upon a time, that bitterness would have stayed with her for weeks. As the years went by, however, the pain lasted less time for each insult. Until now when there was a sharp pinch in the area of her heart that was gone as quickly as it came. Maybe someday I won't feel anything, she thought. Maybe someday, I'll start to enjoy it. She wondered if that ever truly happened, if she would even notice.

Henrietta busied herself with her morning ablutions, and prepared herself for some 5th Avenue window shopping, and probable splurge. She managed herself so that she didn't encounter Richard again that morning. Within the hour she slipped her hands into her ermine-lined gloves, wrapped her Prada scarf around her neck and glided out the door.

The important thing to remember, she told herself as she maneuvered the sidewalk with hundreds of other pedestrians, is poise. That's right. Who's going to notice a little old lady unless she carries herself to be noticed? Who is going to pay attention to someone who believes she does not deserve attention? Well, she certainly deserved attention. She was important. She was rich. She was beautiful.

True, she might be trying a little too hard on that last one. She had passed her prime long ago. There was a certain amount of drooping flesh that clung to her body, like a stranger, that she had never been able to avert since Elizabeth. Even when Richard had given her lipo for Christmas every year through the late eighties. The surgeons would open her up, vacuum her out, and shortly after, it was back. Each time drooping a little more. She had become disillusioned by the whole affair, and had even stopped getting face lifts. Her last one had been in '97. Almost ten years, she reflected as she noticed the image of herself coming back to her from a Calvin Klein display window.

The contents in the window were lost to her in the reflected swirl of indifferent passerby, but she saw herself clearly. Reflected back in a dim tint, she considered her image appropriately subdued. She was dressed to perfection. Her entire wardrobe totaled an authoritative \$8,500, and half of it was bought a couple of years ago. New, she imagined herself to be dressed at an even twelve grand. However, she noted, the most expensive wardrobe in the world could not hide her face. A \$30,000 face. A fact that had seen years of dissatisfaction, alteration, dissatisfaction, and alteration again. Oh, how

she was dissatisfied now. It would seem that one bred the other, like maggots did flies. Her face, although it did not necessarily look old, looked used. Like a redneck, backwater, trailer-park wife you see in movies about people who don't know how to bathe or speak to each other without obscenities. She shuddered at her image. It was alien. Such a face did not happen naturally. She considered flesh colored plastic melted over an open flame with a wad of gray wire fused on for effect. She considered the concept of ugly. She considered alien. She considered a new sort of beauty, but discarded it. Beauty, after all, was in the eye of the masses. She considered all the horses and all the men that belonged to the wealthy king, and how inept they all were.

A passerby brushed into her, causing her to take a step forward to maintain her balance. Her hypnosis by her own image shattered, she watched the rude man continue away from her.

"An apology would be nice!" she hollered, but he paid no mind.

She looked around at other pedestrians, but none of them looked at her. Deliberately placing herself in front of one of them, she nearly screamed when he slipped around her without a glance. Look at me! They parted around her, but not for her. Not out of fear; not out of respect. Not out of anything. She was just in the way, and they adjusted appropriately. Look at me, she pleaded. Notice me.

That's how she found herself walking the into the street to hail a cab, but it sidled away from her, as well. The horn blasted from it, and for a moment she was excited to cause such a minor commotion, but she soon remember it was a New York taxi driver, and the horn lost all meaning through constancy as she heard horns honking all around. She mused how regular it was that the more a person was subjected to something, the greater it dwindled in significance.

Henrietta floundered across the street and found herself descending into the subway. Imagine her surprise as the doors closed behind her and the train lurched forward. The subway? She? It smelled. How many years had it been since she'd been on one of those trains? There was graffiti on the walls, and advertisement lined above the windows. Ads filled with young, provocative people touting Saks and Gucci, Versace and Cartier. The models in the ads looked undeniably desirable. She couldn't help but notice them.

The train stopped at the next station. When the doors opened

a young couple boarded, their arms around each other. His cheek was pressed to her temple. They sat down within Henrietta's vision and proceeded to mumble those soft, adoring tones that young lovers are inclined to mumble. As the train lurched forward, they kissed. They smiled into each others' eyes. They played coy before kissing again. No mind was paid by them to the rest of the world.

Henrietta watched them for several stops, considering youth and love. She considered her and Richard, but could not recall when they had been as adoring as these two. She considered bashing them over the head with an empty whiskey bottle that was rolling around on the floor at the end of the car. She considered screaming to get their attention, and crying, and the bottle again, but instead she got off the train at the next stop.

That was how she found herself in the Bronx, stumbling into an Irish pub. She failed to notice the name, and would never be able to find it again, even if she deigned to try. Besides herself there were two men inside. One tending bar, the other a patron. It was the patron that caught her eye. He was a young man, with a provocative air. His messy black hair was somehow complemented by a days worth of stubble. She considered what it would be like to kiss an unshaven man; she didn't believe she ever had. He wore an ordinary black overcoat and was rolling a gold wedding band back and forth on the bar as he toyed with the rim of his glass. Henrietta sat down two stools away, and unwrapped herself from her scarf.

"What can I get ya?" the bartender asked.

"I don't know. Something common."

"Whaddya mean, 'common?'"

"Something common people drink."

The patron snorted and pocketed his ring.

"What about what he's having?" she said.

"No, lady." The patron turned to her. His eyes were blood-shot and puffy, yet somehow managed to appear fierce and tranquil at once. "This here's cheap stuff. For low lifes like me who can't afford the goods. You wanna have something worth a little more coin."

"Thank you, no. I want the cheap stuff."

"Ya sure?" the bartender asked her. She nodded. "One shot of cheap stuff, coming up."

Henrietta pocketed her gloves and slid over a stool toward the patron. "What is it you do for a living, that you can't afford to indulge

yourself in quality once in a while?"

He looked at her over the rim of his glass before gulping it down and slamming it hard on the bar for another. "What's it to ya?" he asked.

"Well, wouldn't an occasional drink of something high quality be worth more to you in the end than a bunce of drinks which you can't stomach?"

"I stomach it fine."

"That's not what I meant."

"I got what ya meant," he snorted, as the bartender placed their shots in front of them. "After the first couple a drinks," he continued, "it don't hardly matter what they tastes like anyway."

"Would you like me to buy you something higher shelf? Glenfiddich maybe? Glenlivet?"

"Look lady, I don't need no handouts."

"But I could though." She stole a glance at him; his blood shot eyes were curious. "I have money I have enough money to buy this bar several times over. It's nothing. It doesn't mean anything to me. Money. I could buy you what you want. Anything you want."

"What is it with ya?" he demanded. "Ya wander into random pubs and offer to get people drunk often?"

"But I have money," she claimed. "I could do anything you want. I'll write you a check."

"Lady," he said, "why would ya do that?"

"I'm a very lonely woman," she began.

"Sheesus," he interrupted, looking at her sideways before gulping down his drink.

"I have money. All the money you want."

The man snorted. "Ya gotta be kidding. Ya know, that's what I thought ya was getting at, but damn."

"I have money."

He laughed. "Lady, there ain't enough money in the world."

His laughter followed her out of the pub. It haunted her down the street and into the subway. It slipped onto the train with her and hovered at her ear as she sat. It mocked her as she observed the other passengers in the car. All three of them were as far from one another as they could be without leaving the car. Nobody acknowledged anybody else's presence. If they could hear the laughter, they ignored it. She wished she could too, but it jounced along with her on

the subway. It stalked her back up to street level. It breathed down her neck as she entered her building. It cradled itself in her ears as she boarded the elevator. It laughed until she became accustomed to it and failed to notice it anymore.

It was mid afternoon now that she was home. Richard was away, she could tell by the absence of his coat. Probably having lunch with his financial advisor, she was sure. There was a clank and rattle in the kitchen, and she went to investigate.

Sabina was putting dishes away, holding them with a dishtowel. The dark skin of her hands and forearms glistened wetly. There was a small mesh of soap suds in her dark hair. Rising on tiptoe to put away a glass, her black dress hugged her lithe, stretching form. Henrietta walked up to her.

"Oh, hallo Mrs. Gaines. I didn't see you there." Sabina closed the cupboard and lowered back to her feet. "Did you do any shopping today? I so love it when you show me all the new things you buy."

Henrietta stepped in close to Sabina, clasped her and kissed her. Their lips locked momentarily in a fluid embrace. Henrietta was startled by the moistness of their kiss. Richard's were always so damnably dry. Sabina gently pushed away. Her eyes were wide and darted back and forth between Henrietta's own.

"Mrs. Gaines, what are you doing?"

"I . . ." She stared at the floor. Her face was hot, and she tried to will herself to look at Sabina, but couldn't. She just couldn't. "You're so beautiful," they used to tell me. 'I have to have you.' But I never. I never. There used to be so many of them; I couldn't keep track. I wanted to be left alone. I wanted to be ugly and left alone."

"Mrs. Gaines, are you feeling alright?" Sabina lifted a comforting hand to her shoulder, but Henrietta shied away.

"No, please, don't touch me. Don't look at me."

"It's okay, Mrs. Gaines. Here," Sabina took her by the hand and led her to a seat at the table. "You just rest here and I'll make you some tea."

Sabina turned away and retrieved a cup from the cupboard. She was so young and pretty. Her every move bespoke her desirability.

Henrietta's lungs ceased their function for a moment. She was overwhelmed with emotion. All the king's horses and all the king's men. It was more than she could take.

She wandered the New York City streets for hours. She went from 5th Avenue to 20th and back again. She ignored everything except her next step. Disoriented, she turned around several times. Lost, but not so. She could ask anyone which way to 5th Avenue, and get immediate instruction. It was her desire to be lost, but the ever present bustle of the city worked against that desire. It both isolated her and trapped her. She wandered Central Park, but the facade of wilderness trapped her as well. Eventually, she emerged from the park where she saw, across the street, a woman coming out of a store with a Yorkshire in her arms. There was something in the window of the store that caught Henrietta's attention.

Richard woke the next morning with a vague feeling that he had spent the night alone. His wife was not next to him, and he had no recollection that she had ever come to bed. But beyond the vague suspicion, he didn't think anything about it. He washed his hands and face, and brushed his fingers through his hair. Wrapping his robe around him, he headed for the kitchen for his breakfast and coffee.

There was something strange, though. He couldn't smell the coffee. Before heading to the kitchen, he checked the coat rack. Henrietta's coat and scarf were missing. Apparently she hadn't come home. Maybe she stopped all the talk and finally did it, he mused, but doubted.

Then there came a faint noise from the kitchen, and Richard thought he heard a voice. Maybe Henrietta was home after all. Ready to demand his coffee and put up with her nagging, he headed for the kitchen, but stopped in the entrance.

On the table was a large bird cage. Inside, sitting on the swing, blinking at Richard was an African Gray Parrot. It cocked its head from one side to the other then squawked.

"Call William," it said.

A Note on the Design

