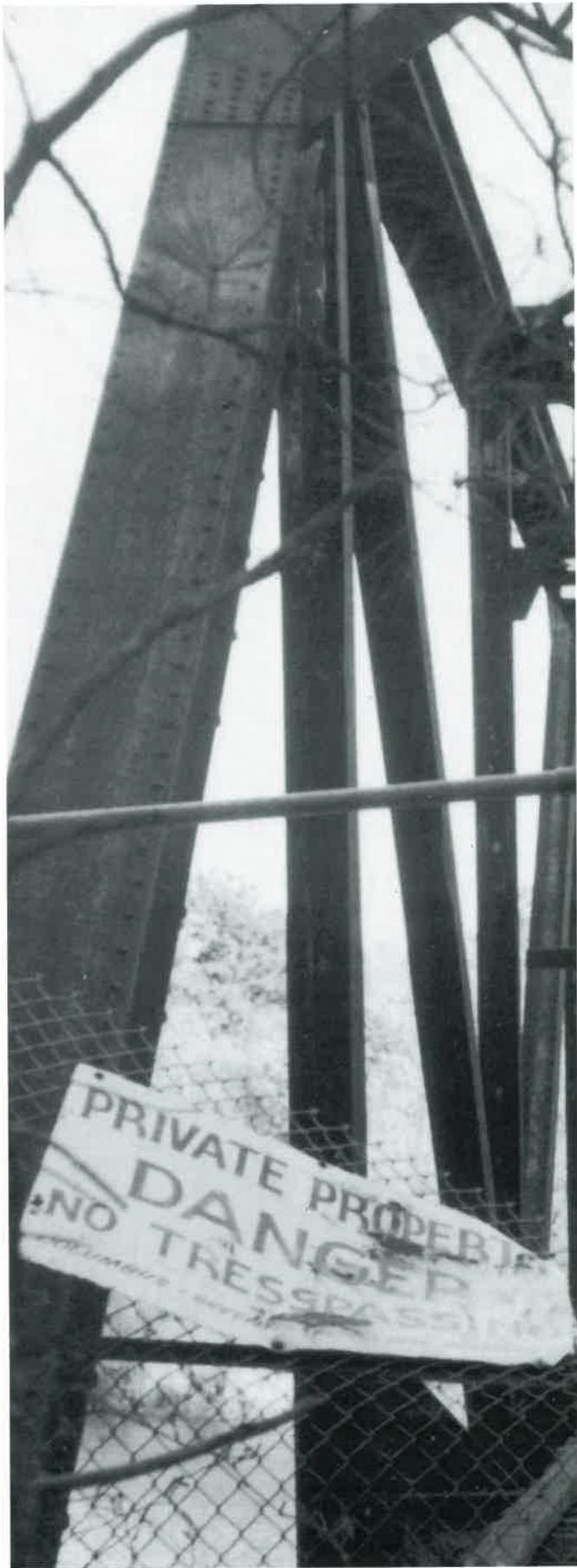


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Southern Voices

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Southern Voices

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ART EDITOR

Jennifer Dockstader

ASSISTANT ART EDITOR

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Lewis Nordan

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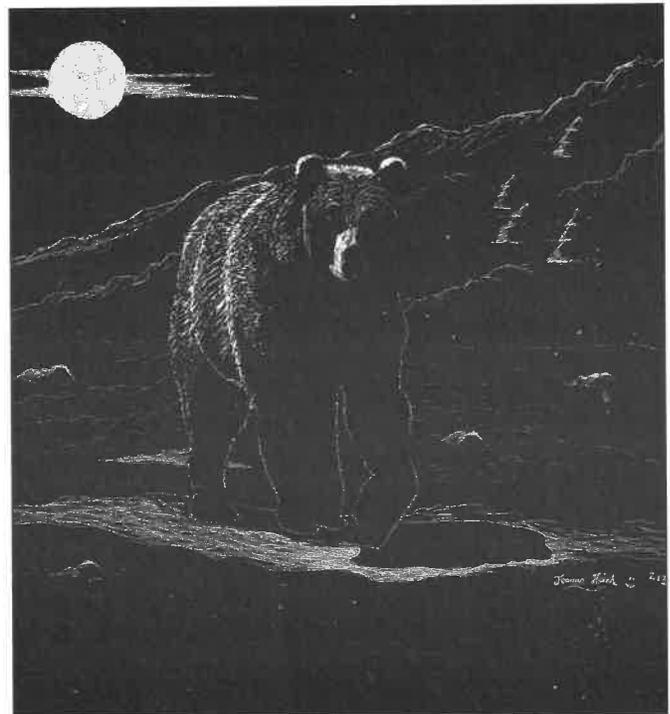
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Jeanne Hsieh
"Wandering Bear," Scratchboard
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

DOWN

by Bridget Gant

First Place, Short Story Contest



et up!"

Heather sat up and looked around through sleepy eyes. She was dressed in an old yellowed triple X T-shirt. Her long dark brown hair hung in greasy matted clumps around her face. The soured sheet that she had slept under tangled around her feet. She glanced around her room blinking the sleep from her eyes as the old ceiling fan above her rattled and groaned with age, cutting and cutting the heat in the room, doubling and redoubling it.

"Baby, now get your shower and don't forget anything. Your jeans are in the washing machine. Bye, baby. Momma's got to go or I'm gonna be late."

Heather's mom bustled around the bedrooms gathering her purse and necessities for a long day as Store Clerk 12. Her tightly permed brown hair clung to her scalp and her brown stretch pants bulged unattractively. Heather watched her quietly, unmoving as her mother clattered out the door.

"Good morning to you, dear," Heather whispered to the overstuffed dog with brown spots perched on her bed. Clothes, books, and old food, unquestioned rulers of the floor, dresser, and even the closet, were excluded from the dog's space. The dog marked the center of a clean radius in a panoramic room. The room smelled moldy, tomblike. The failure of the ceiling light three years ago contributed to the atmosphere. Heather slipped her hand into a pile of books at the foot of her bed. Casually, without looking, she dislodged an enormous hardcover book with "Stephen King" blazoned in red across the cover. Burrowing down into her bed, careful to avoid the hole with the sprung spring, Heather opened her book, clicked on the blue flashlight from her night stand and started to read.

The first glow of dawn tinged the horizon and Heather stirred. She walked down the dark hall. Her feet whispered over the scratchy grey carpet. Heather didn't even flinch at the sour smell that came from the white door in front of her; stepping into the kitchen, she flipped on the light. Roaches scattered off the counter, running from the dishes strewn around the room to the safety of

the shadows. Quietly, she walked to the utility, where she extracted her jeans from the washer. "Too late for the dryer," she mumbled. Grunting, she pulled the wet material over her too-thick thighs and overly round stomach. She looked over at the shower through the utility door almost penitently. Then she moved on through the kitchen not caring. She reentered her room and pulled a pair of dirty socks off the floor and onto her feet. Rummaging around on the floor, she found a blue shirt that appeared clean in the early morning light. Heather walked across the hall and into the pink glow of the bathroom. She took a brush to her greasy knotted hair, but after a few seconds she stopped. Calmly, she took her hair and did what she always did. She took the clumps of hair as one and started a French braid and she made it work.

Heather gathered her books to her and was careful to nab the hardback on the bed. She grabbed a slip of paper for a bookmark and noted pg 764. She grabbed a

donut and started down the driveway. She finished her breakfast as a big yellow Alcorn County school bus roared down the street. She shifted her books and waited. The bus screamed to a halt in front of her. Clomping and slouching, she made her way to an empty green plastic seat. Heather positioned her books on the outer portion of the seat in defensive position, and opened her book. Then it started. It

wouldn't end after that moment. A never ending degradation until 3:30, and it was her fault, and she didn't care. The little boys began taunting her quietly at first but more and more openly as the bus picked up speed and the clanking of the windows rattling in their frames intensified. Heather didn't move, didn't respond.

"What's a sixteen year-old who could have her license doing on the bus?"

"I don't know, man. Maybe she smells too bad to get one. Did you forget your deodorant this morning?"

The bus pulled to a stop and Heather scribbled on her bookmark pg 803. Then she lugged her books onto her shoulder and slipped into the line to disembark. As she walked across the sidewalk she kept her head down. "Don't look up. If you don't look up they won't see you and they

The little boys began taunting her quietly at first but more and more openly as the bus picked up speed and the clanking of the windows rattling in their frames intensified. Heather didn't move, didn't respond.

won't say it. They won't care if you don't look," the twisted logic ripped through her mind repeating over and over. Heather slipped into first period as the tardy bell rang.

The last days of school were always plagued by classes or whole days with nothing to do. A half day like that one was especially susceptible. Heather coasted through first period and second. They didn't have any work but the teacher let anyone leave who wanted to, so none of the loud ones stayed behind. She cut a path to the lobby as the break bell rang. Her book was molded into her side clutched under her arm. She threaded through the lines and crowds of kids as she slipped into the bathroom and locked herself into the last stall. The room smelled of ammonia and hair-spray. The lighting was poor but this place was safe. Girls came in and out, but Heather never moved. She was crouched over the book spread over her lap. With the ringing of the bell her haven was reluctantly abandoned. "One more class. One more class and I'll go home. Only one more class," Heather repeated her chant over and over in her mind as though to convince herself The worst class of her day, third period. All her enemies were there, and they would have nothing to do and nowhere to go, because Mrs. Sloan never let anyone go, no matter how little was going on. Heather took her seat, and as the first fifteen minutes of class passed uneventfully, she felt hope, hope that today would end okay. Then Michael started.

"What is that white stuff in her hair?" Why, God Almighty I think it's dandruff. Dang it, what smells so bad? It's BO. Yeah, boys, that's what it is. Hey, Heather, did you take a bath today, sweetheart, because you sure can't tell it? Hey, Heather what's wrong with your hair?"

Heather didn't move. She remained poised over her book. Her face revealed nothing but concentration on the words in front of her face. Then something happened to undermine the careful shield that the words in front of her provided. She could ignore the boys. She could focus them away. But when Amanda tried to help, the pain that had been slowly building behind her eyes exploded into new intensity.

"Heather, there is something in your hair. You might want to do something about it. They're really making fun of you."

Amanda's words were kind, not snide like they could have been, and surprisingly Heather answered, "Is there really?" She had known that it was there but the words came out naturally, almost calmly surprised. Heather stood up and asked Mrs. Sloan to be excused. Heather barely glanced at her teacher's curt nod as she ran to the bathroom. The fluorescent lights streamed down from the ceiling, and the grey tile gleamed dully up to her. Heather really looked herself in the face for the first time in a long time, and the pain behind her eyes redoubled,

blocking every coherent thought from her mind. The tears streamed slowly down her face as she picked at the dandruff locked into the matted plait of her hair. Heather gave up the useless picking and smoothed down some of the fuzziness with some water. She held her head up and walked bleakly toward the bathroom door. A student that she didn't know opened the door suddenly.

"Are you okay?" the pretty girl asked.

"I'm fine," Heather lied.

Well, you look like you've been crying," the girl asked skeptically.

"Oh, I have been. I have really bad allergies this time of year, and my eyes run like a faucet." The two girls passed each other without a parting word, and Heather headed back to the classroom. She stood outside the door for several seconds. Her eyes focused on the red lockers that gleamed up and down the hall. Those were senior lockers, and she would have one of those in a couple of years. Then the focus to reenter the battle zone that she had fled only minutes before had to be marshaled. Walking out was so much easier than walking back in. She opened the door and like someone practiced at it, looked straight through everyone. She could stare right at your face without meeting your eyes. Heather made the transition from doorway to chair in only a few seconds and was refocused on her book moments later. The last minutes of class passed quietly until the bell rang and everyone rushed for the doors, but Heather was a few seconds behind the stampede as she stopped and scratched pg 209 onto her bookmark and followed the rush for home. ♦

Bonita On a Warm Night

The breeze carried a scent of cut grass,
Raw and sudden with razor edges.
The slicing of goose calls parted the air,
And coaxed out the chill bumps on my arms.
The darkness beginning to descend over the lake
Was a shroud that closed over my mind
And still wraps around me when I think of you
And when I feel the gentle
Rocking, rocking, rocking
Of a front porch swing.

Kelly Reynolds

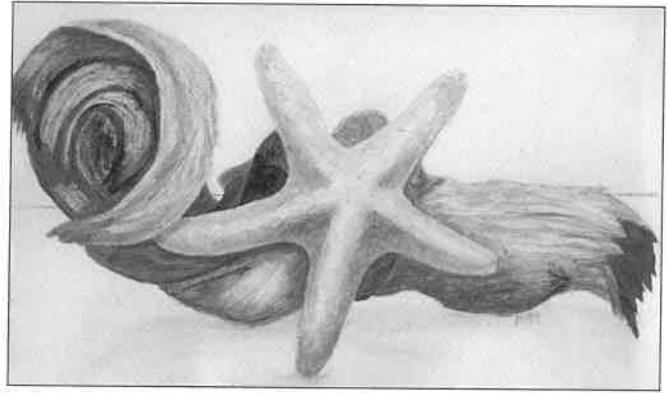
Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Spumoni

From the front porch,
I ate the spumoni ice cream
Mamam bought me
Every day after school...
I never ate the cone;
The door was always open,
And through the screen
I could see the bayou,
Smell the salt and the fish,
Feel the pungent breezes
As they blew in and
Awakened the wind chimes;
Momma's handmade macrame
Hanging baskets swayed;
Awnings drooped to shade
The front stoop;
I saw Mamam's statue of Mary
And the azaleas
Lining the driveway,
The miniature windmill,
And the flower beds
Scattered around the maze
Of walkways; and
The magnolia tree reaching
Over the lawn swing
Where we sometimes sat
And watched the fishing boats
At night over a can of peaches;
I took it all in with a glance
Returning to my puzzles,
Rainbow Brite, and modeling clay;
Playing until the sun went down,
Until the shoplights dimmed one by one
And the bayou flowed silently by
As I went to sleep

Edea Baldwin

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest



Debbie Matthews

"Seaswirls," Watercolor

After the Fall

Shall I speak now of your violence?
Your ever so delicate overbearing acts of love
The weight of sixteen years pressed down on me with
Love and a warm body
That I refuse to despise, I'm a good girl, after all,
And we only walk halfway across the street.
Or will I assume the ever changing position of pacifist in
A vice I cannot for all my pious protestations
Break free of?

Should I lie now about these embraces with darkness?
Or keep on dancing alone with me and my shadow,
Spinning so fast I will fly into orbit,
Careen into Orion, be consumed by a star, and
Stand up later in the morning, brushing off the dust of a
million
Children's stories.

Does the responsibility now truly become mine
Or is there another intrinsic description of the cross
I seem to bear so awkwardly, stumbling like the chosen
understudy,
Unaware of the weight I lack description to hold onto,
Submerged by the shadow it casts with one thorn.

Is it ever to cease this maddening descent?
Or will it never be consumed by its own flame,
But become the uncontrollable firestarter in nineteen
years,
Crucified by its own compliance.

Mary Burge

Crispix

by Carson Carney

Huddled underneath a semi-warm blanket, the bitter air crept through the pores and bit my knees, my hands, and then my nose. Looking next to me I could see that my partner, a year older than I and in the sixth grade, also felt the pains of the job we were doing. The air was unusually cold for Los Angeles, even in November, and we shuddered at the thought of dropping the meager shield of the thin blanket to pretend we were comfortably warm. Teeth chattering, we dared not complain to the woman powdering our noses or the one combing our young heads. In the innocence of our youth, we kept silent knowing the privilege we were living. I looked down at the shabby green dress I was donning and clasped the plastic necklace with the A, B, C's in anticipation. Sliding my hands back and forth across the maroon and green letters, my eyes darted from person to person. I did not understand what lighting technicians and cameramen and producers did, but I knew they were important and were watching me, and I was filled for the first time with a stinging sense of apprehension and place.

Among those endless, determined faces, peering helplessly around the lights and monitors, were the reliable, familiar, Southern faces of Mama, Daddy, and Jay. Mama was aching to break away from the "audience" section and enter into the action to give my eyebrows a spit job and to tuck the fly-aways behind my ear. Daddy was smiling and nodding in disbelief at the men around the set whose tasks were foreign to his real-estate developer eyes. I looked over at Michael, my partner, and noticed his chin was quivering, too. His mother was yelling pointers from across the scene in her distinct Alabama accent. Keeping a fixed glare on the action, her large eyes bulged at every move the director made. Michael just pretended not to notice and looked over at me for relief. I smiled at him and for a second I saw a look of nervous excitement deep in his eyes. The same look swept my face as we anticipated what we were to encounter in the next few hours. Not knowing the intense feelings we would have for this artform when we left, we dove into an unknown world sort of like a

child's game of "Pretend" to amateurs like us.

Immediately, everything was a blur—all the faces and lights and voices screaming directions blended together into a mass of behind-the-scenes confusion. Michael and I just sat still on the broad decaying steps that led to a house that really wasn't a house and waited for someone to tell us when to say our lines. Lighting was essential, we found out, and for a very long time huge lights with large white screens were moved and then moved again until they were perfectly in place for the filming. All these arrangements and rearrangements were for me and Michael—we were the stars that day. It took a long time for that to settle with either of us. Once it did, however, an indescribable feeling was implanted in me, and from there it grew strong in my very soul and

Michael and I just sat still on the broad decaying steps that led to a house that really wasn't a house and waited for someone to tell us when to say our lines.

became a part of me. That "feeling," that's all I can say. For the past eight years I have searched for words powerful enough to convey exactly what that feeling is, but I can't. So I'll leave it at that—a nameless passion that has encompassed me and given me endless goals ever since.

The time came, the cameras fixed upon us and intimidated us, and in a Wizard of Oz-like whirlwind, we were no longer the children we knew how to be. We spun around and around until we had become the two poor children pretending not to freeze on the front steps of the only place they knew. I was Beverly. He was Virgil. The Director was David Ashwell. He was the man with the English accent who knew exactly what to say and exactly how to say it. In spite of his blue, torn sweatshirt, unironed khakis, and scraggly beard, the others looked up to him and perhaps envied him, as I did. He gave a quick look to workers on either side of him and then focused on the pair in the middle. Leaning back, hands comfortable in his worn-out pockets, he shouted calmly, "Ond Oction," in that gentle, foreboding accent. Those words echoing in my head, I visualized the words, the moment. Silence, and then Michael speaks about "Ray Ralph, Jr." and soggy cereal. The minute his mouth opens it's obvious why he was chosen for the part of the southern farm child. I return to the world not as Carson, but as Beverly, and begin to eat the cereal that I hold in my

hand. Crunch, crunch, crunch. In the instant before I say my line everything and everyone is gone. I am alone and I say the line to myself ten different ways. There is no time left now. This is it. "And so is my daddy," I blurt out smiling for all it's worth. I blinked and then looked around me and realized that the people were smiling. I saw first the glorious approval of my family as they grasped each other in delight and pride. Then I glimpsed at the cameramen, the lighting crew, the make-up people, and finally, the Director. I saw wrinkles form in the corners of his eyes and then at the corners of his lips and then I sighed and did the same because I knew he was pleased. He looked at me, smiling, and said, "You're too hoppy, calm down a leetle." I'll never forget those words, and I'll never understand how it is possible not to be so happy when you feel like you're going to burst into a million pieces and go flying off into space. I took heed, though, of his suggestion and scaled my excitement down. Once again the heavy clapboard, black and white, struck in front of my face. I watched it over and over indicating quiet was needed.

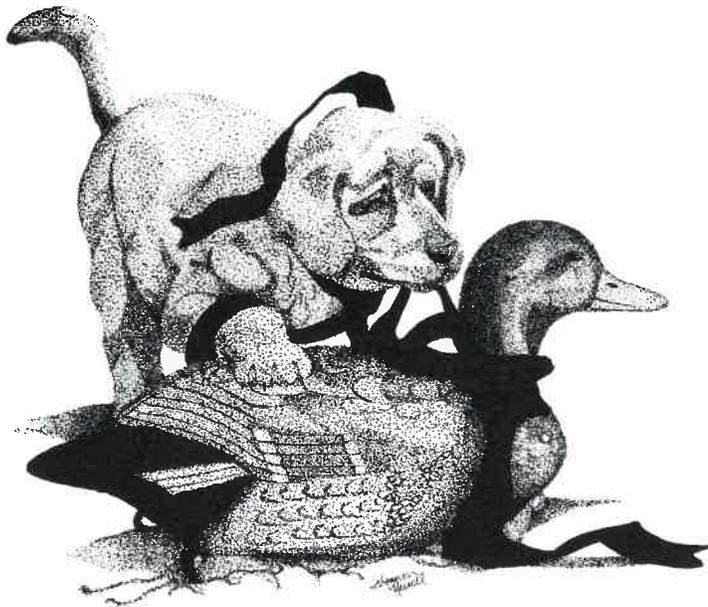
Take two... then three... then four... twenty-seven takes later and an equal number of bowls of cereal, we were finished. By then we were used to the cold and it had even gotten a little warmer. Louie, the rough Golden Retriever with the laid-back personality, had been sitting behind Michael and me all afternoon. Now he was asleep and snoring and drooling. Trying to stifle a yawn was nearly impossible but I couldn't let everything that day had brought end just yet. Little did I know that when I returned from the dressing room I would be welcomed to a massive buffet dinner for the cast, crew, and parents. I forgot about being full from the twenty-something bowls of cereal and dug in. The colorful array of food was spectacular and delicious. The celebration only culminated my feelings for the experience in a burst of energy. An immense bond had developed that day between myself and all the people I had worked with. I adored them and envied their work. More important, however, was my personal recognition of the life I wished to pursue and the dream I felt so sharply in my heart. Going into that audition I hadn't imagined that I would leave the commercial set changed. But I was. I was instilled with explosive emotions that released brilliantly when put in front of the camera. Mama was there, and she saw too what I was feeling. She said my face was a book glowing with newfound aspirations and I knew then that she was fully supportive. A passion cannot be denied an outlet, and that's exactly what had been inspired that November: passion.

In the back of the shuttle-van, my little nose pressed up against the cold, clear glass, I looked at everything from a distance as we drove back to the hotel. There was the porch, the steps, the house, or whatever it was. There they went. The bright lights of the set disappeared as we drove into the reality of Los Angeles. Squinting until there was no more Beverly or Virgil, I turned around completely satisfied—I'd be back someday.❖

Mastering the Potato

Aunt Carla whips out her red toolbox
And pops the lid.
A jumbled set of knives, utensils, cutlery,
And appliances is revealed.
"Let's make a magnolia."
She skins a potato and cuts it in half,
Handing me one end.
A couple of carving implements are set
In front of me, but I sit back
To watch her work.
Moist, potato-peeled petals pop into place.
I remember the picture of her
At the culinary school sculpting an
Ice-swan with a chain saw.
How does she do it?
Quick, manual movements that are
exact and precise.
She doesn't hesitate to slice.
Just like when chopping a cucumber or
Dicing parsley, the safety of her
Fingers never escapes my mind.
Impulsively, she feels her tools
and whittles away layers of the edible.
Two minutes later, a perfect
Rendition of our state flower is presented.
"Wow," I breathlessly exclaim and
Stare blankly at my piece of the vegetable.
"Where do I start?"

Jessica Tippens



Shannon Newell
"Curiosity," Stipple
Third Place, Art Contest

Crucifixion

Inside me—in my belly, beneath this exterior
I put forth—a ball of rage burning brighter,
harder, and sweeter than the love I once knew.
as it swells gaining strength and force,
it will one day expel itself from my body in a vibrant
ecstasy I will drink and rejoice and sing in.
you'll sit back, eyes glazed over in disillusionment,
or is it drunkenness, and try to suppress
what is to come with your hatred and
names of abuse, but once, just once, my rage
will knock you over with such force that i'll
whistle as I walk away, knife gleaming blood
won't come forth, but the ideas i've hidden
from myself and you will gush from the
wounds i've opened, making you shudder,
cry, or is it scream in flight. as I walk away
from you, my past, my suppresser, I sing hymns
of glory because though you've crucified me,
i've arisen from the death of the life I once knew.

Tabitha Parks

1 of 3 americans die of cancer

i was born a statistic.
you made me step off of the page,
crawling with insignificant numbers
just

like

me.

you made me real
you made me feel
something
was it life?
was it love?
was it just the pause that refreshes?

now you're a statistic
a number rolling towards infinity
is it worth the pain?
sucking down the chemicals from the burning tip
feeling the cool death flow
through

your

corrupted

flesh

"The spice gives with one hand, and takes with the
other"

—Frank Herbert

you swore you'd never take another
now look at you
raspy voice
acidic breath
trembling hands
lifeless lungs
lips still cool and kissable
you reach for another

I reach for you

Mark Owens

Matthew

by **Angelia Montgomery**
Third Place, Essay Contest

He couldn't speak to me, but I could see the pain in his face as I held him for the first time. His tiny hand grasped my trembling fingers with all the pint-sized might that he could muster. After violent convulsions his seizure subsided. Although hot and flushed, he soon became still again. Echoing in my mind were the words of his mother, Pam: "It won't be easy, and I can't pay you, but I really need someone to take care of Matthew this summer while I work." Her voice was filled with an air of apology and desperation. Like most fifteen year olds, I expected to spend the summer going to the beach and having fun, but little did I know that this summer Matthew, blind and epileptic, would teach me more about life than a thousand beautiful pictures or eloquently spoken words.

As I approached the door to Pam's house to begin my first day of babysitting, I could hear a faint screaming sound coming from the second-floor bedroom. I thought to myself, "Oh, God, what am I getting myself into?" Reluctantly I knocked on the door. After what seemed like an eternity, Pam came to the door with Matthew in her arms.

"I'm sorry it took so long," she said, "but he's been up all night crying and I have to go to work."

"O.K. I can handle him," I quickly said, not knowing the implications of the statement.

As I took Matthew into my arms, I asked Pam what was wrong with him. She rattled off a long list of ailments including blindness, epilepsy, and autism. She added that all of Matthew's doctors fully expected the child to be dead within a few years. I couldn't fathom the idea that God who is supposed to be perfect, could create something that seemed to most eyes to be a horribly sad excuse for an existence. I soon learned, however, that Matthew was no mistake.

Many of my days during that summer were filled with tears of frustration. At one time in my life, I believed that love conquers all, but Matthew proved me wrong. While he lay in my arms, trembling from a seizure, I would try to channel all of the love in my heart to my fin-

gertips where Matthew could feel it and be healed. No matter how hard I tried, and no matter how much love I had, Matthew still trembled. I was frustrated that he couldn't even see my smile. I was frustrated because I had so many opportunities that this child could never have, yet I could easily remember times when I took those opportunities for granted. This tiny innocent baby might not even live to take his first step or say his first word.

To many people, basic human rights include life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. However, Matthew taught me that none of these are rights, but blessings that we each should hold on to and live each day as if they won't be here the next. Matthew may never know the world of beauty that is seldom appreciated. I often find myself questioning the importance of another day at school, another club meeting, or another choir

"It won't be easy, and I can't pay you, but I really need someone to take care of Matthew this summer while I work."

rehearsal. After that summer with Matthew, however, I know that all of these are important because I can learn and be an active member of my community and school. That is the miracle in my life, a miracle that Matthew will never

be able to understand.

Perhaps the greatest lesson I learned from Matthew is the definition of unconditional love. In our society, people choose to love for various reasons, but often it is based on superficial aspects. When I spoke to him, I could see the love in Matthew's beautiful blue eyes. He couldn't see my face and he didn't know if I was a beauty queen or a hideous monster, but he did know the lullabies that I sang softly in his ear as his shuddering body contorted from the seizures. If we all chose to love, as Matthew did, based on something other than what our eyes can see, many of the world's problems would be solved.

Matthew and Pam moved away at the end of that summer, but I will never forget what Matthew taught me about love. More importantly, because of Matthew I will never forget that the seemingly insignificant aspects of my life are miracles that many people will never know, and that most refuse to realize. ❖

A Marbled Southern City

by Jessica Tippens

ust ease on out and make sure to take your time," stresses Mom, drawing out the last word "time" with a Southern, nasal embellishment. My sweaty palms grip the corroded leather circle at 10:00 and 2:00; I've already adjusted the rear view and side mirrors. Cramming my seat as close to the pedals as possible, I strain my neck past the dashboard to peer out the cracked, pollen-covered windshield. "That's a pretty steep hill," I mumble audibly, but not loud enough to agitate what's left of Mom's strung-out nerves.

So here I am, finally satisfying every adolescent's fantasy of throwing that shift into gear and forging ahead into the cosmos of asphalt, signals, turn-lanes, and right-of-ways — but not quite. Mom baits me with a "cop-out" course, kind of like the bunny slopes on your first day of skiing. We end up conducting my first driving lesson in the pretty, prehistoric, cemetery of Natchez, Mississippi. I am bent on making the most of the circumstance by truly overwhelming Mom with my phenomenal driving capabilities. But I shortly accept that this responsibility is not as effortless as it appeared. First of all, why can't I use my left foot to work the brake pedal? This should certainly balance out the duty between both my feet instead of using my right foot to operate both pedals. Then I discover that pressing the gas and brake at the same time was not a good thing, and Mom would surely rip the door handle right off if she didn't loosen her clench a bit.

Our tour begins through grassy courses and numerous knolls patterned with perpetual ranks of marbled statues, tombs, and headstones. I initiate my descent in the battered tank station wagon. Regal oaks drape gobs of Spanish moss across the beige hood as I cautiously maneuver the beast down the slender path towards the vicinity of headstones and overgrown plots. Mom repeatedly corrects my skills, but I decidedly ignore her nagging comments and apply most of my fourteen-year-old

attention to the cryptic sensation of lost souls and handsome relics.

The city cemetery lies east of the mighty Mississippi on bluffs famous to the Natchez area. A moist humidity originating from the surface of those muddy waters shrouds the late Sunday afternoon. Mom repeats, "Slow down... slow down!" expressing this phrase with increasing intensity and volume as I descend rapidly to the bottom of a slope towards a 90 degree curve. I immediately jolt upright in the driver's seat, narrow my field of vision, and refocus my tactics to handle the situation with a level head. All the while, I filter out Mom's now whiny and desperate commands and reassure her that "I'm doing fine!" By the end of the trip, I come to understand that Mom's idea of superior driving skills does not quite

match mine. After all, I am a mature, young adult now and know what I'm doing, right??

A sense of power courses through to the tips of my fingers and toes. Resting high in my seat after rounding out particular bends and willowy lanes, I conclude that navigating this vehicle any way that I want to results from a slight rotation of the wheel

guided by my very own hands. Wow! What a feeling of authority and control. I could get used to this!

After completing the whole trip with visitations to Jewish Hill, Catholic Hill, the carekeeper's quarters, and the recent plot additions, we decide to retire for the approaching evening. I relinquish my omnipotent position over to its permanent holder and reluctantly lounge in my familiar passenger's seat. "You did okay," Mom encourages, letting me know that she was impressed and shocked with my adjustment to the new experience. "I know," I tell her, now confident, and compelled to master my newfound passion. Visions of trips around the block to Grandma's house downtown on South Union Street and dreams of excursions to the local Malt Shop suddenly flash within my flickering, excited eyes. ❖



Shauna Johnston
"Brother," Black and White Photograph

Viscosity

My lips press hard against yours.
 You pour down my throat,
 and I open myself to you.
 You pour down into my heart,
 where it leaps and pounds.
 you pour into my belly,
 where it jumps and flips.
 I drink you in.
 Your smell,
 your texture,
 your taste,
 your passion.
 I open my eyes,
 to make sure of your existence.
 I sip,
 I drink,
 I gulp
 in an effort to quench my thirst.
 You rush your way into my tingling fingers,
 quavering legs, and arched back.
 I step back, thirsting to drink again from
 the fountain of you.

Tabitha Parks

Launch of the Shuttle Discovery February 11, 1997 3:56 a.m.

We shared the cockpit with you, Ken,
 As a nation, we were buckled in
 And counted down and lifted off.
 We weren't tall enough
 Or smart enough
 Or old enough
 Or experienced enough in space walks,
 But you let us fly inside with you.
 We were close when the sky caught fire
 And our pictures reflected
 In the burning waters beneath your sky-ship.
 Our hair was windblown from sailing
 Upward into day-bright heavens,
 And we inhaled when red faded
 To orange, blue, green,
 And set like the sun beneath the horizon.
 Three g's of national acceleration,
 Our twenty-first century manifest destiny;
 Pushed outward to space
 By God, fate, pride, fear,
 And nine million tons of fuel turned flame.
 We faced you in the cockpit,
 Smiled a collective smile,
 and whispered, "Goodnight, gravity."
 Leaning against a fence ten miles from the cape,
 Or aiming binoculars from the tailgate of a Ford,
 Or counting out loud from some couch in some town,
 We were weightless.

Kelly Reynolds
Third Place, Poetry Contest

Expressive Silence

by Cameron Richardson

First Place, Essay Contest

I use my damp palms to smooth my black velvet dress as I take one last breath of composure. When I walk across the stage to the piano I can feel the thump and click of my chunky high-heels against the wooden floor. The applause I hear follows the protocol of recitals, but I would rather have the opportunity to enter a silent auditorium. However, I know that when I am seated I may take as much time as I need to collect my thoughts. I take a shallow bow and slide onto the bench. The quiet tension in the room is the only silence I will not have to work for tonight. I relish this first silence because it is the one that fills me, seeps into my eyes and my fingers, calms my twitching nerves and dries my palms. The other two silences, though increasingly more pleasurable, will be more difficult to achieve.

After one final inhalation, I begin to play. The silence oozes from my body and enters the piano, hits the plucked strings and jumps into the air as music. The piece is a Scriabin etude. The chords and runs ripple in the canals of my ears as my fingers glide over the polished keys. I am conscious of the approaching silence; if I am not careful I will miss it. Scales rise and ebb, each one reaching a peak just a little higher than the one before. I am working hard to keep the body of the audience tense—the arms of the side aisles taut, the spine of the center aisle rigid with anticipation. The silence advances.

I begin a ritardando and a crescendo simultaneously. The volume swells as the tempo broadens, the music builds and builds, until it is time to sink into the grandest chord of the piece. Just before I hit the penultimate note, there is a pause, a silence. The stillness is slight, brief, and baneful, like a hairline crack in a Waterford goblet.

The ritard has slowed for a fraction of a second to a stop. The time is just long enough for me to capture the outer limits of the audience's attention.

By the time that silence has come and gone, I realize that I have succeeded. It was expressive—it made some mark inside the audience, and it made me realize what I rediscover every time I play the piece: the absolute beauty of music. However, I must move

my focus to the next—and what will be the final—silence.

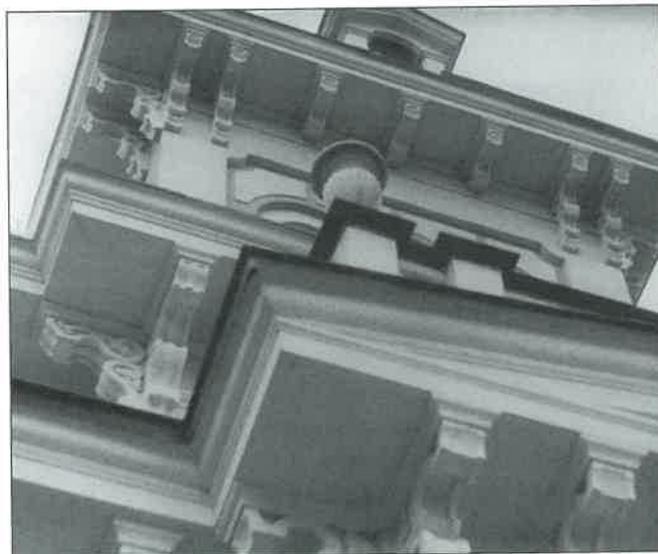
I leave that second and begin again to slide my fingers gently up and down the keyboard. The scale patterns are similar to the first few, but instead of the peaks rising after every passage, they soften a fraction every time. Now that the climax is over, the rest of the piece must gradually fade away and simultaneously keep the audience ecstatically tense. I ease into the last phrase; it rises gently then falls ever so slowly. The audience is barely breathing, wishing to stop even the quiet thump of the heart. I know that if the audience applauds immediately, I have not fulfilled my purpose—no one has been

captivated. The last note hums and hovers in the air into a gradual silence. I wait expectantly; hearing nothing, I rejoice.

With the first silence I expressed my intensity and focus, with the second I expressed my control and my joy. Now the audience has expressed to me its appreciation with the captivated

silence, the ultimate compliment. They will not forget to applaud; they just wish to savor the silence. The auditorium erupts; the silence is broken in the Esperanto of the hands and heart. ❖

I am working hard to keep the body of the audience tense—the arms of the side aisles taut, the spine of the center aisle rigid with anticipation. The silence advances.



Wesley Duffee-Braun

*"Natchez," Black and White Photograph
Honorable Mention, Art Contest*

My Whole World

butter cookies
the scalloped kind with the hole in the middle
held up to my eyes made
reading just like Momma's
eagerly I waited until Momma noticed
and then burst into proud giggles
when she smiled and gave me more
over and over
I would eat one pair
and then place the next two to my eyes for inspection
peering through the tiny hole
all the necessities
filled the circle that was my window
Momma first
and then Daddy came into the picture with his briefcase
perfect
they smiled and kissed briefly
pressing his lips to her cheek
and then cheek to cheek
they glanced at the child
before them
delighted
I was the audience
until it was my turn to go on stage
Daddy came and twirled his "little girl"
in a nameless, exhilarating game of spin
setting me down, I grabbed two more cookies
and showed him my trick
big, green eyes blinked behind the crumbs

and Daddy asked me what I saw
and I told him
exactly what a five-year-old sees
through the hole of a butter cookie
I told him about the dog sleeping in the corner on the
old blue blanket
and the green beans cooking on the stove
the steam swirling above the pot and disappearing into
the ceiling
I told him about the picture I painted for him
the red, blue, yellow, and green blue blur
that was the dinosaur or the dog
that picture was anything
something different to him and me
and that's what made it so special
Daddy told me it didn't have to be anything
but it could be whatever I wanted it to be
right then
he said that it was the same for me
that I could be anything I wanted to be
and I was so happy
I lifted my pink, heart-shaped lips and placed a kiss on
his cheek
as I put a butter cookie on my finger
and showed Momma and Daddy my new ring.

Carson Carney
Second Place, Poetry Contest

A Footnote to her Maker

Dear Sir:

I am writing in regards to my ambitions
The reason I find myself talking to strangers
And reading dead men's fantasies
Praying to be your... (insert word here),
A footnote to be exact
Explaining my contribution to the world
For it isn't money that makes the world turn
It's bad poetry that professors teach
I want to be a Beatrice, a Laura,
A Winged Victory in all her bare-breasted glory
Making men stand in awe

And ponder what force within me
Could inspire such genius
A Helen of Troy with Greek blood
Spattering my feet and conscience,
A Katherine with Hemingway's cheap whiskey
Penetrating my pores and lips
In short, I want to be immortal
Placed in small letters
At the bottom of an onion skin page
Stating only:
"Inspired by..."

Pepper Pearson

Funeral

by Connie Wong

Second Place, Essay Contest



Mama wound the white linen around my cool green jade bracelet as I waited, listening to the steady ticking of the seconds on the grandfather clock nearby. "Why do we have to do this?" I questioned, eyeing the linen-covered jade bracelets of my aunts and mother.

"Because we're going to the cemetery, and during funerals we're not supposed to wear jewelry. Spirits follow you back in them," she replied in rapid Cantonese. Another one of her superstitions was saved in my nine-year-old memory. Releasing my wrist she called to my cousin so she could cover her bracelet.

I shook my arm, feeling the linen instead of the cold stone rub against my skin. I seated myself on the couch and laid my head against the dark brown upholstery, watching my aunts chatter as they got ready to attend my grandfather's funeral.

A knock sounded on the front door, and Aunt Ellen directed me to tell the guest to come around to the back of the house because it was bad luck to come through the front one during such a situation as a death in the family. I briskly walked to the door swinging it open to find Uncle Phillip and Aunt May whom I directed to the back of the house.

The house filled as relatives and friends started to arrive. The funeral would be at 2:30, and we hurried to get all our belongings together before leaving. My father was not allowed to drive, so Larry Lucas was our chauffeur. We got into the station wagon and waved good-bye to my grandmother and baby sister. Due to tradition, she could not attend her husband's funeral. She had been able to go to the visitation last night where she sat in the corner by his coffin and wept in her crumpled ball of Kleenex. It was the first time I'd ever seen her cry. Now she just looked tired as she held my sister in her arms. After over sixty years together, he was gone.

The sun shone on this cool February Sunday which meant that Grandpa had been a good person. I had a vague feeling in the pit of my stomach when Larry steered the car into the parking lot of William and Lord Funeral Home. I fiddled with my polyester black skirt and tapped my high heels together, unsure of what to

feel. Mom, like my aunts, wore a black veil over her face signifying she was a close female relative. We all also had black arm bands around our upper arms secured with straight pins. We entered the funeral parlor to see my grandfather still lying in his coffin. Somehow it didn't look like him. His gray hair was the same style, slicked back. His mouth resembled a duck bill; his lips looked as if crazy glue had been used to seal them. I turned away from the body unable to view it for long. My dad approached the coffin with a fiery red corduroy cap with a Marlboro emblem embroidered on it. He placed it beside my grandfather's body, for he'd requested his favorite color red be with him in his coffin. Other than the cap there were thin sheets of muslin cloth laid over his body to keep him covered in his journey to heaven.

The dim light in the funeral home frightened me; my mind began to wonder where they kept all the other bodies like my grandfather's. I continued to imagine about strange laboratories like those in black and white movies where human robots were created until my father came to tell me the time had come for the service. In his hand he held a stack of red paper packets containing money, offerings from friends. The money would be used for the funeral expenses.

My family was led to a room blocked in by tall white columns where we could view the services without having to be seated with the other funeral mourners. After we were seated my aunts began to cry loud, wailing screams. I looked at them amazed at their outpouring of emotion. "Mama, they did this last night. Why again?" I whispered.

"It's a good show for their friends to see. They want to look like they really cared for him," she replied. I tried to close out their weeping as I started to wonder what they would do with all the flower arrangements we'd received. The waxy wreaths had given a morbid chill to the visitation of the body. I'd asked my mother if we took them home but she had told me they left them at the grave. I wondered about the difference between American sympathy during funerals and Chinese sympathy. All the white friends of my parents had sent the flow-

"Because we're going to the cemetery, and during funerals we're not supposed to wear jewelry. Spirits follow you back in them."

ers, but our Chinese friends had given money.

Mr. Gee officiated over the service in his chocolate colored suit. He related stories about my grandfather's kindness, his frequent walks around town, and his consistent attendance of Chinese Mission, being the first to arrive even though he always walked. I felt proud of Grandfather because he was so well liked in the community. In his former village in Pulau Ubin in Singapore he'd been known for his drunken behavior and eccentric antics, but in America he'd lessened the alcohol and took up walking and being nosy instead.

My mom and he had never gotten along because we lived in such close proximity to him and Grandma. Though she was the model of the harassed daughter-in-law, Mom still cried a little. I looked at my brother as he pulled on the sleeves of his new black suit. He seemed to be listening as much as I was. My father sat with a resigned expression on his face. I could remember all those trips to Jackson for chemotherapy and all for nothing.

My father and I watched as each funeral mourner paired to walk up to the coffin to pay their respects. Mr. Yee was in charge of the ceremonial bowing—one... two... three. Three bows and the pairs would leave so the next set could pay their respect bows. Over two hundred bowed for Grandfather that day.

The weather had changed when it was time to leave for Odd Fellows Cemetery. Clouds covered the sky where the sunshine had been. Was it another superstition coming true? Only stingy people had rain at their funerals and weddings. But the rain fell regardless of the superstition. Larry Lucas followed the hearse in front of us until we neared our house. It was customary to pass by the home of the dead on the way to the cemetery, but the train began to cross as we neared. The Illinois Central roared past with its line of rusty cars creaking and screeching on the tracks. My grandfather had always liked to watch the train pass while he sat on his front porch. Now was his last time.

The caboose sped by allowing the long procession of our cars to move. The hearse stopped in front of my grandmother's home so the funeral director could retrieve the funeral wreath. As he did this, my grandmother's face appeared from behind a peach curtain to peer at the procession. Her sad face stood out from the dim interior of her home, and she stared until every car had disappeared down the boulevard.

Arrival at the cemetery showed the rain had ceased. The casket was carried to under a tent and my family walked to be seated. My black leather heels sank into the wet earth as I struggled to maintain balance. The air felt damp, and the quiet cemetery echoed, awaiting its new member. We sat directly in front of the metal casket and I pressed my back closer into my chair feeling uncom-

fortable at its nearness. After a prayer and a few words, the time had come to leave. We removed our black arm bands and placed them across the coffin. I was afraid to place myself too closely and my brother snatched it out of my hand to place the band there himself. I gladly hurried to the waiting station wagon, away from the sobs of my aunts. I dodged tiny gravestones, some rose hued and others yellowed from age. Little angels guarded some that were of infants dead only after three days. How lonely everything was. Once their funerals had been bustling but remoteness surrounded them now. My attention turned to Uncle Daniel directing his two oldest sons to wait until everyone had left and make sure the body was buried. He didn't want them to cheat us. I almost laughed at his remark. What were gravediggers going to do with Wong Weng Mok's corpse? Even to me it seemed absurd.

We left the cemetery turning onto Main Street where we returned to my grandma's house for a large buffet supper. I couldn't wait for the food and I started to unwind the linen from around the jade on my wrist feeling its cold surface rest on my skin once again. And the bright sun began to reappear glinting off the front window of the car. ❖

New Year's Eve

Reality glares at me,
reflected on the mirrored surface of the pond.
Each line and shape precisely defined,
each color so vivid.
Strong, relentless to time and emotions, it remains
unchanged.
dark and sinister foreground with a rainbow
backdrop.
An orchid purple lightens the horizon,
blending into a dove gray, then to a deep
amethyst.
Finally, a dark ashen color emerges
and sweeps into nothingness over our heads.
Drops of life fall down, splashing gently.
Ripples run across the silvery surface,
blurring the cold face of reality.
They fall faster and faster,
my mind's eye becoming hazy and hazier.
They slacken off, and the picture becomes clearer
again.
It issues from the darkness and chaos fresh.

Anna McGehee

The Fair

They rolled into town under cover
Masked by the crisp darkness of the autumn sky.
They came from some Alien planet,
Or Memphis or Atlanta,
To drain my city.
I watched their kingdom rise
Overshadowing the high-rises
That used to rule.

With flashing neons
And billboard dates,
They invited me to come inside
To tour their homes,
To taste their food,
To trap and drain me too.

What freaks they were!
The unshaven men—
Both young and old,
None having bathed since the week before
The women—
Toothless
Once-white hills of calcium
having rotted
From cigarettes and lack of care,
Hair, a ratty mess of wet straw,
Mixed with natural oils, sweat, and dirt.

The temptress—
Scales creeping towards her thick black mane.
I touched her.
Cold, clammy silk sliding beneath my palm,
Inching from my ridicule.
The midgets—
A two-foot family,
Glaring,
Viewing life
Through the eyes of children,
Longing to be adults.
The Siamese twins—
One grotesque disfigured miniature
Cursed forever to bear two heads.

Society had turned them out,
Made them misfits and losers.
But still they sucked us in,
To trespass,
Continually snubbing
Their amiable attempts at congeniality.

I treated myself to dinner
Penn's Chicken-on-a-stick.
(I dropped a pickle when it burned my tongue)
And elephant ears
Smothered with brown and powdered sugar,
Dripping and soaked with butter.

Through it all
Piercing shrieks
Filtered from the Ring-O-Fire,
Screams of the realization of sudden death
From the Kamikaze.

They left as stealthily as they had come
Masked by the crisp darkness of the autumn sky.
But for days their stench lingered on,
The smell of trash and body odor,
Mingling,
Hovering,
In the same stagnant sewage.
They would return the next October.

Jennifer Dockstader

Mr. Littlejohn

by Jennifer Dockstader

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest



I noticed as Mr. Littlejohn approached Amanda and me in the Fellowship Hall before Big Church that he seemed to be limping more than usual that Mother's Day Sunday.

He approached us all the same, and through a broken smile, he asked the same question he asked us every Sunday. "Now which one of you girls is the prettiest?"

"She is," we chimed in unison, pointing at each other. "Well, I'd bet there's no two girls prettier in this whole church," he added before we headed towards the sanctuary. That compliment, however, was not that great, considering my church, Calvary Baptist, only had about 200 members, at least four-fifths of whom were older than the church itself. Even so, the episode with Mr. Littlejohn was a sort of ritual, and I looked forward to it.

Mr. Littlejohn used to give us each a crumpled dollar bill to buy candy after church, and he would warn us not to tell our mommas. Somehow Momma always found out about that dollar Mr. Littlejohn gave me, and I would reluctantly offer it to Lottie Moon or to the Morrisises in China. "Jennifer," she told me, "don't you be taking Mr. Littlejohn's money

every Sunday, now. He can't afford that, what with his disability." He had fought in World War II with Granddaddy and lost his left foot in combat. Now he wore a thick black shoe that made his left leg a little longer than his right. My tastebuds, however, did not understand "disability" and surely did not know what it could possibly have to do with those red and yellow jawbreakers I wanted.

Mother's Day was always a grand occasion at Calvary. Instead of the usual rotation of deacons, every one of the church's fifty-plus deacons sat at the front of the church, nearly filling the first two rows of pews. Mr. Littlejohn, I noticed, was sitting with the older deacons on the second row. Behind them sat all of the new mothers, their husbands, their new babies, and all of their other children. The mothers were all given white carnation corsages to wear on their special day, which would have been fine had the flowers been real. To make matters worse, each fake flower was superglued to white

fishnet, which pulled and picked everyone's new Sunday dresses. The rest of the congregation filled in behind the honored families.

At the beginning of the service, we all stood and sang a very long version of "God Grant Us Christian Homes," my least favorite of all church songs, and the fact that we sang all six verses did not help my situation. Then, the monotonous drone of the sermon set in. Dr. Street, of course, was giving the same Mother's Day sermon that he had given last year, the year before that, and every year before that for as long as I could remember. It was the one about a mother's responsibility to love her children, to discipline them, to bring them up in a stable God-fearing home, and to make sure they attended Sunday School—every Sunday. I decided that Momma

had definitely taken his advice to heart and had done her best to implement every word into her daily life—and mine.

As the minutes dragged by, I let my eyes wander about the room. It was at least the size of a good size basketball gym with fifty-foot ceilings and could seat about five hundred people, a crowd the building had not seen

half of in over twenty years. Ten stained glass windows on each side stretched from pew level to the balcony and continued from the balcony nearly to the ceiling. The Christ story began in the far back left-hand window and continued through each of the other nineteen windows, reaching completion in the far back right-hand window. I would try to follow the story from Birth to Ascension, but Momma would scold me and make me turn around. Since we sat near the front, if I didn't turn my head completely around, I could only see the windows from the Healing of the Lepers to the Last Supper, so I resorted to people watching.

Mrs. Clark sat on the pew in front of us with her husband, who rumor had it, wasn't really even her husband. Anyway, she'd been living with him since before she kept me in the nursery and before she last did something different with her hair, so they must have been married, or he would have left her long before. Every Sunday she would dye her hair grey, but it wasn't a silver-grey; rather,

My tastebuds, however, did not understand "disability" and surely did not know what it could possibly have to do with those red and yellow jawbreakers I wanted.

it was either pink-grey, blue-grey, or purple-grey, depending on what she might be wearing. I sometimes wondered if she planned it so the colors would match. To the right of Mrs. Clark sat Vernon, who was the forty-year-old retard who always made me find the pages for him when we sang. I don't know why he made me find the right page. He couldn't even read. Sometimes I would just act like I got the right one, and he would turn around so proud and sing all the wrong words. It wasn't that mean because he never knew the difference. On the pew just in front of Vernon and Mrs. Clark sat Miss Sherry, who was seventy years old and had still never been married. She was a good friend of Momma, but I think she just liked her because Miss Sherry promised to leave Momma all of her hats when she died. Mr. and Mrs. Littlejohn usually sat in front of Miss Sherry, except when he had Deacon duty.

I slumped down in the pew as low as I could get and wrote a note to Amanda on the back of the blue visitor's information card telling her to check out Mrs. Clark's latest color—grey-green. I was also going to point out the funny white stuff that had gathered on Vernon's shoulders, but Momma stopped me in mid-sentence. "Young lady," she said, "God is not pleased with prissy young ladies who make fun of people in His house." I felt bad about Vernon's dandruff problem, but I still thought the green hair was pretty funny. Luckily, I didn't have very long to consider the Holy Reprimand I would receive, because Dr. Street called the deacons and families to rise for the dedication ceremony.

Only the second row of deacons got to participate in the child dedication, because they were older. First, the families filed out and stood at the front of the sanctuary facing the congregation and smiling proudly. Then, the deacons would divide themselves, two for each family. Mr. Littlejohn ended up with the Havers, a family of five. Mr. and Mrs. Haver stood quietly holding Adam, the new baby, while Eric, the four-year-old, and Matthew, the two-year-old played chase around their legs. The ceremony began, and the mothers handed over their babies to one of the assisting deacons. The mothers then raised their right hands and read the Mother's Creed, waited for the church's affirmation, and stepped back. The deacons presented each child giving its full name and birthdate, then gratefully returned each squirming infant to its respective parent. After the formal dedication was complete, the other assisting deacons stepped up and presented the new babies with presents, which was usually some Bible story that would be tucked away on a bookshelf and forgotten.

Mr. Littlejohn looked very relieved when Mrs. Haver handed Adam to the other deacons for presentation, which meant that all he had to do was smile and give her a present and a kiss on the cheek. But somehow, as he

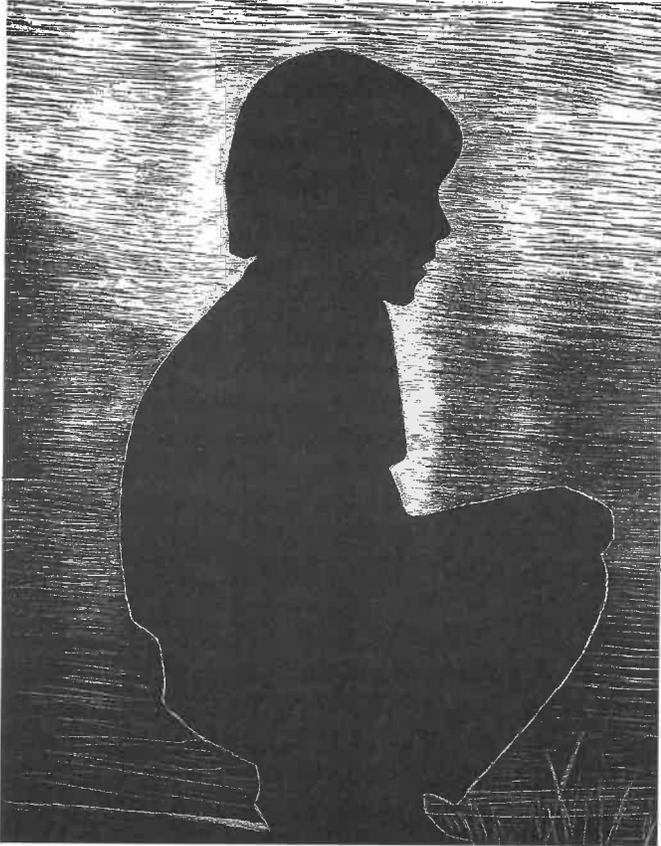
stepped forward to present the gift, Matthew got tangled up between his legs, and he tripped. I thought he was going to catch himself but Matthew just kept squirming, and before it was over, Matthew and Mr. Littlejohn, were sprawled on the floor in front of the entire church. I tried to control my laughter, but Momma's hand was not fast enough to stop the girlish giggle that escaped my mouth. I knew it wasn't funny, but Mr. Littlejohn looked so strange, lying on the sanctuary carpet, his back bent, and that big black shoe dangling awkwardly across Matthew's tiny frame. The other deacons helped him to his feet, and the presentations proceeded uneventfully.

Dr. Street said the prayer, and service concluded with yet another round of "God Grant Us Christian Homes." Amanda and I exited the sanctuary with our parents, and I noticed that Mr. Littlejohn was in front of us. I nudged Amanda and pointed at his back. She giggled, and Mr. Littlejohn turned around. I tried not to look him in the eye, because I was as embarrassed as he was. But, oddly, he just knelt down, like he always did, winked at us, and asked, "Now which one of you Graham girls is the prettiest?" Amanda and I both pointed at each other, giggled, and ran outside. ❖

The Paper

Freedom, hope, pain.
All these drip languidly, their heaviness filling the air.
Thickly rising from the white promise, off a blank
sheet of paper.
Leaving doodles, love, rips, tears, or hate;
Staining the pureness, taking the emptiness and
freedom;
Giving Nirvana a pencil smudge.
Now life dots the paper.
Soaking it with its bitter happiness,
taking its snow-white innocence.
Ripped, torn, folded with care by loving hands,
treasured and read by eyes filled with tears.
Opened, closed, so many times that heaven feels
like velvet;
Edges tattered,
creases cross the soiled pureness in a maze of
gorges.
Dirt and grime turn the paper love-colored, brown
with care.
The gleaming white folds are all that is left of inno-
cence.

Anna McGehee



Hillary Gibson
"Meditation," Scratchboard

On Reading a Poem

Anticipating, I hear my name called,
I rise and walk confidently to the podium
That stands alone amidst a gallery of frozen faces.
I search each face for a hint of encouragement,
A slight twist of the lip, a lifted eye, or perhaps a nod.
But I see nothing except my own form
Glaring back at me from the mirror of those motionless
eyes.

I pronounce each word with passion
Trying to emit emotion,
To set ablaze those stiff forms that lie
Lifeless like the oil pastels that litter the walls.
As I walk back to my seat, self-consciously,
The eyes stare through me to the white linoleum,
And the click-clock, click-clock of my shoes,
Bounces off the walls, echoing through the emptiness.

Jennifer Dockstader

The Gate

Big. Tall. They tower over me,
Looming bamboo posts, thick and strong.
My arms rest atop the wooden barricade
That keeps me in the front yard.

The wooden bridge lies just across. Sometimes
Mama and me sit on its benches
To look at the rest of the town.
Tangkong plants grow on the shallow ditch water,
Black as coffee but not as black as the road.

A thick layer of asphalt smeared on the ground,
The road is wide and big; I'll have to run
Just to reach across the other side.
Jeepneys pass by, sometimes stopping,
Letting big people off
At the intersection not far away.
I listen to music playing from them.
Mama had told me I would dance to the sounds
When I was smaller. I don't remember.

Other big people walk by, not many,
Talking to each other as they go somewhere.
I watch them pass as I stand behind the gate.
I wonder if I'll get in a lot of trouble
For climbing across?

Kit Posadas

Waiting for Salvation

by Edea Baldwin

Miss Josephine Callais sang a little louder than usual in the choir on Sunday morning. She belted out the hymns from the bottom of her heart with complete reverence, but also with complete ignorance of her volume. Her deep vibrato made her sound like she was trying to sing while driving along a bumpy dirt road: "AH ah AH ah AH..."

"That woman is making a racket, yeah," murmured Mrs. Dardar to her husband.

"Hmmm?" groaned Mr. Dardar, waking up from his nap.

"I *said*, 'That woman is making a racket,'" she repeated. "And don't sleep in church," she added a few moments later. She slammed her elbow into his side. Mr. Dardar grunted, shifted his position, and began nodding off again.

Margaret Pitre sat on Josephine's right and kept rolling her eyes and sighing softly to herself whenever there was a rest in the music or she didn't know the sixth verse. On Josephine's other side was Olive Sonnier, equally annoyed, and rather amused; she would glance at the woman through the corner of her eye, then look up at the ceiling, as if she were asking for divine help to keep her from laughing.

Josephine knew all the words; she clutched the red hymnbook to her ample bosom with clasped hands, focused her eyes on the stained glass cross above the door of the church, and channeled all of her soul into every hymn. She was only forty but looked twenty years older. Her pale, thin lips were lost in her face, for she refused to wear lipstick. Foundation and powder, however, were fine with her, and the make-up, a shade or two (or three) too dark for her skin tone, sank like draining rainwater into the deep wrinkles on her face. Josephine wore a simple lilac dress with a white belt. Everyone could see that her brown hose were knee-highs; whenever she took in a breath to carry her booming voice through a phrase, she lifted her shoulders, which of course took the dress with them, revealing a short glimpse of her white knees. ("Scandalous!" whispered Mrs. Griffin to Miss Boudreaux.) Josephine's auburn hair was neat and combed, and fell around her broad shoulders to frame her joyous, round face.

On the outside, everyone remained grim and solemn; this was, after all, *church*, and worship was a matter not to be taken lightly, and certainly not a time to enjoy oneself. On the inside, though, everyone was laughing. And most everyone knew why, on this Sunday, Josephine Callais was so happy. Next Sunday, she would be her old self, murmuring the hymns and drifting off periodically during the sermon.

Mrs. Theriot, attending the church for the first time with Mrs. Pierce, stared at Josephine, mouth agape; she leaned over and asked, "Is that woman, you know... all there?"

Mrs. Pierce smiled, clacked her dentures together, and opened her Bible to Psalms (right in the middle; that's how she knew where it was), and spread the book

over her lap. "I'll tell you about Josephine," she whispered at last. "You remember Roy Terrebonne?" She continued upon her friend's nod. "Well, you know he used to be married to Josephine. She wore lipstick then. They always wear lipstick when there's a man involved. Anyway, they were mar-

ried for about two years. Josephine was real busy with church. She taught catechism to my niece one quarter."

"So what happened?" prompted Mrs. Theriot.

"I'm getting to it, honey, I'm getting to it. Six years ago, Roy took up the notion to leave her. Nobody knows why, but I have some theories, and I'll tell you about them later. One night in June, or maybe July or September, Roy just packed his suitcase, jumped in his fishing boat, and took off down the bayou. She tried not to get a divorce, cause then she couldn't take communion till she got an annulment from the Pope."

"Me, I can understand that," inserted Mrs. Theriot. "Just protecting her soul."

"Well, it didn't work," said Mrs. Pierce with a touch of drama. She paused to increase the effect of her words. "She got the divorce and wrote the Pope that same day. One of my friends got to go to Rome once, and he heard the Pope speak. Very inspiring, he said. Who is the Pope now? Didn't we have one die a few years ago?"

"What about Josephine?" hissed Mrs. Theriot.

"Shh!" came a voice from behind them.

Mrs. Pierce pursed her lips and continued. "Some

"Well, you know he used to be married to Josephine. She wore lipstick then. They always wear lipstick when there's a man involved."

people are so rude. Anyway, every Sunday she had to sit up in that choir loft and watch everybody else go up and get communion. Just sat there picking her nail polish, somebody in the choir told me. But somebody else told me she spent the time reading the introduction to her hymnal. I don't know, maybe she did both. And I know for a fact that she prayed every single night that God wouldn't let her die before she could take communion."

"And?" urged Mrs. Theriot, drumming her fingers on her Bible.

"My hairdresser's daughter is a nurse in the emergency room at Lady of the Sea Hospital, and she said that Josephine used to come in practically every day with a 98.9 fever or a headache or something, crying because she was afraid to go to Hell."

"The poor thing!" was Mrs. Theriot's insight.

Mrs. Pierce nodded. "And she just got her annulment in the mail yesterday. Today she gets to take communion, and that's why she's making such a show." Smug because of the knowledge she had been able to bestow on her ignorant friend, Mrs. Pierce beamed, and highlighted a verse in Psalms just for the thrill of it

By that time, Josephine was singing even louder, her mouth wide open, her body swaying out of time with the music, her face lifted to Heaven.

"She's rattling the windows," commented Mrs. Dardar to her husband, who had drifted off again.

"Hmmm?" asked the poor man.

"I said, 'She's rattling the windows,'" answered his wife.

Mr. Dardar murmured something about hurricane weather and the bayou being high, and the whole parish flooding. His chin dropped slowly down to his chest, and he got another poke in the ribs from his wife.

Between the choir's performance and communion, Josephine sat twisting her fingers and crossing and uncrossing her ankles. Wouldn't it be just like Satan to kill her off right before she could have communion? She'd be just like Job then—well, sort of—and maybe then she'd be declared a saint. Wouldn't the Pope feel sorry then?

The congregation watched as the choir stood up to go down and get communion. Josephine had jumped up, and her hymnbook fell on the floor with a thud that echoed through the sanctuary, waking up Mr. Dardar for a second or two. It was a lucky thing that he woke up, for he was about to start snoring, and that was no attractive sound. Besides, it would have cost him his Sunday dinner. On the way down the steps from the loft, Josephine tripped on Mrs. Sonnier's dress, then stumbled at last to the front of the church.

All eyes were on Josephine Callais as she opened her mouth so the priest could place the round white chip on

her tongue. They stared as she drank the wine. As she returned to the choir loft, her head was high and her shoulders were lifted, revealing those knees again. "Just scandalous," said Mrs. Griffin once more. "The woman has no modesty," said Mrs. Dardar. "Hmmm," said Mr. Dardar.

Mrs. King later told the women in line with her at Delchamps that she had seen (with her own eyes!) light shining down from heaven on Miss Callais' face when she took her seat in the choir loft.

"Well why not?" Miss Boudreaux had asked. "She ain't going to Hell now, is she?" ♦

History

Bass guitars and tom-toms,
organs and saxophones
resonate with color.

Heelbeats bring background
to the foreign phrases
of the graceful and grisly,
lyrics meant for kings,
as well as gods.

As the sun-burned worker
bows to the fluffs and pods,
hymns of inspiration,
promises and prayers,
escape the rows and rise.

Thunderous roars,
screaming for vengeance,
mix with the
passion-cries of resistance.
Pleas and cries
catch the tailwinds
and drag along.
Guitar twinges wipe away tears.

Harmonic melodies rush
from solos and concertos.

Love bursts from the microphone.
Quick words fill the sky.

Yesterday
slips past the gates,
softly whispering,
Remember.

Leander Taylor

Away From Home

by Leah Speights

Honorable Mention, Essay Contest

Home was never Jefferson Davis County, or even Bassfield. Home was the few acres of hills, woods, and creeks that I loved. Home was my family and running barefoot over the tar-and-rock road to Granny's house for lunch or the mail. Home was the warm smell of hay and dust and honey-suckle. Home was protection from the 6:00 news realities of abuse, neglect, or wondering who would take care of me. Home was being tucked in at night, and not locking the crayon-marked door. Home was Sunday, with Nabs and chocolate milk for breakfast so Mom could sleep late, singing solos for Big Church, fried chicken and cornbread for lunch, afternoon football games on the television, and feeding the cows from the dented tailgate of the truck. Home was stacking wood on the porch and the smell of kindling starting fires in winter. Home was a bubble removed from the world, one I didn't care to break free from for more than the space of a good book.

Books balanced my world, led me down back alleys, over mountains, and through the lives of countless travelers. I met the *Prince and the Pauper*, sneaked to Terabithia, raced the *Black Stallion*, and favored Merlin over Arthur no matter how the story was told. I stayed up till midnight with *My Side of the Mountain*, carried *Peter Pan* to the bathtub, and bawled my eyes out over both. I admired Sherlock Holmes' clever mind and pitied his loneliness. Louis L'Amour's descriptions of the West sent a strange, searching longing through me for open spaces. *War and Remembrance* terrified me with the depths of sickness so-called human beings could find in themselves and gave me hope for more human strength than my freshman mind could comprehend. *The Sword of Shannara* shuttled me to realms of elves and druids, but J.R.R. Tolkien carved them in my heart. I struggled and raged and danced to tunes no ears ever heard, seeing the world through the eyes of people my isolated town could never show me.

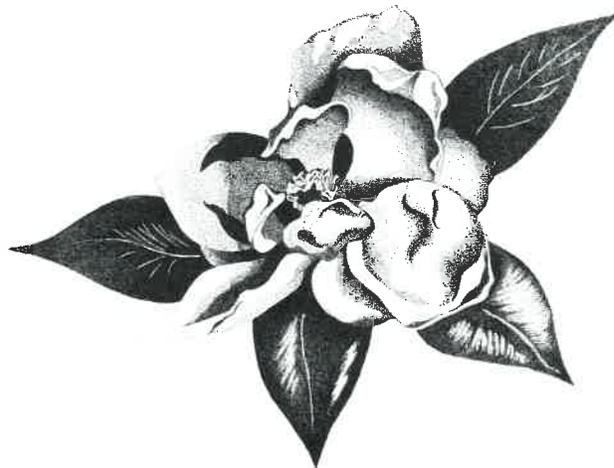
No matter how much I read, though, some themes were simply over my head and there were few enough people with whom to discuss them. The older I became, and the more mature my books, the more concerned I

became over my understanding of their subtleties. Words played over me, pleasant but not substantial because of my own lack of understanding. The desire to learn how to learn pushed me from a secure, happy home to a dreary boarding school dorm four hours away. I was sick, overworked, frustrated, and determined to stick the ordeal through. My heroes would be disappointed in any less, as would I. Fortunately, God made me stubborn enough to stay on faith until I had the more tangible reasons of friends and familiarity with campus life. There were opportunities to undergo my own ordeals, come through stronger, and occasionally help others, whether it be with work in the dorm or playing with the children at Palmer Home. My understanding increased with the more knowledgeable perspectives of

Home was Sunday, with Nabs and chocolate milk for breakfast so Mom could sleep late, afternoon football games on the television, and feeding the cows from the dented tailgate of the truck.

my teachers, friends who held similar curiosity, and changes in my own perceptions of mankind. Those changes were a result of encounters with unfamiliar difficulties, whether overcoming my natural wariness to strangers or controlling the urge to dismiss another viewpoint in reaction to its peculiarity. Home is still precious and remains a peaceful

sanctuary from the current fast-paced confusion of daily ordeals, and literature still opens my eyes to the possibilities. However, I welcome experience now, and look forward to my own quests of realizations. ❖



Deidre Wheaton

"Magnolia," Stipple

Honorable Mention, Art Contest

The Umbrella

The constant
dripping of the rain is like
a painful memory coming back to haunt me—
coming back to remind me of all of the losses I have
had to endure and all of the defeats I have accepted— forcing me
to relive certain parts of my past— the very parts I have been attempting
to forget for years. My only protection, an old and tattered umbrella, hardly
serves as any real comfort, for the rain seeps through, drenching my body and
my soul, encompassing my entire being until I am overcome by my thoughts and
memories. A wave of fatigue moves through my body, causing me to fall to the ground.
As I fall, I drop the heavy umbrella and my eyes slowly close... Soon they open again, and the
world seems different. The umbrella is on the ground, broken. It is as if I have been freed from the
grasp of a strong, unseen force. As I rise, I feel the soft, warm rain on my face and arms and it cleanses
and refreshes
me. I
am no
longer
confined
by my
past
or my
inhibi-
tions.
I stretch
my arms
above
my head,
gaze at
the sky,
rub my
eyes,
and move
in a new
direction.

Rebekah Page

All Tucked In

Carson Carney

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest



I'm not sure when Sunday School became a social event or a fashion show, but I think it's when Debbie Alexander and Mona Lewis started to fill out up top. The neckline of their dresses mysteriously lowered at the same time jaws dropped on the rest of us. Isn't one of the Ten Commandments "Thou shalt not covet" or something like that? Well, I know I was in church, and I know I was supposed to memorize Psalm 100 before the end of the hour, but where did those things come from, and where was I going to get them? The situation was bad enough that I couldn't compete with the boobs in front of me, but the cutest boys from the eighth grade at Oak Hill Middle School just happened to sit on the other side of the room. I only had to look up once to see a dozen bulging eyeballs of all different colors staring in the general direction of Debbie Alexander's and Mona Lewis's chests.

I squinted my eyes tight and put every ounce of hope I had into growing breasts right then and gazed down. Dropping my chin to my chest, I balled up my fists and painfully looked at myself. My eyes fell on nothing but my lap where grape jelly from my biscuit at breakfast had dripped. I knew nobody would notice, though, so I stood for the closing song and prayer. "Holy, Holy, Holy" ended, and before I knew it SHE had grabbed my hand to pray. There was Debbie, a good two inches taller than me (not to mention a little wider where it counts), holding my hand saying, "Amen." I just thought to myself that she already got what I was praying for.

My arms were crossed all through lunch and for the rest of the day. Whether or not anybody saw me, I couldn't bear knowing that my front could have easily been mistaken for my back. Mama sensed something was wrong and sat me down to talk. I uncrossed my arms and simply pointed to what wasn't there. "That's the problem, or maybe that there is no problem is the problem," I muttered. She slowly began to shake her head and I could see the pity forming in her eyes as she started, "Darling...", only she didn't finish because she couldn't stop laughing long enough to make me feel better. That only made matters worse. Here I was in a fretful dilemma and a 32A, and my Mama was giggling hysterically. I tried

to reason with myself, though, to make myself feel better. I told myself that this problem could be beneficial in the long run, because at least then I wouldn't have a large drooping chest to contend with like the hyena beside me on the bed. As these mean thoughts entered my mind, Mama snapped back into her Mother Mode and finished consoling me about my ill endowment. "You're young for your age," she said. "I didn't develop until college." Thanks, Mom.

As a treat the next day, Mama took me shopping for a new Sunday School outfit. "You'll feel better if you look a little older," she yelled at me over the rack in the junior section of Gayfer's. I appreciated Mama's gesture in wanting me to have new outfit, but her idea of "a little older looking" was one bow instead of two. I dreaded

I'm not sure when Sunday School became a social event or a fashion show, but I think it's when Debbie Alexander and Mona Lewis started to fill out up top.

what I knew she would make me try on. Her first attempt was not very encouraging. I watched her hand in slow motion move to the black plastic hanger. She moved over one, two, then three BLACK POLKA-DOTTED dresses until she saw my size. Also in slow motion, I turned around to escape the flowered collar and poofed sleeves, but the second I moved I

heard the words, "Isn't this precious," and I knew I was stuck. "No, Mama," I tried, but she caught me and said, "You'll never know unless you try it on." After she got an idea of what I was looking for she was a little better at picking out what I wanted. We agreed on a few matching skirts and jackets and even a few dresses to take to the musty dressing room. Not to my surprise, however, most of the tops didn't fit, not even the putrid polkadot thing. On my last try, I put on a plaid dress that was a lot shorter than I thought Mama would have agreed on. We were both frustrated by then, but by the time I reached my exasperated mother, who was sprawled out on the waiting chair and fanning herself with her checkbook, I was feeling much more confident. The dress not only fit, it flattered me AND my chest. Mama smiled as I stood in front of the three-way mirror in Gayfer's beaming at the thought of a dozen eyes of all different colors gazing in MY general direction.

Before bed Saturday night, I put the dress on the back of the white wicker chair in front of my desk.

Sinking deep into the bright pink sheets and down pillows, I decided to dream about how successful Sunday School would be the next day. I said a prayer thanking God for Mama, Daddy, my brother Jay, Sugar, Whiskas, and my best friends Emily Durant and Kelly Jacobs. I also prayed that the lead singer of Pearl Jam would get the letter I sent him. I prayed that I could be Oprah when I grew up. I prayed that Scott Williams would notice me tomorrow. And I prayed that all the hungry people in Ethiopia would get help soon, and they'd find the missing girl on the back of the milk carton. Amen.

Two and a half hours before Sunday School was supposed to start, I was already up and showered. The yellow terrycloth felt comfortable on my skin as I held up the plaid dress for the fourteenth time that morning. I kept envisioning myself, almost like I was going to a ball, in the dress with my makeup perfect and my hair pulled up gracefully so that the wisps around my ears fell just right. The July sun beamed vividly through the window beside the desk and brightened my disposition even more. An uncontrollable smile dominated my face all through breakfast and then in the Buick on the way to the church.

Stopping in the first floor restroom to make sure everything was perfect and there were no jelly stains on my lap, I confidently stepped onto the elevator and pushed the fifth floor button. I strutted out of the elevator, my chest pushed outward and my face pointed to the ceiling. I was positive I reeked of sophistication as I entered the Sunday School room. As usual, the boys were on one side facing the girls. I was the picture of elegance as I made a point to take long, graceful strides all the way through the center of the group to an empty chair on the other side of the room. My stomach squirming, I dared myself to glance across the aisle. To my surprise, there were a dozen eyes on ME. It had worked, the dress did the trick. I looked next to me to see what Debbie Alexander and Mona Lewis thought about the attention I was getting, and they were staring too! I turned away and put my nose right back up and let them stare. This was the life. Mr. Tate began the lesson on Jonah or Judas or Jesus, but I couldn't let that be the end of my attention-getting, so I excused myself to the restroom. Standing up slowly and assuredly, I fixed my hair into place and glided through the crowd to the door. I hoped as I left that they were watching me, and I knew they were when I heard light giggles as I turned the corner. I didn't have to use the restroom exactly, I just wanted to make sure I was still as together as I had been that morning. I smoothed the front of my dress and checked my makeup, reapplying lip gloss so that they would shimmer. Then I pulled up my pantyhose which I had

relentlessly been fighting all day. I straightened the wrinkles around my ankles by tugging them up to my knees and began to move toward pulling the entire top portion of the uncomfortable leggings when I realized that my skirt wasn't there. Well, it was there but hidden underneath layers of clothing! I put on a pair of underwear over my stockings which were OVER my other panties to help keep the hose up, and I had mistakenly tucked the skirt into the FIRST pair! I had strutted through the lobby of my church all the way up to the fifth floor and had pranced like a fool in front of the exact people I had been so desperate to impress. There was my rear, exposed for God and the world, especially the eighth grade boys at Oak Hill Middle School, to see. I went back into the room with my nose pointed toward the floor hoping that everyone's focus would be on Debbie Alexander's and Mona Lewis's chests. ❖

Six Months

The doctor said you have six months to live.

It's time for a choice:

cigarettes or life.

At first you chose life.

You sat in your worn leather recliner
chewing gum, playing games, anything

to keep the nicotine urge away,

then you took up walking

through the yard,

the woods, or even down the road.

You came back smelling of desire,

desire of smoke. You soon tired of your charade,

and no longer hid your indiscretion.

Again, in your chair, you would sit,

hidden in a fog of your own creation,

Marlboro pursed tightly between your lips,

inhaler in your fingers,

ready to release your next breath.

Tabitha Parks

Jailbird

by Jeremy Dobbins

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest



Moonbeams glistened on the water as I passed over the bridge of Notaloby Creek, on my way home after going to the movies in uptown Miltonburg. Curfew was practically non-existent for me at my age, being just a little shy of eighteen, but it was still there. For some reason, I always found myself home early and never had to worry about speeding in order to prevent breaking curfew.

I arrived home around ten o'clock, well before the mandatory two o'clock. One o'clock was preferable, but two was the deadline. I sat parked listening to the end of a song on the radio, but finally, I began to get a chill in the cool night air of the Mississippi summer. So, I made my way inside.

Mom and Dad were still up watching the news and waiting for my brother. Darl just turned sixteen; we had nothing in common. He would be home at exactly eleven o'clock, his curfew, or he would be about fifteen minutes late. Needless to say, he was often in trouble, and it seemed he got worse as he got older. Tonight was no different.

I walked by the door to the living room where the low murmur of the television could be heard, and two figures could be seen staring at the screen. Mom sat curled up in a chair doing needlepoint in her housecoat, and Dad lay on the couch comfortable in just his underwear, only his salt and pepper hair visible above the armrest from the doorway.

"Hey!" my father said. "What did you do tonight?"

"Nothing," I replied, giving my usual answer when I wish to avoid the question. Mother looked up from her needlepoint to look at me in the doorway.

"Nothing?" she said, repeating what I had said; she didn't believe me. "You sure have been gone a while to have done 'nothing.'"

I just smiled because I knew she was only picking at me anyway and walked on back to my room. In a few minutes I returned in my pajamas, and sat down in the light-blue recliner in the living room and watched for a minute as my father continually flicked through channels with the remote.

"Where's Dumb-dumb?" I asked.

"Your brother is not dumb," my mother answered; she said it by rote.

"He isn't?" I replied sarcastically. "Well, his grades don't show it. Anyway, that isn't what I asked."

"I know, but he seems to be doing better," Mom said in his defense. "He didn't fail but a semester of English last year."

"Oh, really!" I said mockingly. "Well, where is he, anyway?"

"He's gone to Lyle's. He'll be home soon."

"Lyle's? Why do you let him go over there, when you know what goes on?" I asked. I was more than a little perturbed at their leniency with him.

"Well, I'd rather him go over there and I know where he is, than him rebel and sneak off to God-only-knows-

where." Mom got a little agitated at my questioning her motives, but she was over it in a moment as she withdrew back to her needlework.

I sat there a few more minutes until I grew tired of seeing the channels flick by again and again, and then I got up and went to my

room to sit on my bed and read. However, since I had already read everything on my bookshelf, I could not quit thinking about Lyle and my brother.

Lyle Bennett was about my age, but he was finishing high school at a college. I am unsure how that works, but he did. He had been arrested a while back for stealing some things from several people's houses, and he had been sent by the courts to a juvenile reform school. Ever since he had gotten out, he never went back to high school but tried to finish it at Mississippi State University. He and my brother had been friends before and after the incident, and as time progressed they became even better friends, even though the college courses caused them only to be able to meet on the weekend.

In the not-too-distant past, Lyle's family had moved to a different street in town. They bought the parsonage of a small church downtown when the church outgrew the building. However, with the parsonage, the Bennetts also got the church building. Now, Lyle had a creative mind (and one that wasn't very religious either) and

The windows had been covered with layers of garbage bags so that no light could be seen coming from inside, and a pool table was placed upon the pulpit.

before I knew it, he had transformed this church. His parents let him have it for his own personal use, probably to get him out of their hair as much as any other reason.

Soon, every weekend, Lyle was having a gathering at his church. My brother, of course, was always there and played a part in the church's "re-decoration." I was invited by my brother to stop by, and once, I created a reason to need to speak with him. I found out that all the rumors were true. Essentially, the windows had been covered with layers of garbage bags so that no light could be seen coming from inside, and a pool table was placed upon the pulpit. The baptistry tub was used as the storage unit where all the caps from their beer bottles were thrown, and the Sunday school rooms were put to use by placing mattresses in them just in case there were any women present, which there often were.

Although the club of people who sat around on the old, cigarette-burned couches where the pews used to be and drank deer was entirely male, a few women were granted entrance, mainly if they were one of the boy's girlfriends. Otherwise, they were not really welcome. They were a sad lot to see, especially after a couple hours of drinking, smoking marijuana and cigarettes, and doing some acid every now and then.

My brother loved it, but I compared the whole lot of them to a cult. All of those boys idolized Lyle, and any of the boys would defend him against any cross word that anyone would say about him. They followed him with more devotion and cultish fervor than many of the people who had previously used the church.

It was during thoughts about this whole situation that the phone rang at nearly a quarter till eleven. I figured it was Darl calling to plead for a few more minutes. However, when I answered the phone, I heard a stranger's voice.

"Hello?"

"Om. Mr. Gordon?"

"No, this is his son, Josh."

"Oh. Well, this is the Clark County Sheriff's Department, and we have Darl out here, and we need to talk to Mr. Gordon."

In my mind I thought *Uh oh, there goes the weekend*, and said, "Okay. Hold on."

I quickly walked to the living room.

"Daddy, you need to answer the phone."

"Who is it?" my dad asked at the same time my mom detected something in my voice and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Well," I said with a grin, "it's the Sheriff's Office, and they have Darl out there."

My mother's face visibly clouded red with fury, and my dad got up to answer the phone. Mom went on back

to her bedroom to put on a jogging suit, knowing she was going to have to go out.

"I'm gonna kill him," I heard her mumble about the time I heard Dad say, "Hello?"

I walked behind her to the back bedroom and watched her put her hair into a pony tail and tie her shoes. Soon, Dad was coming back there from the telephone to get dressed.

"What in the hell has he done now?" Mom asked when she saw him come through the door.

As he put on some pants and a shirt he said, "They picked him and Lyle and John up at a road block. All of them had alcohol, and they'd been drinking."

"What are we gonna do with that boy? You think he'd learn," was all she said.

"What are ya'll gonna do to him?" I asked a few minutes later, hoping that it would not be pleasant. I always got an insane thrill when Darl got in trouble, and the bigger it was, the better. This was big.

"I don't know," my mother snapped. "He won't be on the phone anymore, and his computer and Internet account are history, too."

"And he's gonna have to work," my father added. Dad was always in favor of labor to satisfy any need; his American work ideal was one of his most cherished ones.

"Yeah," my mother added. "He can help out at Mama's every weekend."

Pretty soon they were dressed and made their way towards the door. As Mom picked up her keys and purse she said, "Don't you call anybody and tell them about this, you hear me?"

I thought *How did she know?* and grinned. "I wasn't," I protested. "I'm not *that* crazy!"

"Well, just so you remember," she said. She opened the door. "See you in a little while when we get back."

"Bye!" I said. The door closed. I heard the car crank and watched it go down the driveway and out of sight in the darkness. As soon as it was gone, I was aching to call my great grandmother, but decided not to because Mama would find out. Great Grandma had a big mouth sometimes and gave away secrets that she shouldn't have. But I still had to tell *somebody*. I decided to call Ella, who had gone with me to the movies and was a friend of mine in school. She also knew Darl pretty well, too, and could appreciate my news.

I picked up the phone, and dialed the number. *Surely, she's not asleep yet* I thought, and if she was, she'd be glad I woke her up when she heard where my brother was tonight.

"Hello, Ella?" I said when I heard an answer. "You will never believe what Darl has done now...." ♦

The Walk

I took "the walk" with you
Awkwardly, leaving my hand exposed
So that you might take mine in yours.
You did, and ever so gently led me
Through a grove of cedar trees,
Over the deadening rye, to the rocks,
Where we lay, gazing millions of years away,
Watching and counting,
As the light from some distant time
Crashed into our atmosphere.
I told you of a tale I'd heard,
That each of us had a star;
So we each chose one, side-by-side,
Close to Orion's bow.
You told me then of your dream to fly,
But I just smiled, and hoped
You would walk with me again.

Jennifer Dockstader

Home Life

She begged me to sit in the dining room
with him
while she sat
alone
at the kitchen table,
chewing with her mouth closed
like her mother once taught her,
consciously now,
trying in vain
to muffle her bite,
But he heard her.
Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch.
Each time the cutting and churning of teeth growing
louder, louder.
Oh, that scream!
That shrill, piercing scream
Fine china strikes the floor,
the spaghetti slides
slowly, sluggishly
to the same spot
to mingle with glass and blood.
I feel the sharp jab
of stainless silver
in my back,
hear her stifled whimper,
and see him tip the bottle once again.

Jennifer Dockstader

Pride

Uniforms display medals and colors,
Rainbows of past glory,
Shapes given to formless memory.
I stand proud in these trinkets,
Unthinking of the ones killed to obtain them,
murdering, massacring, killing, raping.
My children run in the playground,
Source of my own vanity to recreate myself,
sons of heroes, descendants of slaughterers,
Fathers of veterans, forerunners of destroyers.
The children's vicious, fanged jaws,
Spit corruption engrained into mind
Since the first moment air burned their nostrils.
Blinded by pride, bound by vanity,
I hear the blaring trumpets of glory,
Singing hymns of nations.
But where are the screams of mothers,
The wails of the tortured?

Jeremy Dobbins

Shoe Polish Saints

by Edea Baldwin

Third Place, Short Story Contest



They would never get him to set foot in a church again — not him. He had decided that long ago, and he didn't intend to change his mind. But then again, he hadn't expected the news he had received in March.

Pappy stared down at his shoes, and noticed how the warm August sunlight streaming through the stained glass windows was reflected on them. If he turned his foot just so, he could almost make out the image of the Apostle Thomas shining just above his laces.

Not only had they gotten him there, but they'd gotten him in front, and they'd forced him to put in his teeth so he'd look respectable. What he wouldn't have given for a Twinkie. To his right was his eldest daughter, his wife's namesake. She clutched a wad of Kleenex in her hand, but she had given up on using it about ten minutes before, and now her make-up ran down her face and fell from her chin to her white collar in small peach-colored droplets. To his left was daughter Yvonne, her chief activity being an occasional lift of her lacy handkerchief to dab at the corners of her eyes.

Only a year before, Olive had talked him into coming to church. They were having a special ceremony for couples who had been married for fifty years. Even then, he reflected, her skin had begun taking on the sick yellow hue. She had worn a lavender dress with a floral pattern, and her corsage had been the prettiest there, though now he couldn't remember the flowers he'd picked out for it. They were purple and white, though. They were purple and white. He had worn a blue suit and his teeth. Everyone congratulated them after the ceremony, but he thought the whole thing was pointless. Bicker and quarrel for fifty years, and get a church service dedicated to you.

"Me, I'll never set foot in a church again till the day I die!" he had once said. What a temper he had then — and now. He had hammered six telephones, smashed in two television screens with beer bottles, broken countless things. And Olive had said nothing; had just accompanied him to the store to buy replacements. Once he had bought a pool table for his granddaughter for her birthday and placed it right in the middle of

Olive's kitchen. That didn't last very long. She took one look at it, and ten minutes later it was back on its way to Houma.

He was here, but they couldn't make him cry. They would never make him cry. As far as he was concerned, they could all go to hell, except for the little girl, his great-granddaughter; he loved her. She sat about fifteen rows back with her mother, father, brother, and baby sister. They had moved away two years ago, but for this they had to make the trip back down to the bayou. He remembered how during her naptime, she used to sneak from her house to their back door, and he and Olive would let her in and give her frozen yogurt and potato chips. She'd then follow Olive into the den and alternate between watching Olive embroider and trying to understand what was going on in *The Young and the Restless*. The day they moved away, Olive shut the van door, and after the face of the little girl disappeared from view, she had crumpled to the cement in the driveway and stayed there for twenty minutes. He just went into the house and drank a beer.

*What a temper he had then — and now.
He had hammered six telephones,
smashed in two television screens with
beer bottles, broken countless things.*

As long as he didn't look at the empty playhouse, he could handle it. As long as he threw away the surplus supply of yogurt and canned pears, the storybooks she had forgotten to pack, and the crayons in a glass on the kitchen table, he could handle it. He could always handle it. He clacked his dentures together and nodded. Yep. He could always handle it.

He picked at the seams in the pew's purple cushion, looked around at the windows, noticed how the pieces of glass fit together to compose the stern-faced saints. Outside a fishing boat sent out its loud signal to raise the bridge, and it startled him. At night they used to sit on the lawn swing that hung from the magnolia tree in their front yard and watch the lights play on the ripples in the bayou. The little girl ate from a can of peaches or pears and chattered about how she found a four-leaf clover during recess, or Micah Dardar had made the teacher mad again, or Shelly had made her talk and that's why she had to put her nose on the chalkboard.

The voices from the choir loft filled the sanctuary with a slow, haunting version of "Amazing Grace," and Pappy noticed — or imagined he noticed — the absence

of one voice in particular. Miss Josephine and Mrs. Arceneaux stood beside each other now. There had been someone between them. Olive had sung in that choir for at least thirty years, and now they sang without her. She joined the choir because she didn't want to teach the catechism anymore, and she had to do something for the church. Well, that was one of her reasons. Pappy had scoffed when she told him the idea, saying that her singing wouldn't be doing something for the church because she'd scare everybody away. She joined the choir that same week, practiced her music while he was trying to watch his boxing and wrestling on television, and refused to strain his gumbo for three weeks straight. And now they sang without her. He had never actually heard her sing. And they were singing without her.

The old man lifted his head to see the mass of flowers in front of the towering pulpit. The choir sang a few more songs, and then six men walked up to the front of the church, closed the lid of the coffin without a sound, and heaved it up. They all looked alike: black tuxedos, shiny shoes, black hair, red noses. "She's not really dead; she's just sleeping." He remembered how the little girl used to turn around in her chair in the theater during *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and comfort the children behind her with this same phrase. Olive would hiss "Shhh!" and hand her a box of snowcaps to keep her busy.

He realized who was in that coffin, and his stomach turned to lead, his mouth and throat dry. Already he missed her—her scent, a powdery clean smell that filled a room with every move she made; her cooking... everything about her, everything that was now gone. As soon as this service was over, the little girl would be leaving him too. Everyone would be going away, leaving him with a dish of cold food that could never compare to Olive's; food that wouldn't be strained or cooled under the ceiling fan. He would be in that house by himself, alone with his Little Debbie cakes and his beer, listening to the sounds of the bayou.

He grimaced as his two daughters blew their runny noses at the same time. "Damn it. Damn 'em to hell," he muttered to himself. They both heard him, and both slammed their elbows into his side. He wanted a telephone to smash.

A heaviness seeped into him like the barbeque sauce that dripped into the holes he drilled in crabs. They all used to love his barbequed crab. Olive once sat at the picnic table for three straight hours eating his crab, then spent another ten minutes licking her fingers. The sun had moved to another window, to illuminate the face of another saint, and he looked down at his shoe, now dull and lifeless like his heart. ❖



Wesley Duffee-Braum

*"Wooden Shadows," Black and White Photograph
First Place, Art Contest*

THE HALFPIPE

Down the mountain pipe,
Climbin' the walls,
And comin' down with style.
You wanna win the big one,
You gotta get stoked,
And go all out.
Don't get scared,
You've got the best board on the mountain,
And you're ranked high among the best.
That guy did a McTwist at the end,
You've been doing those for years.
If you pull that off with your style,
You could easily take the gold.
If you ride goofy, take the first jump easy.
Pull a faky down that side, and ride regular to the other.
When you take that side, do that McTwist
You've been doing for years,
And show 'em how it's really done.
Pull of a 720 next, or a 900 if you feel really good
Then end up on a hand plant, and you've got the gold.

Tommy Byrd

M & M Grocery

I ride down the grocery aisles
past boxes and shelves of Campbell's.
Blue Plate Mayonnaise and Kraft mustard
in glass jars line the left
and cans of Kelly spaghetti stack to the right.
I turn on one wheel near the cash register
counter and Mom yells for me to slow down.
Ignoring her I race past towering
glass refrigerators bulging with RC's and Cokes.
The wooden floor rumbles beneath
my tires as I bounce on
the plastic seat.
I chew on my Tootsie Roll
thinking of my next direction.
Giggling and smiling, I miss my turn
and run into a box of Tide
and dent the cardboard container
with my front wheel.
Past the rack of Lay's and Frito's
and by the Turner freezer
I'd ride till my mother warned me
a customer was coming to the door
and then I'd ride to my garage
behind the counter.

Connie Wong

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Our place

People bustling through the streets-
Hustling,
in the day and the night-
Working,
a man sells apples to an undercover cop-
Luckily, the cop didn't try to stop Op from selling
his crop-
Why?
Is it that our place is always hot-
at night after fights,
much to the delight of knights in blue-
Who,
Defend our place from destruction-
To,
Keep our place safe, from the dragons gorging on-
the crack bones of children-
Innocently,
are the future of our place.

Marcus Jones

Shadows

Dark shadows drape the walls,
Velvety veils sending everything into vague obscurity.
They remind me of the soft shadows cast by a lone candle,
Deep into the depth of night's term.
The shimmering stars out the window,
Make me remember the twinkle in your eyes,
In a room rich with the smell of cinnamon from burnt incense,
Once used to cleanse the air of demons,
Candles to light our clandestine ritual.
But can we be compared with priests of religions
Long since dust, or those that continue their torturous existence?
We do no sacrifice:
No blood of wailing men and maidens stream
Down the steps of the ziggurats and temples of Montezuma.
We do not sacrifice ourselves—who we are—
Bent kneed before the foundations of Jerusalem and Rome.
We do not swear to the jihad and bathe the sands in corrupted blood
Perhaps our ritual is more holy, more ever-lasting,
More pure, more true.
And when the candles are blown out,
I still smell cinnamon,
Warm in the embracing darkness.
And again, I miss you.

Jeremy Dobbins

Prexem Tibi Adorare

Now, as the years roll by,
Passing like the winds over the desert dunes,
Stirring the sands of Time with new fervor,
Burying the monuments and temples
Long since silenced by changes in the tides of man,
I think of what you are:
A vague mystery that I do not know,
That I must on faith continue to believe
You are out there somewhere,
Waiting on me as I wait for you.
Perhaps my search will never find you,
Or perhaps you will never find me.
But we are One, and always shall be,
In this lifetime or another,
We will meet again as we always have
In innumerable lives before this.
Vainly I look into the faces of man,
Looking for the remembered soul behind those forgotten eyes.
Searching for lips so long denied.
And my one comfort is in my faith that you are out there,
Searching frantically for me, for your other half,
My one fear that our twisting paths may never cross,
Or that the winds will blow you from my fingers
Like dust upon the wind.
I pray to you, Magnum Mysterium,
Whose current name and guise I do not know:
Don't give up looking for me,
And pray that I shall have the strength to continue,
When it seems that you will forever be lost on the seas of time.
Remember, my True Brother, my one Other Self,
Amor aeterna est, Love is forever.
And in this time, or another, We Will Meet Again.
In noster nomen, Amen.

Jeremy Dobbins

The Mirage of a Titan

by Allan Hillman

Humble-muscled body and glittering eyelids, swollen cheeks of a toothless mouth, and the boiling point of a bald skull petitioned the nurse's attention. He looked like he needed some help, she would later claim to the family as they questioned her of his whereabouts for the past several hours. She, breast-tag reading "Patricia," eased her way up to the fellow, wanting to hurry with him, yet not wanting to startle him in his more-than-obvious fragile state. Yet, the contented smile on his face did take a small portion of the awkwardness out of the situation.

"Excuse me, uh, sir," she began politely, but never finished. He looked up at her, smiling hugely, warmly even. "Ma'm, I'm gonna' watch my grandson play baseball. Please tell my family that I'll meet them there." With that, the old man collapsed into a heap, just missing a magazine strewn coffee table to his immediate fore-front. The nurse, breast-tag reading "Patricia," screamed for a medic, rushed to his side, and out of professional instinct, checked his pulse... zero... his heartbeat... zero... breathing... none. The man was dead. She'd seen it too many times before. This gentleman was not coming back.

Stroking the cat's mane, Grandpa George looked into the oval eyes of his five-year-old grandson, Jake. Jake had been frolicking within the boundaries of the yard, searching out any new wildlife that he hadn't already tortured into his Mason jar of insects.

Grandpa George sighed, hearing the not-too-distant rumbling of a log truck on the gravel-packed roadway nearly one hundred yards to the front of the house. God, I wish I'd have lived farther on back in the woods, Grandpa George thought, believing in his heart that one of those log trucks would be the end of Sassy, his unneutered, loves-to-roam-about-at-night, can't-stand-a-night-without-a-female, tabby-furred feline. Sure enough, one of those log trucks had taken the only dog he'd ever owned, a mangy mongrel named Tab. Hell, he had a right to worry. Besides, Sassy was his only weakness. Other than his snuff. And, of course, his grandson.

"Paw-paw, do grasshoppers bite?" Jake asked, spying

the tiny creature he now held in his hand.

"Well, I reckon not, seeing as how his teeth ain't much bigger'n a grain -"

"I was just wonderin', Paw-paw, cause this one's doin' a damn fine job of gnawin' my thumb off," he said, nonchalantly, smilin' at his grandfather who hated foul language, but used it from time to time himself.

Just the same, though, "Watch at mouth, boy! If your Mama heard you talkin' like that, she'd beat me like a -"

"Paw-paw, why do you say my Mama'd beat you up? She ain't too big, and she don't look any stronger'n you. You reckon she could beat you up if she took a notion to?"

"Boy, if you don't quit interruptin' me while I'm talkin', I'm liables to -"

By this time, Jake had meandered up onto the porch, hoping his Paw-paw would let him plunder in his pockets. While his Paw-paw was still talkin', Jake planted himself firmly on his Paw-paw's knee, and gave him a big hug.

Once again, cut off in midsentence, Grandpa George thought, chuckling to himself. He would have been more than happy to let his grandson plunder in his pockets had the idea itself not reminded him that he was out of snuff. This posed a catastrophe to the 52-year addict. Not a small catastrophe, either.

The problem wouldn't loom so large if Grandma were here. If she

were here, he'd just call to her, tell her to grab him a box of snuff out of "you-know-where," and that would be the end of it. But she wasn't, and he had to dispel a way to get to his secret cache without Jake noticing where it was. Grandpa George knew that the boy was only five, but he'd always had a fascination with that "funny-smellin' brown stuff Paw-paw always had in his cheeks." This problem would not solve itself.

"Jake," he said, speaking to him as though he were a five-year-old, which, for all purposes, he was, "I've got to run in the house a minute. You reckon you could hold ol' Sassy here for me until I get back?"

"Sure, Paw-paw!" Jake squealed, releasing his excitement in one autistic yawp like he usually did. Pride illuminated the youngen's face, making large the dimples

The nurse, breast-tag reading "Patricia," screamed for a medic, rushed to his side, and out of professional instinct, checked his pulse... zero... his heartbeat... zero... breathing... none. The man was dead.

that dipped into his smile, and brightening the blue-lights of his eyes. Paw-paw smiled, too.

"Now, you just sit tight. Don't let Sassy go, she'll go off'n get dirty and then we can't keep her in the house cause Maw-maw'll have a cow herself" He turned to go.

"Paw-paw, why will Maw-maw have a cow?" Jake asked, just as serious as when he wants a cookie thirty minutes before supertime.

Grandpa George rolled his eyes, suppressing a giggle at the thought of Doris *actually* having a cow. Don't worry about it, champ, just hold Sassy tight for me."

Grandpa George went in the door, first hearing the TV in the den and then hearing the annual sounds of the coffee maker in the kitchen. Heading between both the den and the kitchen, and straight down the hall, Grandpa George moved into his bedroom. Above his chest-of-drawers was a set of double cabinets, built into his room after he decided he was tired of walking to the kitchen for a mid-night snack. Zoo-zoo's, candy-bars, graham crackers, and saltines crowded the interior of the cabinet. Of course, that was only in the front.

Farther to the back, behind the Chips Ahoy wrapper, were two rolls of Skoal, smokeless tobacco.

Although he'd always called it snuff, "the funny brown stuff" was actually just tobacco. Snuff was the grained, sandy looking material that his Granny had always pinched into her lip. Thinkin' of the many times he had stolen "a pinch" from his Granny as a boy made his smile flicker into a full gravy-eatin' grin. She'd always catch him, though, no matter what he did. She knew to the exact gram how much her snuff can weighed and exactly how much was in it. When she did catch him, she'd make him fill his mouth with the bitter herb, and run around the house several times. He'd always quit for about several weeks after she run him, but that bitter taste had always...

So engrossed was he in his reminiscence that he hardly paid any attention to the call of caution from outside. Distantly heard, "Hey, Sassy! Don't play in the road. You know Paw-paw might have a cow."

Thinking about his Granny's funeral when he was about thirteen years old, Grandpa George remembered his father giving him something. Something that he was supposed to keep, perhaps, to remember his Granny. Remembering his father's speech about responsibility, he pulled the old can of snuff out from behind his rolls of Skoal. It was rusted, beat-up, and warped from the many times he'd lost it in his room, and then found it by kickin'

it against the wall in the dark. He thought about how his mother had hated the idea of him having that snuff even though it had belonged to his Granny. Then, there was his teacher's abject opinion of it when he had brought it to school to show it to his buddies. Yep, a lot of trouble that snuff had caused...

Grandpa George snapped out of his reverie, hearing two all-too-familiar sounds at once... The innocent call of a boy—his grandson—for an orange fur-ball cat to get out of the road, and the oncoming wail of a diesel driven-Mack truck. Heart sinking as he realized that Jake wasn't in the back yard anymore, Grandpa George rushed for the door.

* * * * *

The funeral was well out of the way. They'd had the longest procession to ever pass through town. Although Jake wasn't known to anyone but the church-goers, everybody had felt the urge to come and grasp ex-Grandpa George's hand, give him a hug, express their sentiments, and, incidentally, make him even more depressed than he already was. He had just sat in the corner of the room, watching the people file in, look at his grandson's casket, and then file out again. The only coherent thought that passed through his mind was, "They couldn't even open the casket for me to see him one last time, the sons-of..."

Tears that hadn't stained the face of the old man for better than fifteen years streaked his wrinkled mug continuously. No one knew what it had been like.

His son had forgiven him. A little. Danny had paced up and down the funeral parlor for nearly three hours, just trying to convince him to talk. Yet, it just seemed that he was doing it because he felt that he had to. If forgiveness were weighed by visits over the next couple of years, George would have guessed that Danny had damned him to Hell... Maybe a phone call once or twice a week. "We need you now, Dad, we need you here with us," his mouth would say, passing his hands over the blank, wet stare of the old man, but his eyes said, "I cannot believe what you have done to me, you old -."

Denise, George could tell, would never forgive him. After that night in the hospital, waiting for the doctor's final word, Denise had sprung upon him like a hungry cat onto a fieldrat. "What did you do to my son? What did you do? Ohmygod, look what you've done, you..." George had sat there, staring into space, hoping to clear his mind of all the useless memories of him and the small boy, these memories which caused him ungodly

amounts of agony.

He had been taken home, and, now, sitting in the same place that he had sat the night that he had left the hospital, George began to cry. It had been exactly two years since the accident occurred. Two long, awful, pain-wrenching years. Two years in which he had gone through a daily routine of waking, eating, and sitting in his old chair on the porch (the same which he had last seen Jake alive in). He just lived from day to day... If a person could call that torment from day-to-day *living*.

The only portion of his day that he was even able to think consistently was when he took his unheeding, undismissable walk to the graveyard. Rain or shine, sleet or snow, if one were to walk past the Simpson graveyard at about 20 minutes after four o'clock on any day, they would see ol' George, sitting on a gravestone, talking to thin air (Jake).

George enjoyed this time of day. No visitors disturbing him, no phone calls to answer (he had thought about ripping it out of the wall, but Danny had stepped in), nothing. Just peacefulness. Real peace. Peace that only his grandson could give. Only his grandson.

For two years, his walks to the graveyard had been uninterrupted. Looking into the mirror, noticing how he had aged ten years in only two, George, not alone, decided that today would be different.

* * * * *

Sitting in the same hard, uncomfortable seat, smelling the same ammonia-clean scent, glossing over the same portrait of two lion cubs wrestling with one another, George felt that familiar course of nerves... *deja vu*. The waiting room was the same, not one change from the last time that he was here. He sat at the same place he had sat, the same way he had sat, looking and listening in the same direction that he had on the last night he had been here. This was what he had been told to do.

No images nor visions came. He heard no sounds from the ceiling, protesting the weight of the voice of God. He felt nothing. Not a damn thing, except the remorse that clouded his insides every day. He just sat, not minding the father and child who passed directly to his right, seating themselves about two chairs down. The man looked to be in his mid-twenties, sporting a navy blue suit with a Tabasco tie, definitely of the "lawyerly" persuasion. But the small child was the one who caught his eye, manning a seven-year-old frown of confusion with a tear-stained Atlanta Braves uniform to match.

Although his hearing wasn't what it once was, he was still able to tune in to their conversation. It wasn't nearly as morbid as those that he had carried on with his

grandson for the past two years, discussing the why's, what's, and how's of the accident, along with the ten thousand apologies that George would always cast onto the tombstone.

"I don't want to play my baseball game, Dad," the boy said, the expression on his face telling anyone that he knew he wasn't supposed to say anything, but *he just had to*.

His father frowned, then smiled. "Son, you really need to play. Your Mom really wants you to, I promise. I promised her that I'd get you to the game right after we see her. But, right now, she's still kinda' upset about your grandpa."

Thatta' way to do it, man, George thought, admiring the fellow for being straight forward with his son about the boy's mother, yet sort of playing it off by telling him that the game was still on.

"Grandpa can't see me play anymore, can he?" He seemed almost unreal, holding his glove in one hand, while hugging his father with the other. "Can he, Dad?"

George could feel the wetness in his sockets start to crest, once again, but, he thought, what would the two think of him if he just broke down. They might get up and leave.

The father looked at his child, so pertinent in his question. George could see him bluffing through his closet mind for an answer, which almost didn't come. Funny thing was, George wanted an answer, too.

"Well, uh, son . . . Yes, he can still see you play. He sees everything that you do, and he'll be so proud to see you strong, marching out onto that field, without a worry in the world. He knows that you'll be worried about your Mom, but he'll see you out there, and watch every play. And you know what else, Jesus will be watching you, too. Just think, *your* grandpa will be watching you with *Jesus Himself!* From now on, Jesus won't be watching you alone, He'll have your grandpa right beside Him. Whatta' you think of that?"

The boy remained still, lost in thought for a moment. "I think they'll both have a hard time buying me a Coke after the game," the boy said, frowning all of the sudden. But, as anyone could see, his gears were turning and his eyes revived, "But you can do that for me, can't you Dad?"

He let out a squeal (just like Jake used to), and ran out of the room. The father sighed, smiled, and got up to leave. Passing back by George, he stopped as his hand was grasped. "Excuse me, sir... But, do you really think there's baseball in Heaven?"

The man looked at George closely, almost serenely, and George saw a glint of confusion, then cheer, in the fellow's eyes. "Well, sir, if there is, Heaven will surely be a happy place... 'Cause I could definitely spend eternity

watchin' *that one* there," pointing toward his son," doing anything that makes him happy. That's my life there, sir, my life. If he died, I think I'd just as soon die so that I could meet him in Heaven. Heh! Heh! I'd coach his team there, too."

George could feel the tear seep out of his eyelids. "I know exactly what you mean. Jake is (was) my life as well." George turned his face from the man, and then into the nothingness of the waiting room, speaking to, maybe God, maybe himself "I could be a spectator, I guess." The man smiled, turned, and chased his son down the hall, picking up the glove that the boy had thrown happily as he was being chased.

"Thank you, sir." George whispered, and smiled. For the first time in exactly two years, he realized that his life had ended, too, when Jake had died. Also, for the first time in exactly two years, he was happy... happy because he knew what was about to happen. Grandpa George looked to Heaven, smiled again, and said, "God, I'm ready to see my boy." No tears fell. Remorse was lifted. George just sat... and waited for what was to come. God bless us, all...❖

A Trip in the Tree-Grabber

Barb and I sit high,
Flailing our limbs out the window
To wave at the passersby below.
Dad leans over,
Tugging at our shirt sleeves
To jerk us back inside the roaring spade machine.
He shifts that pole jutting from the floorboard,
And we suddenly accelerate faster, faster,
Gaining enough momentum in the multi-wheeled truck
To steam-roll a house.
I spot the clippers hovering on top
And wince as stop-light wires scathe
Its razor jaws.
Dad drones through traffic,
Constantly pushing and pulling
The stick.
But Barb and I still sit high.

Jessica Tippens

Loaded Responsibility

You all have faith in me.
Almost too much.
Overlooking my disappointments,
Hurling my failures to one side,
You all accept me.
But now from a span,
In scattered shreds,
Removed from what I once called home,
I recognize that it is not just
Gravity pressing down on my
Shoulders anymore.
I can feel the heaviness
The accumulating-bulk-squashing
My-backbone-into-an-accordion-folded fan.
The subsistence has run out.
I long to be sick.
To slumber away the disheartening
Winter like a heap of grizzly fur.
Numb with warmth and no one
To disturb.

Jessica Tippens

Animal Mother

Dedicated to Stanley Kubrick and Adam Baldwin

the slow drip of blood onto the mattress
collecting into a thick sanguine cake
the sounds in the dirty darkness
herald a dirtier birth

the shrieks of the Jewess of Dachau
evoke his Pollack hair
The moans of the white cow driven to her knees
evoke his bovine build
the screams of the women of Mai Lai
evoke his thousand yard stare

these noises of anguish and terror
flow through his throat, up
mingling into a guttural roar
shaking the jungle canopy
paralyzing the filthy animals
even those wearing boots and hungry slant-eyed
smiles

His battle cry is echoed
by the roars of the rifles
the blasts of grenades
the laughter of his own demons
"I have become death."

Mark Owens

To Town

Today's the day they all go to town,
From gutters and dumpsters,
From shacks and Shanties.
Some live in the streets,
Some come from the hollows.
They come in their dull rags and cheap cars,
Stocking the supplies for the month.
They fill stores with long waits and foul odors.
A wino complains over the inflation of his vodka,
A mother of six stretches her money, and
A young boy rents a place to stay for the month;
He is far too young to be renting for himself.
Today's the day the rich stay home.

Charles Cates

Ideas are stupid creatures

Ideas are stupid creatures
like tiny buzzing flies
cavorting in the air about my head.
The first time was accidental
I reached out and grasped too strongly
the idea squished within my closed fist
creative juices dripping from murdering fingers
and right before I felt its frail body crushed
I heard a wee cry of indignation
come out as if through a helium atmosphere
different from the usual whisperings they give
constant muttering which becomes annoying
always vying for attention - each idea believing
itself more important than the rest.
So deliberately I began killing them
one by one I ripped them apart, slapped
them out of the air, pinched their little
bodies until they popped and splattered.
I even ate some of them, holding back an evil
laugh as they squirmed around my chewing teeth
they fight for the longest time then give up
and slide passively down the throat.
And each one had its own flavor. Some were bitter,
others sweet. One tasted like bananas.
Eventually the ideas no longer came around
although every now and then one will appear
tumbling around the border of my head
Unlucky ideas - casually caught
with fingers long suited to the task.
The last image they see
of an increasingly similar world:
my descending foot.
Funny, that they don't learn.
but now I sit and smile
enjoying silence

Phillip Nguyen

A Tale of A Reluctant Martyr

by Kelly Reynolds



The air around the man was teeming with the smell of vomit, a sharp-edged blade, that could slice the tender skin just inside the nostrils. He lay crumpled, piled like fall leaves for the burning, with his head between his knees. He was silently crying; huge tears smacked the sidewalk beneath his bowing head. The sun barely cut into the darkness of the alleyway. The few arrows of day that reached the figure illuminated his streaked face, revealing dirt-caked crevices and a tight mouth with the upper lip rolled inward. His nose was soft, barely protruding from his face, and it was full of his smell. He knew that he was dirty and that sometime he had to get up and move on and bathe somewhere, but not just then. For now, the light was enough light, and at least his own smell was his own.

His hands moved from his feet to his head, and in the turning motion, the scars and bruises and peeling nails were visible. He rubbed his forefingers and middle fingers in gentle, slow circles around his temples. The nausea subsided a little as he focused on his head and not on the lurching of his gut. A deep breath filled his lungs with thick air, heavy with sour odor, and his stomach churned again with a sickening flop.

The priest had asked him if he needed food or a coat. He said no at the time, but wished now that he had taken the coat. It was growing cold as the sun sank, and fewer rays of light were filtering through the muddy air. Turning down the food was okay; he felt that he would never eat again.

The run from the church had been tiring, and now his legs cramped painfully below the knees. His hands ached. The bruises were turning yellow around the edges, a sickly yellow, a jaundiced, rotten yellow. The purple scars that ran down the center of his palms were pulled taut from either side, and they were hilly, raised and new. The priest had asked about his hands, but he didn't explain the bruises or the scarring. The wounds, like the smell now, were his own.

He had gone to the church only because it was warmed by spaceheaters, and if he curled up beneath one, he almost suffocated in the heat cloud. That, and the huge white doors were always unlocked. He had

been curled up beneath a heater on the right side of the sanctuary when the priest found him. He awoke with a jump; a sharp, piercing fear sliced through his torso, and the quick frightened breaths tore his lungs. Under the gaze of the priest, he shrank back and almost became one of the stained glass saints. The priest had been kind to him, had invited him to come and rest in his own rooms behind the sanctuary. They walked together down the long aisle, red carpeted, bordered by rows and rows of empty pews. The candles cast an eerie light against the walls, and statues had shadows and plans.

The altar was draped in purple cloth, expensive linen, almost liquid and dripping to the floor. On it were two tall candles that seemed to reach half-way to the ceiling with twin dancing flames that looked like eyes. Above

Above the altar on the far wall of the sanctuary, a man hung on two crossbeams held up by metal rails in the plaster.

the altar on the far wall of the sanctuary, a man hung on two crossbeams held up by metal rails in the plaster. He was naked, muscled legs tensed in pain. Arms stretched outward pulled his chest flat and white. The cracks in

his right arm and in his face had been painted over. The color wasn't right; it was two shades too pink and stood out against the violent whiteness of his breast.

"Who do you say that is?" the man asked the priest in a whisper.

The priest didn't hesitate for a moment. Without lifting his eyes, he said, "That is Jesus, our holy savior."

The man took measured steps toward the ever-watching eyes of the tall candles. He leaned heavily against the wooden altar, felt the linen beneath his fingertips, and stared up at the figure above. Flat eyes, paint chipping from the wounded forehead. The hands, with metal driven through bone and flesh, the wounded, bloodless hands hanging limp at the ends of the cross piece. He looked down at his own hands, at the bruises and the purple scars, and he turned suddenly away, afraid of the up and down, swirling motion of his stomach. He lurched forward. Hands to temples, hands to temples. Circling, circling. He vomited onto the red carpet over and over, doubled, bending into half a man. The smell wrapped itself about him, hung in his hair and clothes. He glanced back at the flat eyes of Jesus, then at the priest with his head turned away, and fear crept up his throat where the vomit had been. He ran down the

aisle, tripped, but caught himself. He threw open the white doors, ran as hard as he could away, two blocks, four blocks; he lost count.

And now he wished for a coat. The sun was gone completely; no darts of light, no scraps of warmth were left. He fumbled in his pockets for a pack of cigarettes

and a book of matches. He lit one, striking the match on the brick behind him. The smoke, the damp mold, and the smell of vomit swirled together into his nose. He threw the cigarette into the corner of the alleyway, watched the fire disappear into the darkness, and collapsed again into a pile of brown leaves or cold ashes.❖

Ironic Aqua God

It's always seemed ironic that water symbolizes life...
it took yours.

I remember those dog days,
seven years old, gullible as hell,
picture-perfect image super-imposed in my mind,
counting mosquito bites on my chicken legs,
following the shadow of an invincible man.

You were my idolized agrarian god,
tearin' down a prairie road, handlin' that green

Bronco like a ragin' stallion...

That machine saw hell every day,
and Mama did every night.

Goin' to the quarters, wantin' no trouble,
just askin' for a little water, 'mam.
Sable men fondling brown paper sacks,
smiling as big as the cashier who wears the tight
skirts
on Eucutta street.

What's in the bag, Daddy?
Somethin' for me?

No, honey, just good tap water.
Of course, I trusted you. (My idol wouldn't lie.)

I am ten years old now, grown up with a sassy
mouth.

This May morning is as hot as Dante's *Inferno*.
Cigarette lighter floatin' at the pond's edge,
they say the old man hasn't been home all night.

I hate that water,
that powerful algae-infested god.
Murky brown, then fade to black (for you maybe).

But I'm grown up and it's all clear...
you were dead to self thirty years ago...
black men with the paper sacks
killed you when Mike was just a kid.

Thirty years later...
addiction purged by water,
sweet relief, that murky dismissal.
(Redemption from denial)
You can call it water if it will help you cope...
we all have our devils.
I will call you Daddy regardless of their harsh
words and
accusing glances...
they knew the rumor and I knew the man...

Memories blocked,
civil wars vividly rape my thoughts,
I did not mean to see you bleed.

Emma Johnson
First Place
Poetry Contest

That Boy Belongs in Whitfield

by Kelly Reynolds

Second Place, Short Story Contest



Daddy would have made me go to the funeral, if I hadn't wanted to go so much anyway. He said it was befitting the family of the sheriff to turn out for such events. Usually, I would have begged and pleaded, bargained and bribed, and cried a lot not to go, but this funeral was different. So Mama ironed my newest Sunday dress, and for once, she didn't tie a ribbon into my hair. She said it wasn't proper. There had not been a church so full in Russell, Mississippi, since the morning after the flood in 1907. Daddy said that he thought the church was even more packed this time, but he didn't know how that could be. From a pew toward the back of the white-washed building, I craned my neck to see into the casket. I was too far away, but I could imagine the way Walter looked. I thought sure he was wearing his Confederate uniform, the grey, tattered one that was his granddaddy's. He had worn it to church every Sunday morning and Wednesday night since I was born, and long before, too, Daddy told me.

On Sundays at church, Walter sat up in the front pew on the right side where he always sat, where his daddy used to sit, and his granddaddy, too, when they made him go to church. One Sunday, right in the middle of the final hymn after preaching, he stood up in the middle of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and saluted. We all stared, eyes bulging out of our heads. There was giggling from the back where the teenagers sat, and Mrs. Singleton stopped playing the piano. Gradually, all the voices died away except for Walter's. He finished out the first verse, the second, and even the third. Then he turned on his heels and marched out of the church. For a moment after he was gone, there was silence, then whispering. I nearly laughed my dress right off, but Mrs. Juanita Jenkins, the wife of the pastor of The Russell Congregational Baptist Church, was not amused. That Sunday started her crusade to have Walter committed.

Miss Juanita called a town meeting about Walter, and the next day after supper, we all gathered in the church to hear what she had to say. She stood and projected in her best stage voice, "That boy belongs at Whitfield!" I was never sure why she called him a boy; he was older

than my daddy by at least twenty years. I guess Miss Juanita just got excited. She hadn't had such an audience since her stage debut in *Annie* her senior year at Russell High School, and she loved an audience. Anyway, she wasn't very successful sending Walter to Whitfield because Daddy never would sign the papers that had to be signed. I heard him tell Mama once that he'd sign 'em if they had Miss Juanita's name on 'em. Mama scolded him, but laughed when she thought I wasn't looking.

Nobody paid Miss Juanita much attention at first, except for the Baptist Ladies Aid Society. Soon, though, her mission became the town joke. I was allowed to sit sometimes on the steps of Daddy's office and listen to the men talk as they drank coffee in the mornings. They always laughed whenever they spoke of Mrs. Juanita

Jenkins, but everyone of them tipped their hats and said, "Good morning, Miss Juanita," when she passed by. Somehow, the Ladies Aid Society decided that if Walter couldn't be committed, lemon meringue pies and prayer cards were the way to restore his sanity. Walter hated lemon meringue pies. He said that they gave him indigestion, and so every single

Walter liked the prayer cards better; they were brightly colored and had pictures of Jesus on the front. He hung every one up in his bedroom beside his pictures of movie stars and empty seed packets.

one that the Baptist Ladies Aid Society brought to him was thrown over his back fence. Needless to say, Miss Juanita was enraged. The boys in my class used to sneak back there and eat those pies. They only had to sneak because of Miss Juanita; Walter never minded. Walter liked the prayer cards better; they were brightly colored and had pictures of Jesus on the front. He hung every one up in his bedroom beside his pictures of movie stars and empty seed packets. Miss Juanita never knew about that, and if she did, she wouldn't have liked Jesus to be stuck between the tomato seeds and Lawrence Olivier. Walter thought it was an honor.

One night last summer, I was awakened by an awful racket on the street. Since my window faced the backyard, I tiptoed down the hall to Jeremiah's room, which faced the street. Me and Jeremiah knelt at the window and tried to piece together what was happening below. Walter was standing beneath the lamp post across the street and diagonal from us. He was wearing his bathrobe and no shoes.

I could see faces in every window in the neighborhood. Walter was on stage and the perfect circle cast from the street lamp was a spotlight. Looking up at the light, he yelled, "Eunice, come down from there!" Daddy hollered out to him from his upstairs window. "Walter, what are you doing down there? Why don't you go on home?"

Walter didn't seem to hear him. His only reply was again addressed to Eunice. "Damn you, Eunice! I ain't got the time to come up and get you, but I will if I have to! You hear me up there, Eunice?"

"Walter, Eunice's been dead for fifteen years. I went to her funeral. She's not up there, so why don't you just go on home?" I could hear Daddy's tired voice, how sorry he felt that Walter was the center of such a spectacle. But Jeremiah and I were enjoying it. Nothing much ever happened in Russell except droughts and revivals, and Walter's craziness was exciting. None of us had ever known anyone who was nuts before, and all the children in town would have been crushed if Miss Juanita had been successful in sending him to Whitfield.

Jeremiah and I saw that Daddy had gone down to the street and was quietly talking to Walter. He managed to convince him to give up calling to Eunice, and even got him to come inside the house. Mama gave him a glass of iced tea, and he spent the night in the guest room that used to be Grandma's room before she died.

Compared to his everyday life, Walter's funeral was boring and uneventful. We sang "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" and "In the Sweet By and By," as usual. Brother Jenkins prayed and read "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," like he does every time. Even Miss Juanita cried a little, although I'll never know if it was because she was grieved or if she only thought it proper that the preacher's wife cry at funerals. I cried, and so did my Daddy.

Mama held the wake at our house, since Walter had no family. She cooked from the time we got the news about Walter until the funeral, and it was good; everybody said so. The whole town crowded into our living room, spilling coffee on the carpet, and making a lot of noise. Mama didn't get upset about the coffee, though she complains about it often enough now that everything has calmed down.

Hours past dark, the wake came to an end. They called the children up out of the yard, and I had to abandon my game of checkers with Jeremiah. The townspeople milled about on the front porch for a few minutes, shaking hands and prolonging their departure. A voice arose from the other side of the porch, softly singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." I don't know who it was who started it; it might have been Mama. But we all joined in, even Miss Juanita. ❖

ledge

have you ever peeked over
the rim of human triumph and paths
of the beaten road and knowledge
so far leaning to almost tumble
into the well

catching yourself knowing that
you cannot leave
you are just placed and fixated by the wind
rushing along the wings below

waiting for the light the
pale blood sun
to rise and pierce the star's black light
that shines no comfort no soft glow upon your land
on the edge of reality and human power

the blood sun rising
breathing life into your legs
your mind
as you move
away from the well rimmed with drips
reflecting in deep maroon
the transfixing red glow from below

and the sound in your ears is still echoing
the wings of the wild
birds and cranes
crows
flapping their bone arms stretched
with thin leathery skin
lifting them round and round above
the flames and fires
of below

running around the edge looking for a passage
out of the limits
of the mind and soul
never realizing that finally you are
trapped in the edge always
the wind rushing and the light reflecting
in your taunted tortured brain
forever

Wesley Duffee-Braun

a 1984 station wagon

the dashboard peels away
crumpling like paper
paper dolls in the backseat
flying on their stomachs
and the beads on the mirror make their own
little sounds
little songs
as they smash and crash
and jingle so perfectly
sometimes we forget what things we hold dear
sometimes we forget
just what we remember
with the windows cracked
and the cigarette smoke choking the upholstery
blood can't stain
on a red carpet
on a one-way road
and music in the front seat
with me in the back
the gun in my hands feels so smooth
just get it over with, i scream
and the beads are up there jumping around
and rolling down his forehead
the carpet rubs against my face
and i'm filled with too many
evil thoughts
and cups of sugar
that i didn't ask the boy next door for
but he gave me a roadsign anyway
that said
eighty-four more years to new orleans
and four more to go

Shauna Bahia Johnston

Sunset

Emerald grass under reddened skies
Shadows seek endless edges
Rain falls without fear
A heart sighs for a soul found
As the sun kisses the Earth
One last time

Debbie Matthews



Shannon Newell

*"A Time of Innocence," Pencil
Second Place, Art Contest*

Ladybug Lucy

Lights let way to letters;
Logos labeling lounges and liquors
Lead the way.
Ladybug Lucy leisurely begins her lame labor,
Layered in lavender lipstick, bare legs,
And a little lace. Her label is "loose."
Looking for a luxurious lawyer in a Lexus,
She lunges against the lamp post.
Lukewarm hands latch her.
Lily - white lips lick left and right.
Laden by money, she lets her body
language linger to lust for the
last time.
Ladybug Lucy learns about life;
Legal labors launch her to ladders of
happiness.
Learning her lesson, she laughs at him
Who stops by the lamp post only to
receive a lollipop.

Memorie McCreary

Montar la Bicicleta

by Altiemeis Howard



I could pedal fast. Faster than anyone on two wheels, except my older brother, but he didn't count. We'd race our bikes up and down the dirt road, rocks and sand spewing from the back tires. The rough terrain was no challenge for us. Through steep ditches and tangled bushes, we rode. Homemade ramps may not have been the best, but they satisfied us. Downhill was the most fun. The wind pushed through our shirts and the smell of blossom-perfumed air shot up into our nostrils. We glided over the land hoping some strange force would come to lift us up into the sky. Then I started to pedal harder and coasted the rest of the way. There was no need to pedal, just float. Going uphill was worse. My calves ache to think of it. Picture a bunch of eight, nine, and ten year olds trying to make their way up a hill. We're not talking about soft rolling hills, but the high steep ones, with deep ditches on the side. Falling downhill was not an option. At the speed of a slow-developing eclipse, we pumped our tired little legs up those gigantic hills. We would usually get off and walk our bicycles up the hill, but on few occasions we managed to ride to the top and survive.

Sometimes we'd break out with rakes, shovels, and hoes to create cities. We had rural roads, highways, freeways, and an interstate. We had speed limits, police, and our own traffic rules. We'd race our bicycles through our pretend streets and stopped at little stores and shops on our way out of town. We made road signs and everything; we even had a jail for all of our dangerous criminals, and hospitals where either CPR or the Heimlich cured everything. We had a lot of fun riding through the streets of our town.

One time my father was working on a fence. Standing in the corner of the yard was a big cedar pole, covered

with the sharp stubs of previously cut branches. I came flying down the road, legs pumping up and down, up and down. I turned and sped into the driveway, under the pecan tree, by the peach tree and the wild cherry vine, leaves crunching under my tires. I am going way too fast. I have to stop, soon, and there aren't any brakes. The only thing ahead a dark organization of trees, but then I spot the cedar post. I slowed down as much as I possibly could with my feet, and rammed into the post. I thought I would stop by doing this. I thought wrong.

"Altiemeis!" I heard someone yell. Too late. The bike flipped and I went with it, up and over. I landed in a mess of vines, wire, metal, and briars. Burning, stinging welts and scratches covered me from head to toe. Everyone

We made road signs and everything; we even had a jail for all of our dangerous criminals, and hospitals where either CPR or the Heimlich cured everything.

laughed including me, but it was only for a moment. Not one to cry, I gathered my composure and walked to the house. Slowly, very slowly. Trying not to add to my discomfort, I climbed up the steps and went inside.

I could hear them shouting across the yard: "Daddy,

Altiemeis ran into the pole," snickering at the same time. I made it inside and my father looked at me. It wasn't the first time I had done a crazy stunt and certainly wouldn't be the last. I heard him laugh while pretending to watch a football game on TV.

Mocking me, "Are you okay?" he asked. I simply ignored his little comments. There was something more important on my mind.

I ever so carefully cleaned my wounds, removed all dirt and pulled out each and every briar. To add to my pain I rubbed my legs and arms down with rubbing alcohol. Then I lowered down to lie on the couch to recuperate. I rested for a little bit, then pounded down the concrete steps. I mounted my bicycle and raced down the road, once again. ❖

Contributors' Notes

Edea Anne Baldwin came to MSMS from Quitman High School in Quitman, MS. Edea plans to pursue a career in religious studies. Her favorite writers are L.M. Montgomery and C.S. Lewis, but her words of wisdom are Shakespeare's: "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."

Mary Katherine Burge of Hattiesburg, MS, attended North Forrest High School before coming to MSMS. She plans to continue her educational career at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, studying English and communications.

Tommy C. Byrd, a native of Biloxi, MS, came to MSMS from d'Iberville High School. He hopes to attend Mississippi State University and major in graphic animation. His favorite writers are John Grisham and Tom Clancy.

Catherine Carson Carney, a native of Jackson, MS, attended Jackson Preparatory School before transferring to MSMS. After graduation, Carson plans to attend the University of Mississippi to pursue a major in theater. Carson's admiration of literature ranges from writers such as Kahlil Gibran, to Jane Austen, and even Shakespeare.

Charles Martin Cates came to MSMS from Brookhaven High School in Brookhaven MS. Charles enjoys reading the works of Jim Carrol, Thomas Moore, and Jack Kerouac, and his favorite books are *Utopia*, *On the Road*, and *The Republic*. Charles is undecided about his future plans.

Jeremey Donn Dobbins from Quitman, MS, transferred to MSMS from Quitman High School. Jeremey plans to attend the University of Mississippi, where he will study international relations. Jeremey's favorite authors include Richard Bach and Robert Jordan, and among his favorite books are *One*, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and *The Wheel of Time*, series.

Jennifer Ellen Dockstader of Raymond, MS, attended Jackson Preparatory School before transferring to MSMS, and she will be attending The University of the South (Sewanee), where she plans to major in English. Jennifer admires the work of James Joyce, but she finds that her own style has been influenced most by Mississippi writer Lewis Nordan.

Wesley H. Duffee-Braun, a junior, attended Hattiesburg High School before coming to MSMS. He wants to go to Sewanee and become a priest. Shel Silverstein greatly influenced his writing.

Bridget D. Gant attended Kossuth High School in Corinth, MS, before coming to MSMS. Bridget plans to pursue a degree in veterinary medicine from Mississippi State University. She admires writer Paul Anderson and gains inspiration from works such as *Dune* by Frank Herbert.

Hillary Dianne Gibson transferred to MSMS from Drew High School in Vance, MS. Hillary plans to attend Mississippi State University, but is undecided about her major.

Allan Hillman of Neely, MS, attended Greene County High School before transferring to MSMS. Allan intends to continue his education at Millsaps College, where he will major in history and political science. Allan finds that his work is influenced most by the poetry of Edgar Allen Poe and John Keats.

Altiemeis Angela Howard came to MSMS from Quitman High School in Quitman, MS. Although she is undecided about college, Altiemeis plans to major in pre-med with a secondary concentration in English. Altiemeis enjoys the novels of Stephen King, especially *The Dark Tower II* and *The Waste Lands*.

Hsing-Chia Jeanne Hsieh attended Oak Grove High School in her hometown of Hattiesburg, MS, before coming to MSMS. Jeanne, a junior, hopes to attend the University of California at Los Angeles to pursue optometry. Jeanne's art has been inspired most by the artist Vincent Van Gogh.

Emma Darlyn Johnson, a native of Quitman, MS, attended Quitman High School; she plans to attend Oberlin College, pursuing a career in vocal performance. Emma favors writer Alice Walker and artist Norman Rockwell, but her words for life come from actor Woody Allen: "The heart wants what it wants. There's no logic to those things."

Shauna Bahia Johnston of Jackson, MS, attended Forest Hill High School before MSMS, and in college, she plans to pursue photography or some other form of art. Shauna's work has been most heavily influenced by Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and by singer, songwriter Tori Amos.

Marcus L. Jones of Columbus, MS, attended New Hope High School before MSMS. Marcus plans to study international business and corporate law at the University of Mississippi. Marcus' favorite and most influential writers are Richard Wright and Nathan McCall.

Debbie May Matthews, a senior, attended Louisville High School before coming to MSMS. She will probably attend Mississippi State University. Her favorite writers and artists are Anne McCaffrey and Norman Rockwell.

Memorie Shea McCreary from Cleveland, MS, came to MSMS from Cleveland High School, and she hopes to pursue a career in surgery. Memorie's favorite author is Dr. Seuss, and her most influential novel is Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*.

Anna Catesby McGehee, a junior at MSMS, attended Trinity Episcopal School in Natchez until tenth grade. She says that Whitman's *Song of Myself* and e.e. cummings have influenced her as a poet.

Angelia Marie Montgomery, a native of Moss Point, MS, attended Moss Point High School before MSMS. Angelia intends to study biology at the University of Mississippi with hopes of a career in medicine. She is inspired most by the work of Richard Bach, especially his novel *One*.

Mary Shannon Newell transferred to MSMS from Kemper County High School in Dekalb, MS. Shannon plans to attend The United States Military Academy where she will study medicine. Shannon favors the work of William Wordsworth and has gained inspiration from his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality."

Phillip Nguyen of Steens, MS, attended Caledonia High School and plans to complete his education at Tulane University. Phillip's favorite writer is Anne McCaffrey, but he has been influenced the most by *Christine's World* by Wyeth. Interestingly, Phillip's personal motto is just that, personal: "10110100010110."

Mark Owens, a native of Pascagoula, MS, attended Pascagoula High School before MSMS. He plans to pursue biochemistry and English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham upon graduation. Mark's favorite writers are Charles "Chuck" Bukowski and Rod McKuen.

Rebekah W. Page of Jackson, MS, attended Murrah High School before MSMS, and she plans to attend Tulane to prepare for a career in English or art history. While influenced most by Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Rebecca takes her words of wisdom from the Indigo Girls: "The best thing you've ever done for me is to help me take my life less seriously; it's only life after all."

Tabitha Parks, a senior, came to MSMS from Kosciusko, MS. She plans to attend the Honors College at the University of Southern Mississippi, where she will major in social work. Tabitha describes herself with a quote by Jack Handey: "I don't pretend to have all the answers; I don't even know the questions. Hey! Where am I?"

Pepper A. Pearson of Pass Christian, MS, attended Our Lady Academy before coming to MSMS. She plans to pursue a degree in English at Oglethorpe University.

Kit Posadas, originally from the Philippines, attended Pascagoula High School before transferring to MSMS. Kit plans to pursue a career in forestry at Mississippi State University. He cites as a favorite quotation a line from *Don Quixote*: "[U]ntil, finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind."

Kelly Elaine Reynolds attended Meridian High School before transferring to MSMS, and she plans to attend the University of the South (Sewanee) where she will pursue majors in English and chemistry. Kelly's art has been influenced most by Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, but Aeschylus molded her personal philosophy: "We suffer and we suffer and we learn, and we will know the future when it comes."

Cameron Brown Richardson of Columbus, MS, transferred from Columbus High School to MSMS. After graduation she plans to attend Davidson College, where she will major in mathematics. Cameron's philosophy for life is to "let us endeavor so to live that when we die, even the undertaker will be sorry." —Mark Twain.

Amy Leah Speights of Bassfield, MS, came to MSMS from Bassfield High School. After graduation, Leah intends to study English at Samford University. Leah admires such writers as J.R.R. Tolkien and Victor Hugo. "Sight comes after faith, but not before," is her personal philosophy.

Leander Thomas Taylor, III of Oxford, MS, attended Lafayette County High School before MSMS. Leander plans to attend Louisiana State University where he will pursue biological engineering. According to Leander, "The game of life is not so much in holding a good hand as playing a poor hand well." —H.T. Leslie

Jessica D. Tippens transferred to MSMS from Trinity Episcopal High School in her hometown of Natchez, MS. After graduation Jessica plans to attend Tulane University where she will pursue a degree in architecture. Jessica has been most influenced by the literature of Mississippi writer William Faulkner.

Deidre Lyniece Wheaton of Montrose, MS, transferred to MSMS from Bay Springs High School. Deidre plans to attend Dillard University, where she will study English and secondary education. Deidre's personal motto is that of Col. Herbert Carter: "We fight prejudice with excellence."

Connie Susan Wong of Greenwood, MS, attended Pillow Academy before transferring to MSMS. Connie plans to further her education at the University of Mississippi where she will be studying pharmacy. As her writing suggests, Connie's personal statement comes from the great James Joyce: "Imagination is memory."



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