

Table of Contents

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Paul Alterink	
<i>Freud and Literature: An Essay</i>	30
Michael Bonowicz	
<i>Gambit</i>	68
Brian Budzynski	
<i>Frankentsteinfuckerman</i>	56
<i>Monday afternoon bedwindow</i>	57
Lawrence Cleary	
<i>Bus-Stop: Fishin' a Purse</i>	24
Michael Cox	
<i>Love in a Ditch off the I-55</i>	26
Michelle Darcy	
<i>Staggering</i>	43
<i>Messengers</i>	45
<i>A Test of Rhetoric: in Dialog</i>	46
<i>To Something Drastic</i>	47
Mathew Deal	
<i>Thinking</i>	52
Ryan Elizabeth Gilles	
<i>All American Eve</i>	53
Jeff Glombicki	
<i>Hush</i>	69
Amy Hanson	
<i>Last Day</i>	9
<i>Deadline</i>	34
Miranda Hunter	
<i>Oh Lord My Nappy Hair (Prayer for the Hair Abuser)</i>	55

Patrick F. Kelly	
<i>Rabid Transit</i>	59
JD Lancaster	
<i>Doleful Glee</i>	50
<i>Glowing in the Grandeur of the</i>	
<i>Golden Carrot</i>	51
<i>Here Comes Swifty!!!</i>	70
Amanda Laudig	
<i>The Way We Pray for Rain</i>	29
Dan Maurer	
<i>Prose on Poetry</i>	5
<i>Dead Bodies Everywhere</i>	7
<i>Cityscape</i>	11
<i>An Exercise in Listening</i>	64
<i>Only the Worthy</i>	72
Sarah McHone	
<i>A Love Letter</i>	21
Anthony J. Orrico	
<i>Under the Rug</i>	12
<i>Poet's Poundemonium</i>	19
<i>Written by a Man</i>	20
Michael Place	
<i>From "The Alzheimer's Guide to Confession"....</i>	61
Chris Simich	
<i>Clean Up in Aisle 7</i>	35
Kim Smith	
<i>...Now...(I Know)</i>	36
Sarah Stewart	
<i>So to Speak</i>	10
<i>Low Life</i>	25
Erik Unterschuetz	
<i>Daydream wagon on grocery day</i>	66
<i>Two boys in the moonlight</i>	67

Dan Maurer

Prose on Poetry

"Quotation admits inferiority."

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

People don't buy poetry books anymore. Did they ever? You would think so, as many poets as there are. All the poets could build a nation of self-sufficient poets, if only they bought books of poetry. Hear me out. We'll make a list of all the poets in the world; we will start with me, and we'll put a few other people on there too. Those first people don't have to do anything but pass it on to five people, who add their names to the list, and buy copies of our books, and remove the person at the top of the list. Then they would pass it on to five more people, who would do the same. Five to the fifth power is 3125, so, assuming we make two dollars per book sale, that is \$6250. If we kept this going for a while, everyone pitching in to a huge "poet's fund" we could eventually buy a big island, like Australia, and have just poets live there. What would it be like, a nation of poets?

It would probably be violent. You wouldn't think so, but it would be. Terribly so; you would have the beatniks over on the West coast, near Perth. With that much caffeine and coffee shops, there would be no hope for peace; they just wouldn't be able to sleep until they had gotten far enough away. Then, where Darwin is now, we would have the modern poets, all crying and wondering if it would be better down in Adelaide, it's always nicer the further south you go. The Aborigines in the south would sit there, and look profound, and people would read their pointillist faces, as if they had a point.

In Townsville, Queensland, we would have the traditionalists, who all go around speaking like Robert Frost, and about fire and ice, but none of them are able to find their way home because they want to find other ways to get home. Down south, in Melbourne, all the Victorian poets, being sufficiently verbose and tasteful about the whole affair, would basically repeat whatever they had been told when they last were in Queensland. In Sydney, they would admire a woman whose husband cheats on her. The people in Melbourne talk about her.

"She isn't the pretty angel they think she is."

They would say this and then go and recount a story they heard a few weeks earlier.

Down in Tasmania, a person who thinks he is Earnest Hemmingway will sit on his porch, with a shotgun, and he'll be damned if any of those people come and bother him. He's got some fishing to do.

No, an island of poets is bad. They would all have their troubles deciding what exactly is poetry. The beatniks will say Moloch made all the poetry before they were here, and billions of trees will die, and no one will understand a thing. The Victorians would not commit to anything; aside from what they've been told looks like poetry. In Darwin, the modern poets will have cried all over the paper they wrote on, making it illegible. Down south, they would write poetry, but they don't have to, they just sit there, and look important. They are poetry embodied. In Sydney, they will just stare and gawk at their stupid princess, who is really of little consequence anyway, and they will write nothing for years. In Queensland, they would write sonnets and be happy.

Down in Tasmania, our Hemmingway sits with his shotgun and coffee. "I don't give a damn," he says.

Everyone would taunt the other people. "You're not real poets," the beatniks will say. "You're just keeping the system going."

No one will understand what the modern poets say, their sobs drown out whatever words they might have said. I think they're saying, "I'm sorry for being a poet."

I propose a meeting of poets, to discuss poetry and what poetry is.

"Poetry is an exercise in language usage to express a specific idea. The key is that it's a specific language usage thing. Form not function."

"Get him outta here!" The beatniks are saying. "He's put too much thought into it. Or maybe too little . . ." the last sentence trails off like the dribble of cappuccino down the front of their sweaters.

I say he's closer to right than they are.

Who would have thought poetry would be that violent?

I think we might need metal detectors at the entrances.

Dan Maurer

Dead Bodies Everywhere

I hated my drill sergeant. Hated him. He was just like the one in that movie, "Full Metal Jacket," but he would never hit anyone. Sometimes you wished he would hit you, so that the pain would have a time limit, and you knew physical pain would go away. His assault was verbal, and those red cheeks and blackened eyes lasted a lifetime.

"No matter where you go or what you do, you're gonna die," he said once or twice, and we knew he was right, that death was inevitable, but we still didn't like the thought, and he sure as hell didn't have to tell us.

Here, though, is what he meant. He didn't mean a physical death, of course. The Marine Corps wouldn't kill us, and life would end, but that isn't real death, anyway. Real death is when your heart doesn't work anymore. It beats, but nothing more.

Let me tell you how I died.

I died in this war-torn neighborhood, not because of shrapnel or the gusts of lead coming up the street, but because I smoke cigarettes.

It was over four hundred and twenty degrees a few blocks away, but we weren't concerned about that. There was a man on his knees praying, Muslim style. Around the praying man were dead bodies. There were dead bodies everywhere, and Mecca was the other direction.

The praying man held something in his arms. A smudge of white against the heap of gray, I saw, and walked closer. This could be any battlefield, Gettysburg, St. Petersburg, Harper's Ferry, Nagasaki, and if it were any of those places, I would still walk. I walked past the broken cars on the street covered with dust and bones. I paced myself, knowing but not knowing what was coming.

I stepped on the bodies, not avoiding it because trying would only make me fall down over a stray arm or other appendage, attached or not. The bones crunched. The sound reminded me of playing in the newly fallen leaves when I was little, or the crunch of walking on a newly fallen snow.

Then I saw the baby, limp in the arms of the devout corpse,

its eyes and mouth open, both dark and empty. Hands limp, head tilted back. Its skin looked like an old painting, dry and cracked. It was wrapped in a blanket with an apple pattern.

I then remembered the fire fighter carrying the dead baby in Oklahoma. The picture was on the cover of all those magazines. I thought that this should make a cover too. It should be there, with the cigarette butts, snuff films, sit-coms, and tele-evangelists. It should be there to be known.

I looked around for a garbage can, and couldn't find one, so I dropped my cigarette and died.

Amy Hanson

Last Day

I am possessed by a woman.
She tells me I might die tomorrow. I ask her how she knows. She says she doesn't.

"Why are you telling me this?" I ask.

Smoothly with a shrug, she replies, "Because I can. Because you could."

I wonder how I can get this lady to leave.

I forget to eat dinner. I stay awake all night. I write letters to people I remember. I see the sun rise spill onto an empty city street. I spend morning hours saying "Hi" to every passerby. I take a bus back and forth and around. I study the hands and eyes of the overlooked.

I'm drinking a beer in a bar by noon.

I ride my bike to the country. I memorize its lines. I put my fingers in its soil. I breathe the green from the trees. I follow the sun to the horizon and as light as a cloud I pedal home.

Finally, I close my eyes.

The splintering light of morning cuts through the blanket and sheet. It penetrates my heavy eyes. I roll over and realize the woman is gone.

I invite her to return.

Sarah Stewart

So to Speak

Ruined: whose analog records kept wired
together each year (in spiraled Decembrace)
some starry mention of discretely fettered
Free & Ezies—
Who, this Christmas, has managed
to satisfactorily snap
filamental familial Ideals! By splicing
herself an empirical mind
in the rented room's electron tube.
Musing, sets the Murphy bed for dinner,
"Trouble's when the nurse is jury,
eyes averted, motions where to hang your coat..."

Vegetables bake on the radiator: glass
casserole sympathy for the pink-eyed
widow of one tungsten strangled rabbit

Dan Maurer

Cityscape

Over oceans of skin
Bathed in perversion and sin

You're in danger
Getting stranger all the time

I thought this was settled
When you bent to lick my boots

I have been diagrammed,
I have their sanction

It's called "why don't we do it on the road again"
At least that's what I've been told

Lovely as a split lip
Soulful as this city . . .

Watch your videos all day
Rewind and play

Syphilitic things
Can we fly without wings?

Under the Rug

He gazed at the softness of her skin. It traveled the foundation of her face, stretched backward over her cheekbones, and gathered tightly beneath her chin. She grew plush with pinkness and quickly returned to her natural color. A hue of green dabbled in her pigments and reflected back into the sky; then blue and green and red and white. A rush went through his stomach and engaged his pelvis as light took turns glazing her cheeks and manipulating her frozen face. Her head cocked back as a large one came; it was pink again. He was hard.

She smiled at the sky unaware of the finale on the way. He smiled at her smile and joined in on her fixation with the sky above. As if unleashing his caged libido, she pet his bulging jeans and teased him with her touch. Their faces met, and a public kiss, hiding their private desires, released a tongue that only their mouths could silently speak. Praising the lights above them, the crowd awed like a choir after each random explosion. The finale began.

"This is the only time this damn town comes together." His voice awkwardly broke through the moment as her face, gathering his thought, turned red and blue.

"Yea," she replied.

Jackie's thoughts never compared to Dave's. His language was always rough and rich with pessimistic poetry while she rarely ever chose to speak aloud. She just absorbed his words and silently reflected upon them. Nothing tangible seemed to ever come from her internal escapades.

"The sky looks so amazing right now. It can't be real." He adjusted his penis that now hung limp in his twisted briefs. "Fuck it." His eyes stabbed through the night. "Let's get out of here."

Jackie would follow him anywhere; without question, she did. Fireworks continued to ignite their shadows that danced upon the people of their town, stepping on blanket corners and hopping over coolers and kids. They trampled through generations of offspring, who were momentarily finding peace within their restless lives.

Jackie's mother detached herself from the display and noticed her daughter running recklessly through the crowd. She didn't dare

nudge her husband and trigger his disapproval, but instead silently took note of the situation. The young couple's transparent figures completed the escape, and Dave glared at the obstacles behind him.

"Ow, let go of me!" Jackie demanded as she snatched her hand away from Dave's tightening grip.

"Oh." He reached for her. "I didn't know I was hurting you."

"Relax," she demanded. "I'm sorry," she took it back.

Jackie was always retrieving her words from Dave. She'd throw anything by her mother, but with Dave, she was more cautious.

Dave dragged Jackie's petite body through an alley hidden between the single-parent apartment buildings that cluttered their town. He reached for her hair that worked like light brown fire between his fingers. She always wore it down and pulled behind her ears, but Dave loved to undrape her hair and watch it dangle in front of her eyes. Her eyes had a touch of eastern ancestry somewhere in them. They were vulnerable and wide while slanted and trusting. He placed her back against a deep, red brick building and began to handle her like meat.

"Get away!" She demanded. "I'm sorry." She took it back.

"Just slow down."

"I love you," he lied.

"I know." She believed him.

"You're amazing." He knew it.

"So are you," she agreed.

Dave turned away from her. He had turned away all his life—always to the left. He favored that side. The night his mother left, he turned. The night she came back, he turned. The night his father left. The night he left. He had discovered all the one hundred and eighty degrees to the left and never thought once to turn the right way. Jackie had no idea. She just followed him.

An arm's length behind him and to the right, Jackie watched Dave light up a cigarette and smoke the entire stick. He blew out each breath of smoke far enough so his clothing wouldn't absorb it. Jackie wanted one.

His skin was dry and lips lightly chapped. They pressed and released, puffing the end of the stick like an oxygen tank. He hated smoking, but more than that, he hated people knowing he smoked. Jackie knew little about him, but she knew he smoked and intently watched the back of his head while he indulged. His dark, brown hair seemed to groom and clean itself. Dave rarely ever maintained it publicly, but for all she knew, he could have spent hours preparing it each morning and managed a few quick fixes during the school day. It

separated at a natural, crooked part and reached down both sides of his head. Full enough in the back, his hair hid beneath his shirt collar and concealed his neck. His clothes were always dark and long but cuffed, rolled, tucked and pulled. Dave was by no means in high demand among the girls, but he supported an image that was a growing trend. Aside from his layered clothing and set of hair, his age won him Jackie.

With his heel, Dave dug back a mound of dirt along the street side and dropped the cigarette butt in. Then, he pushed over the dirt with his foot and buried the remains.

"My hands are cold," Jackie announced.

"Come here. I'll cover you up."

"No." She was misunderstood. "It's just my hands."

"Come here," Dave insisted and she obeyed. He wrapped a dark blue flannel shirt around her shoulders and led her towards the City Hall parking lot.

"You're so beautiful," he told her.

"I can't believe we'll be going to the same school in a few weeks," Jackie thought aloud and looked for Dave's response.

"Yea, one more year and I'm out of here."

"Are you going to college?"

"Yea. I'm not sure where, though. I need to get away."

Jackie felt like a young woman. These feelings rose from her serious belief that an older boyfriend, busy weekends, and an increase in allowance administered a transition into womanhood. Dave crushed her belief.

"Jack, you haven't even started high school yet!"

She regained her credibility and said, "I know, but if you're going to college next year, I'll be dealing with a whole 'nother world. My four years of high school should fly by while we... Do you think we'll stay together?"

"Life is always changing, Jack."

"I know." Jackie's eyes grew shifty, and she added a bite to her lip in attempt to gain Dave's attention. She was ready to tell him.

"I've got things to do before I settle down, ya know?" He interrupted her attempt. Noticing her hesitations he asked, "What?"

"Nothing."

"What?"

"Nothing."

Dave's white, but rusted orange, station wagon rested at the gates of Millridge City Hall with a parking ticket under a windshield wiper. Jackie helped herself into the passenger while Dave faced

denial and read through his violation for blocking an entrance. She could smell the dampness of a deli mixed with cigarette smoke in the old car. She despised that smell.

Dave's father, a butcher down on Fisher Street, had the wagon from nine to five and shared his day's work with the ripped leather interior. At lunch, he routinely wiped his bloody hands across his apron, disposed of it in the back seat, and then rubbed more of his work's remains on the cushions beside him. At five o'clock, he repeated the procedure just before Dave took over the car. Burn holes speckled the reddish brown interior and air-borne sediments continuously contaminated the atmosphere. Playing two roles, the neglected car floor acted as a hamper and an ashtray. The green leaf air-freshener around the broken volume knob never conquered the stagnant aroma.

"It smells like smoked sausage in here!" Jackie joked with Dave as he sat down beside her.

She rarely ever joked with him because she wasn't very confident in her ability to do so. He didn't laugh and she immediately followed up with an apology in reaction to the expression on his face. He inserted several contradicting expressions into his next face right before exploding with rage.

"Thirty-five fuck'n bucks!" He raved about the ticket and jolted Jackie.

Backing the wagon's rear out of the lot and skidding forward, he steamed forward down Mill Road and took a left on Clyde. Forced to follow Dave's unannounced destination, Jackie sat speechless and erect. She resorted to watching trees pass by the passenger's window and then turned to catch him eating *something*.

"Are you still sick?" He questioned her.

"No. I just said it smelt in here."

"No. Have you still been throwing up?"

"No." Jackie felt her head.

"Are you eating right?"

"Yea."

"You better knock that shit off then, Jack."

"It's not that?" She no longer wished to discuss the real matter with him.

"What's your problem then?"

"Where are we going?"

"No where."

"Seriously, where are we going, David?"

"McCarthy's."

"I want to go home."

"No. We have to talk," Dave demanded. Jackie turned to the window again and the McCarthy woods were thickening around her.

The town's only forest preserves were actually combined with a nature center and colonial exhibit that for several years had been shut down. Neither Dave nor Jackie would recall anything about the center's significance or land's history because it closed well before their times. Instead, adolescent townies now used the land for mischievous retreats. Dwelling in their conquered log cabins, they'd live freely until it got too cold and return reluctantly to their heated homes. Building fires, they roasted marshmallows, instead of potatoes, and reached new kinds of highs with their friends.

A new group of young settlers had taken over now and the Millcomb preserves unanimously became the McCarthy woods. McCarthy was not a colonial leader or town contributor, but a drunken old man who rolled into the near-by creek. It was the year 1996 when he made local history with his death. Men and women once used to wash their hands in that creek; children have always jumped over it. Whether passing the back way over the tracks or driving there on Clyde Road, children still jumped the creek and gathered in their makeshift homes to interact like family.

Four wooden posts, two taller than the other two, stood a story high and welcomed every passer-by to live among the ruins. Dave called the masterpiece a "monument of joints" once, and that seemed to stick with the majority of them. They never bothered to notice the inscription some town historian provided about the symbolism involved with the piece. A father, mother, male child and female child stood like joints deeply dug into the soiled ground. Often leaning against the poles, the new settlers breathed in more than the air and watched the family dance.

In order to divert her attention, Dave pressed the automatic window button down and Jackie's reflection disappeared before her eyes. A gust of wind devoured her face as she desperately reached for the controls. While rolling the window back up, she licked her lips and fixed her knotted hair. She let her anger settle and pretended to sit undisturbed by the interruption. Once again, a surprise attack of wind reworked her hair into chaos and dried her eyes.

"Knock it off!" She screamed as she reached for the controls. An evil laugh brewed from the pit of Dave's stomach and she slapped his arm a few times in defense.

"Knock it off!" He shouted back and switched a face or two.

"What's your problem? You're acting like a jerk!" Jackie no

longer recognized him.

Like a child, Dave pushed the controls, and her buttons, to send a final flying gust of wind her way. Increasing his speed, the pressure, and her frustration, Dave circled McCarthy's parking lot and parked a few yards off the pavement and into the thickening weeks. Jackie slapped his arm before she pushed herself out of the car and kicked the door closed. Cussing and sobbing, she knelt down on the dirty ground while Dave sat spinning in silence.

The smell of meat triggered his sudden hunger for a sandwich. He pretended to reach into the refrigerator and feed his cravings. Unlocking the glove box, he reached for a tool, bag, and lighter. While preparing a bowl, and then smoking an entree, Dave momentarily glanced at his own eyes and ripped down the rear-view-mirror. For dessert, he grabbed his cigarettes, slammed the compartment shut, and chained three in a row. He practically swallowed down the first two as his eyes rolled back in their slit sockets. With the last one, he took his time, and didn't quit until he inhaled the last possible drag. The back door opened and closed.

"I'm pregnant."

Dave slowly turned to the aprons in the back seat.

"No, we're pregnant!" Jackie's voice blasted through her hands that cradled her hovering face. Then, she aborted her concealment and exposed a hysterical face flushed with redness and dampened with tears. Dave started at the softness of her skin.

Dave's ears converted her words and weeping into the irritation sound of cattle crying that grated away at this forehead. He felt around, poking her belly, and flinched as though it snapped at him. He imagined the cattle must have known what was coming, but that, he reasoned, was the way of life. He reassured himself with mindless tangents about the food chain, means of survival, and how man stood at the top of it all.

Her cries died down as she lost her way in his expressions of insanity. He grabbed his keys and struggled with the door handle before swinging into the tender night air. The cattle cries grew desperate in his head as she pounded on the windows like caged meat. His temples kept time as he popped up the trunk hood and searched for his tools. He found a pair of his father's work-shoes and claimed them as his own. Slipping them half way on and pushing his heels down inside the shoes, he believed he hated his work, but thought it was living. If he had better opportunities, he wouldn't have to wipe his hands clean or sweep dirt under the rug. The trunk hood fell and the sky popped.

He wept the entire time.

Under broken tree bows, her covered carcass finally rested on the ground. Dave wrapped the lamb in his stained blue flannel and pulled off his black under shirt. Returning to the wagon, bare-skinned, he tossed his apron in the back seat and wiped his red hands across his lower abdomen. Letting out a sigh, he sat behind the wheel and rubbed his night's work on the ripped interior.

The old station wagon rumbled itself into a start, and Dave backed up and out of McCarthy's entrance. There was no one in sight, and he took that into account while he began to mentally cover up his tracks. He was still half absent, but he felt the result of his actions resting like acid in his stomach. Clear evidence trailed behind him as he took a left on Clyde, but he convinced himself that everything was hidden. The dampness lingered as images flashed by like virtual recollections. With rehearsal and conditioning, David no longer could identify with any of the details. He began to weep again as if just hearing the news and then pulled back his face. His eyes, like dry wells, were not producing. He wept a third time as if just learning about the tragedy, and this time they rushed. Tears blurred his vision and blinded him of the intoxicated truth. He truly began to believe. He truly believed.

An abrupt horn put Dave back into his lane as an older man scolded out the window. The man passed by with his wife and two children sitting alert and all staring at Dave. He reached for his cigarettes and fumbled around the dashboard for his lighter. He leaned back in his seat and began to unwind. Headlights were heading away from the heart of the town. The entire area's population seemed to be returning from the Fourth of July celebration.

Dave slowed things down and parked the station wagon at the curb of his house. Closing the car door with conviction, he noticed the lights in his home were rested. He stepped forward, dipping his heel into a shallow puddle, and walked up the front lawn. He stood like a single pole at the center of his yard and deeply captured some of the night air in his lungs. His bare chest shivered and flexed as he stroked his empty stomach. He glanced down at his dirty fingernails and the upward to his blackened bedroom window. He had some cleaning up to do.

Anthony J. Orrico

Poet's Poundemonium

I fret these bounds that bind my overflow,
Forcing tightly trimmed fragments in a tuck.
Worthless words, none of ease, in convent lock
Around convicted thoughts captured below.

A veiled prisoner, I can but bestow
Only sanctioned poetry, and I ache
With this shackle around my pencil neck
And back pulled tenser like a harp's crossbow.

Paper and spelunker strapped facing front
To watch shadows of what-could-have-been pass
This assigned cell, and the smell of fire
Suddenly burns my hands, but my mind won't
Let go of spontaneities that last
Till my eyes sight mastery and failure.

Written by a Man

A woman's fingertips
lean their naked white prints
against a glass
separating her from truths
hidden behind each wrapped sin.
Snaking around her waist,
her arm reaches for a little pink purse.
The woman reads, "In God We Trust"
from a shiny quarter she plucks
and then gathers three dimes and a nickel
in her palm to insert.
Coins hiss and cling their tempting chords
and slither down the slot
as her curious index finger makes a decision.
The woman watches the loose red wrapper
concealing dark devil's chocolates
twist and catch in the turning spirals.
The candy silently dangles before her
as she shouts some foreign tongue
and slams the machine off balance.
It falls down and crushes her.

A Love Letter

"Arrogance," my sweet, oh so sweet, said to me. He hits the nail right on the head. Is he warning me or persuading me? I smile, coyly.

She is so pretty she makes statues bleed. Often he wonders what, exactly, it is. So what is it anyway? She'll talk about anyone like she's considering them. He is full of burning hot envy that drips off of his tongue. He has a burning hot pen. He writes the nasty stuff with it.

Like how, in the wee hours of the morning when he finds her sleeping on his chest like a puppy, he wants to, very much, shake her awake and make her leave. He would tell her that she was a bitch, and he let the word fall off of his tongue and land at his feet.

Knowing her she would laugh with her high pitched giggle. He would really like to rip out her voice box. "He's a violent guy."

I said. Nothing to worry about. It is just a story, and I'm a girl you can trust.

She kissed him or hung up the phone. Her roommate looked up quizzically but she didn't speak because she didn't want to know. Her roommate fears the boyfriend 3500 miles away, though she'll never meet him.

"If I cheated on him, he would kill me," the first one said.

"Not really?" I asked. I hope the answer is no.

"Yes. Really, he would kill me." Second girl wants to put her hands over her ears. She wants to lock the doors and scream "Don't go back to that country where a boy might kill you!"

"Would you kill me if I slept around?" she asked her boyfriend. She hopes the answer is no. Her thoughts, if put down on paper, would read: "I don't live in that country. Would a boy kill me here?" She thinks that maybe an ocean of difference could protect her.

He tells her no. He says he'd kill himself first. He says that he would stop loving her, and she wonders if that is enough to kill her.

The roommate wants to find an American boyfriend. She has a sexual attraction for black men. Second understands, looks at people and wonders if they are roommate's type. But roommate says that she

isn't on the prowl. "Right now I am not lonely." This is good, because it seems like she was risking her life for sex.

She said, though, that her boyfriend told her that she can do whatever she wants, except he will never cheat on her. "Betray" is the word she uses. He also said that he will never love anyone else. Second calls this a lie. It's a lover's lie. Everyone has said that. She thinks that he will still kill her, even if he must travel 3500 to do so.

"Don't you love me enough to kill me?" she says to her beautiful boyfriend. She hopes the answer is yes. She thinks maybe love equals pain. She provokes and pokes him, bites and asks annoying questions. But to no avail, he was raised the very model of courtly love. He secretly thinks that she is crazy, bored, or both, but he never asks why.

3500 miles away, a beautiful boyfriend looks across an impossible graveyard. He thinks about everyone who has ever left him. His girlfriend will be his third. He weeps over the stones and tries to get them to bleed. His grandfather's ghost consoles him. His breath smells like alcohol.

She has an alcoholic grandfather too. She wants to be an alcoholic, why break with tradition? She has domination in common with him. She would bet the farm that they have other things in common too.

At night, in the dark, she lies in bed and gently strokes his face in her framed photograph. She can almost hear his voice, but he isn't yelling death threats or begging her for attention. Rather, he is telling her how much he loves her. They are going to get married. He'll quit smoking. He'll let her do as she pleases in the future, whatever that is. He'll call her tonight. She damns 3500.

He is the very model of courtly love; does that make her a princess? She orders him around just to see. He resents it, but he will always be the submissive one. He fears that she will kill him. She loves him an awful lot. She doesn't consider anyone else, but talks like she does. He resents it.

If roommate sleeps around with the objects of her attraction, what will line her walls? It won't be him. She told 3500 to stop calling so much because she was tired of defending herself. It also made it difficult to be lonely enough to compromise her morals. She may or may not be a girl you can trust.

A whole new story: They must have been in love because they caused each other an awful lot of pain. He had the power to convince his wife that her household duties consisted of turning her head into a roast. She put her head in the oven, and moved on to the next meal.

A second was convinced the same, and she turned the oven up to 400 degrees. Maybe they were to blame, they weren't girls you could trust because they kept turning into dinner.

"At least I'm not like that," I said to my sweet and my only. "You aren't dinner."

For the record I never considered anyone else. This is a story and I am a girl you can trust.

Lawrence Cleary

Bus-Stop: Fishin' A Purse

Warn her that she is old and must sit down
In the shade of Lindens, where Blue-gills swim
Freely, not as bait for strays, on the Nile's rim,
Between the third and fourth cataract, bound
Uptown, to float an Upside-down Cat whim-
Sickly over the safety of the sound,
Over the mystic channel. Tight her crown
Of wispy blue. High the cheek as if to shim
The sun up 'neath the shade of painted brow.
Her lips a blood-knot brought tight with a jerk,
Caught on the fisherman's lure, she to bow
To his mean skill, too late to hide in murk
Of channel, her stooped back a futile vow
To resist deceit: a fisherman's work.

Sarah Stewart

Low Life

Bathtub Ophelias filling their lilies: poetic
throats sucking down pages of opium smoke,
passing rolled Poe from one blood lung to the next
Another semester deader

(drown in shallow pools of coffee, tasting
wait, the usual match dragging ache)

Jezebels by the box, laid straight, pack enough
fuchsia perfume and paper flame to deaden several
rounds of bad Manhattan madly mixing
style with capitalist tricks of addiction

Love in a Ditch off the I-55

So we're driving along the interstate towards I forget which Chicago suburb to meet her parents, Pimp and I, and we're listening to Dr. Dre as loud as the factory Escort speakers will pump it. Pimp turned me on to Dre. She told me to just forget about the cultural stigma around rap music and to listen how he talks like he's sitting right next to you. She's right too; I never thought about how I always envision myself looking up at Rock and Roll singers, like at a concert, and like, Dr. Dre is just more intimate, singing right next to you. I'm thinking about how this new perspective is helping me understand the black culture when Pimp yells something. Without even looking at the dial, Pimp turns down Dre, which I find amazing because I'm usually the one to work the controls in my car, and the whole time, which really happened pretty quick, she is cranking her head to look out the back window and yelling to pull over. Pimp throws it in reverse for me and we start to back up in that reverse gear buzz. I'm getting kind of uncomfortable about Pimp messing with everything, I mean, I know how to back up. But so, she yells stop and is out and down the little hill before I turn the car off; did I turn the car off?

We're down at the edge of this marsh, or is it a swamp (I don't really know the difference)? Pimp is just kind of stuck, standing there motionless with her mouth hanging open. I'm relieved that it isn't a dead guy we backed up 300 feet to see, and I'm not really scared anymore, though I am confused, because the look on her face isn't tense but more like the face of a child awestruck by a new Christmas doll. —I've seen this is a dream.— I don't know how to react to this, so I just wait to see what she does next.

Next, Pimp starts walking into the mud, no, leading me into the mud. I tell her that I am wearing my new shoes. She might have ignored me because by the time I said this we were already up to our ankles in slosh, or she might not have even heard me. Pimp is up to somewhere between her knees and her butt in water when I realize that this is really a lake, not a marsh like I thought. I tell her that, "Hey, isn't it kind of funny that we are walking into the sunset; I've

never actually done this before," then I hurry to catch up to her and imagine that this is what it must feel like to walk on an alien planet. It's an effort, and then there's that shlop sound like pigs eating.

Pimp is now swimming. I don't even think about my car's interior and swim after her. I find I don't really have to swim. The water's only about two and a half maybe three feet deep, I guess this is really more of a pond, and the swimming is kind of like trying to swim in the kids pool. Sometimes my knees bump into the muddy grassy bottom. I'm impressed that there isn't any garbage floating around since we're really just off the interstate.

And then Pimp's head goes down. I wait for a little while and realize she's not coming up. It's weird because I don't really feel scared. I feel more like I'm being led by a host through a fun house. I know Pimp has never gone swimming here before, but she seems to know what she's doing, so I dive down after her. I keep swimming down and down and down. I keep expecting to find the bottom with the next kick and swoosh of the arms, but I keep going down. I keep going down, that is, until I surface. Yeah, like how cartoons can dig through to China, I resurface at the bottom.

Pimp is waiting for me at the edge of what I finally decide is a medium size stream. We sit and dry in the sun and really have a great time. We don't think much about how we got here or how strange it all is, just about how great everything is and how you don't really know a person until you talk to them on the other side of the reflection.

Pimp's long curly hair stays wet for a surprising amount of time, something I never knew about her before. She's even got this strange yet incredibly cute habit of always wanting to sit with her feet under my leg. I wonder if she does this to warm her feet or if there's another reason. Pimp's big toes are pretty funny looking, but I don't think I could describe them so I won't try, instead, I'll just continue feeding grapes to her. I like it when she opens her mouth towards the sky so I can drop the grape in. After the grape is stopped by the tip of her scrunched back tongue, I lightly pull the ridges of my finger print across the moist edge of her bony teeth. As the fish in the river jump, a behavior I find thoroughly confusing, Pimp and I like to say what they must be thinking. I get every other one, and there really are a lot more jumping fish here than in normal rivers. Right now we're trying to flop around like a fish would, and Pimp is sticking out her tongue which I find hilarious because she looks more like an epileptic dog than a fish. I'm going to ask Pimp if she'll kiss me with fish lips...no, I'll just surprise her the next time. I hope she doesn't decide to

retaliate by licking my cheek with that tongue of hers.

I feel like we are never going to leave the side of the river when Pimp stands up, kind of stretches, pulls the underwear out of her butt (I feel weird saying "panties"), and starts walking. Once again, she seems to be quiet, in her head. I follow. This time I am kind of nervous but I don't really know why. I follow, not tired of the exciting/peaceful spot, but don't object to this adventurous exploring phase. The field we are walking through slowly turns into a forest, though maybe it's a grove. Sometimes she stops and lets me lead the way, but whenever she veers off in another direction, I follow her.

The thick dark section of the woods is over now. I'm tired, but I don't want Pimp to stop when she does. I figured out why I am nervous. Pimp tells me she's got to go. She cries a little, not enough tears to be called a stream, but still goes. I don't think she goes because she has to meet anyone out here, here in this land that I still don't know how to describe despite all of our exploring. She walks into the sunset, though it might be the sunrise (I've lost track), and I think about whether she will be able to get back home.

There isn't water anywhere in sight, so I don't know if I'll ever be able to find my car. And even if there was water, I'm not sure I'd be able to get through the surface again.

Amanda Laudig

The Way We Pray for Rain

At night, we escaped
the dull orange glow of our idle living rooms
And then meandered the long gravel lane
until we could hear the creak and hum
of the giant irrigation system.
Turning, we saw its black silhouette,
a skeleton with a smoothly-arched spine
slowly sliding over the rows of beans.
In the distance, its mist fell like a halo
and then glistened on the dark green leaves.

A lavender haze hung over the field,
chilled our knees, obscured our path
As we approached the cold rain
of the enormous machine.
Our skin was pale blue,
Illuminated only by the refracted light
of the wax crescent moon.

Dust suspended in heavy, stagnant air
turns the mid-July dusk translucent gray
As another day passes over fragile roots
that turn brown and stalks that lay over.
Restless from heat and bad luck, we begin to pray
for relief, the way we pray for selfish reasons,
the way we pray for rain.

Freud and Literature; an Essay

"You said that irony was the shackles of youth."

-J.M. Stipe

And so but then I get back from the Alamo with approx. twenty six bags of books for various courses I am taking this semester. Over dinner that night, the expected questions are asked about said books, including, "So what are you reading for each of your classes." I answer that in Sel. Fig. of Am. Lit. we are reading Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* etc. and three Freud essays, to which my Father replies, "Oh GOOD!!! Freud wrote some of the best fiction of this century!"¹ There are days I want to kill my father. Mother, however, is being perfect as usual and listening to what I have to say. Mother and I have always been close.

So I go to class, to find the prof. is not there.³ One of the things I must do is read said Freud stuff and write a "critical response" about it. In secret, I gather fellow English students at a restaurant to plot.⁴ Waiting for our waiter to return with my refill, I gnaw on an ice cube. "So, who had T——?"

"I did, and so did E——. She was cool, although she had too much reading, and you have to do it because she requires Crit. Responses."

"What do you have to do for those?"

"Just write about what you read."

"Do I get graded, or just that obnoxious check mark in the top sinister corner."

"Check mark if she approves."

"Can I take her on, disagree?"

"Yeah, Prof. type B⁵. Don't worry, you're smart, just make crap up. I did."

"Does it have to be formal or informal?"

"I don't know. I always wrote formal."

So I'm at work⁶, having just finished my Mountain Dew beverage, I am peeling away the label and contemplating what to write

when I notice the high school student in the lane next to me doing her best to look clinically depressed and/or suicidal. She sighs and looks up casually for a second to make sure I've noticed. I really don't want to hear this week's tragedy, how her boyfriend dumped her, after last week they swore they would marry after graduation, or how no one truly understands the pain she goes through, how her parents don't understand just how serious this month's boyfriend is, etc. So I turn and casually attempt to flee in terror before the mouth can open and prevent my escape. But she sees my plan, and when I turn, she says, in her best inadvertent Droopy Dog impression. "Hiiiiiiii Paaaaaaaulllllllllll." I'm not sure whether it really dragged out that long, or whether it was one of those moments of horror when everything seems to slow down a bit.⁷ I slowly turn around.

"...Hello...."

She seems to sense the fact that I'm not going to ask her what's wrong, so she started right into it; "My life SSSSSUUUUUUCCCCCKKKKSSSS!"

"(...)"

"My boyfriend, like began to make eyes at, like, my best friend in the whole world. So I, like, want to stay out 'til, like, 4:00 a.m. the night before my ACT's and my, like, stupid parents, like won't LET me. So I, like, wrote a poem about it."

"(...)" (Oh God, no!)

"Would you like to hear it?"

"(...)" (Please for the love of God no!)⁸

"I look at the rain as it falls, and I feel sad./ I never ever felt this bad./ The rain is like the boy I knew/ who isn't anymore/ no one understands me/ I am sad like the rain."

It is moments like these that I firmly believe that everybody should be equipped with cyanide capsules in their teeth.

"Would you like to hear another?"

"K—, do you ever READ poetry?"

"Yes."

"I mean besides Jewel."

"...No..." followed by a slightly embarrassed look.

"Did it ever occur to you that in order to write good poetry, you have to read it to understand how?"

"Well...it's how I feel."

"Well, here's a poem about how I feel. It's called, 'Ode to the Psycho Hose Beast from the 666th level of the Abyss.' Oh Psycho Hose Beast from the 666th level of the Abyss,/ why do my eyes well up with red every time you speak to me?/ Why do I spend nights measuring my

crawl space to figure out how many of you and your waifish friends would fit?/ I hate you, Psycho_Hose Beast from the 666th level of the Abyss, and I wish you grievous injury.”

“...Um...okay, so, like, S— lied to me about, like, not making moves on my, like, man, and...”

I walk past at Anne Geddes display on the way out of the store, and I imagine myself as Dante leaving Hell.⁹

All this leaves me with just enough time to write this “Reader Response” thing. I’m feeling pretty good about myself at this point, and this response is 4 pages long, and it only had to be one. Plus I’ve even got footnotes.

As thoughts and Freudian catch phrases run through my head¹⁰, I begin to stare at a poster on my wall of Malcolm McDowell’s asymmetrically eyelashed face staring at me. He seems ready to psychoanalyze me. “So, was it your Mother who made you scared to experiment in your own voice, to steal styles from this month’s ‘greatest author ever?’”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re a messed up hack, you know that, right. Blatant schizo. tendency, stop abbr. what I say. I mean it! Delusions of grandeur, in denial, of course...” His accusations continue, until my sig. oth. comes over to check my essay.

She says, “You’ve been reading David Foster Wallace again, haven’t you?”

I look across the street to the Burger King sign, which states “Now Hiring 99cent Whoppers” (sic). I decide that plausible denial is my best recourse, from her and Malcom.

And that’s all I have to say about Sigmund Freud.

¹ I love this question. Not only to I get to speak for long periods of time without interruption about something I enjoy talking about and never get to, literature, but I get to hear my own voice for extraordinary amounts of time!

² My father is a psychologist, with a strong behaviorist background, and an avid follower of B.F. Skinner. It is rumored behind closed doors at APA that Skinner had a picture of Freud on a dart board in his rat lab.

³ She had to attend a conference on improving student/prof. interaction.

⁴ I used to be under the naivish impression that profs. did not do this. Ha. Rude awakening; walk into class and Prof. says cryptically during roll call, “Oh, so you are the guy.” In short, I was afraid.

⁵ There are 4 prof. types. Type A demands that you agree with them in all things. Resistance results in a “D” at best. Then there are B’s, who love it when people disagree, if they provide half-coherent arguments to go along with this. Disagrees get a letter better, regardless of actual skill. Type C’s are tricky, for they claim to be B’s, but don’t practice what they preach. Type D’s have Tenure, Full Prof, and are looking to retire early. They don’t do much of anything.

⁶ I work at Osco, where (ironically, given the subject manner of the anecdote) the motto is “You can count on people who care.”

⁷ i.e. the Ming vase falling off a mantle, the moment you know you are going to get rammed by the car running the red light, premature ejaculation, etc.

⁸ It was at this point that I realized Nietche was right, God was, in fact, dead. Or sadistic. Hardy’s “Hap” comes to mind.

⁹ After seeing Anne Geddes’s work, I feel I was too harsh on K—, I have spent my energies on too lowly a target. If I were Sinéad O’Connor, I’d tear a picture of babies sleeping in flowers and say, “Fight the real enemy.”

¹⁰ Oedipus Complex, Electra Complex, slips, dreams, the subconscious, Id Ego and Superego, Penis Envy (dream on, Freud).

Amy Hanson

Deadline

delineation of energy

i give to you sixty beats per minute
tapping keyboard

i chase away daydreams
to find focus on hard drive

yet this line is not ALIVE—

Chris Simich

Clean Up in Aisle 7

It's another Blue Light Special
Nature's way of saying
"I love you"

Not as difficult to stare at as the white bright light
And not as revealing

Everything looks good under the Blue Light Special
All color is disregarded

As forms take on different shapes
It changes attitudes

And brings peace to warring minds

The power behind the Blue Light Special

Lovers come together

Entangled in their writhing lust

Underneath Nature's greatest invention

Shadows and silhouettes

The gentle cooling of souls

A deep feeling of comfort

A step away from the flame of life

The precious moments we forget to cherish

All brought back by the Blue Light Special

...Now...(I know)

It's 12:00 am on a Sunday night. I'm craving...everything. A swift, cool, mellow drink, a smoke, and human contact. Sheryl Crow croons away on the portable radio with buzzing speakers...I'm paying for my Violent Femmes concert remake. God that was a good concert, my poor radio couldn't handle it; maybe only Gordon Gano could make it that loud. I envision the guy from work...tall, dark, incredibly...and well, sexy. I see him kissing my hand. I can't wait 'til I see him again...

So, it's 12:06 am...same Sunday. Steven Tyler has replaced the sweet falsetto of Sheryl and I'm feel more unbearable. I need to talk...and there's never anyone around here to talk to...the nurses just administer the medicine. I begin to feel guilty for my "Marty moment." I feel guilty for impure thoughts. I feel like I'm having some sort of affair, a mental affair, on Ryan. Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.

I wake up the next morning to the shuffle of nurse's feet and the rattling of the old, squeaky medicine cart. There is a light knock at the door. Some mornings they are so quiet because Rachel has had a bad night, but I was right there with her. The gray-haired nurse pokes her fat, round face into the room and calls, "Rise and shine ladies, it's time for breakfast." She walks to Rachel's bed and unties the straps that have bound her all night. Rachel jumps from the bed and sprints to the bathroom. Poor Rachel was thrashing all night unable to break free from the nightmares that so often plague her sleep. Once she told me she'd buy me a thousand cartons of cigarettes if I just loosen her straps at night. I was tempted but I would be dead, and they'd probably keep me here forever. I couldn't handle being here any longer than absolutely necessary, the people here are crazy, I am just stressed. There is a difference. They treat me like I am one of them, though, like I'm some sort of crazed-psycho-lunatic. I'm not, I just have a lot on my mind.

"Your session with Dr. _____ is at 10:30, right after breakfast, you'd better get ready now," the nurse interrupts and warns me as

she leaves the room.

After breakfast, I walk down the long, bright, carpeted hallway of the ward. At the end there is a huge door that mocks my freedom. I have to be escorted anywhere past that door, I can never be free. I say good morning to the orderly and he leads me to Dr.

_____ 's office. Within the office sits an old, gray, balding man. He looks more like an elf than someone who is supposed to tell me how to feel better. How can he interpret my feelings when he doesn't appear to have any of his own? I sit on the hard, leather couch and wait for him to talk to me. He asks his first question. "And how are we today, Miss Smith?"

...I feel like I'm wearing a sign... "I'm dating a great guy whom I really like, so please hit on me!" It's like they have a boy network of who's taken and who's not. This network lets other guys know to hit on the girls who have boyfriends already and are perfectly happy in their relationships. Damn boys. And they think women are hard to figure out? What a joke. I've *always* understood females. It's the guys who are difficult. Do they really like us or do they just want sex? There I said it...sex...S-E-X...the big one. I've never had it so maybe I'm missing something very grandiose. Somehow it seems sex fucks everything up. For example: too soon-it's over-not good enough-it's over; not good enough-it's over; too much-you're dead. Anyway, you end up screwed in the end (literally and figuratively, of course).

I guess I'm missing something. Remember the boy network? Yep. They know who the virgins are too. They stay FAR away from them...they don't want commitment, they just want to screw our brains out and never talk to us again. Well that's how most of the guys I went to high school with were. "Yeah...stupid freshman thinks just because I slept with her I wanna date her," stupid senior jock-o says to his ignorant, alcoholic, senior friend. "Yeah...freshman girls are easy and dumb. They need to get a clue. Hey wanna party tonight?" senior #2 replies.

Meanwhile, in the freshman girls' locker room..."Oh! I went out with (*fill in the blank with any idiot's name*) last night. It was great, I think he really likes me," naive freshman girl #1 says.

And the senior girls are dating college *men* because they know the senior guys (they've been there before of course) and wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole. I was in love with a guy who epitomized high school stereotypes. You know...the jock, Mr. Popular, Prom King, Homecoming Court...an asshole nonetheless. Yep, all of that and I was in love with him (a definite far cry from Marty). But I was the

unnoticed, smart girl who he never knew existed. So I suppose my crush epitomized conformity, something that has never happened to me before.

High school was such a huge joke for me. Envision any given episode of Daria...there's me in high school, only less neurotic, spiteful and animated. I was too smart for my own good...something had to screw it up. Life, love, and the pursuit of happiness got in my way. I probably tried TOO hard to fit in and be accepted. I was accepted all right...as the girl who knew all the answers. "Hey Kim! Can I borrow your notes and worksheets from the last chapter? I need to...uh...check my answers! You're so smart, you ALWAYS get them right." And me being so naive (and able to take compliments without getting TOO big of a head) believed them, and gave in willingly.

But that was high school. High school is a joke to everyone. Remember when high school was serious and you actually learned? Well, not you personally, but your parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc...Back in the days when Mommy and Daddy went to high school, high school was *it*. Most didn't have to go on to college. You didn't have to. You could get a *good* job right out of high school. Now the job market is so competitive, to enter it with only a high school diploma will get you laughed right into the unemployment office. You'd be lucky if someone like Bill Gates would let you lick the Microsoft dust off of his shoes. Now, college, or some equivalent, is so necessary. Once in a great while, you get a whiz kid that can do anything with say...computers. He could get a job that pays \$60,000 BEFORE he gets out of high school. And if he were to go to college, he'd eventually teach the class he was required to take. But not all of us are that lucky. Some of us have another four or more years of school. Like me...I HAVE to get my Masters so I'm doing a 6-year stint at the Institute of Higher Education of my choice...well I.S.U. It's a good school. I'll be glad to live away from home...but I'll feel just awful leaving. I definitely need a year on my own. That way I can use and abuse a curfew free environment. I can drink, smoke, toke, screw (just kidding) I'll probably drink...smoking kills loved ones; pot kills loved one's brain cells; screwing creates loved ones. It's all too much. College will be an experience when I'm not in class or at the library...when will that be? I'll forever be in my class...my 17 hours worth. (What was I thinking? I must have been heavily drugged or really crazy stupid).

College will be an experience. So many new things will be happening along with the old things, and sooner or later it's going to blow up in my face. You know the daredevils who try to accomplish

amazing feats? I bet they'd be scared straight after a few years as a teenager nowadays. Do adults really understand all that we are going through? I'm going to do an inventory, like you said, of everything that's caused me grief in the 5 years I've been a teenager: (The list is so long, I'll spare you and list only the major ones)

1. Junior high
6. Chad Kirchner
14. Moving to a new place in my FRESHMAN year
31. Junior Honors English
40. No date to the Junior Prom
42. Graduation
43. Choosing a college
48. Alcohol
49. Nicotine
50. Ryan Kemphues
51. College
52. Graduation
56. College
57. Graduation
58. Ryan Kemphues
59. Graduation
60. Being Editor-in-Chief
62. Graduation
69. Knowing I'm a college student
70. Being responsible for me.

There are definitely more...these are just the few I could think of off the top of my head. I know some are repeated, but those are the ones that caused the most grief, heartache, and headaches. Looking at this list now, these things seem so trivial. But they were EVERYTHING then. I always thought my life was over. For awhile, I thought I would end it, that way these things couldn't destroy me. I've done stupid things I'm not proud of. Can you say Nathan? What a loser. He was in it for kicks...he only used me for one thing. Too bad I never gave in! But I got him good, I only said I loved him. There was no way I ever could. The day some girls does love him *for real* and he loves her back, will be the day hell freezes over.

I'm not sure if I'm capable of love. I thought Ryan...no, I know Ryan. But if that's what love is NO THANKS! Crying is not a good emotion. I seriously thought he was the one. Obviously, Sam "the Gangster Whore" thought so too. It's just plain wrong when a girl asks a guy to marry her. Just wrong. I'm all for

equal rights, but there are things only men should do...pee standing up, mow the lawn, propose marriage, just to name a few. But love is such a mystery. I "love" so many people. But they're all a different love. Mom, Dad, stupid Kelley, Ryan, Chris "the undeniably good looking host", Marty...It's all a different feeling. Some are familial, friendly; some are just pure lust. And it's no wonder most people interchange love and lust because according to the American Heritage College Dictionary:

Love: 1. A deep, tender feeling of affection toward a person;
2. Intense desire or attraction or emotion of sex and romance
3. Sexual passion

Lust: 1. Intense or unrestrained sexual craving
2a. Overwhelming desire
b. Intense sexual desire

Ah Hell Theobald! Love and lust are almost the exact same thing! I KNEW IT! So all of the feelings I have ever had, could have been love. But screw love. It's not worth it. Most men aren't worth it. But of course, there are the select few that can be romantic, sweet, charming and great without sex getting involved. So far-I've met one! (And I barely know him so my perception could change). But a man who simply kisses your hand upon a good-bye...wait that's what I want to know. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? Does it mean anything? Do guys just do it to be nice-or can it be some sort of romantic gesture? Maybe everyone should come with instructions. Maybe once you become an emotional human being you should write a set of rules for yourself to live by and a list of instructions for everyone else.

Rules to live by:

1. Live for yourself.
2. You be happy first.
3. Be cautious of private automobile sellers.
4. Always balance your checkbook BEFORE you hit the Eastland Mall sidewalk sales.
5. Never keep a job you just don't like.
6. Never take anything for granted.
7. Don't be afraid to try things just once.
8. Be leery of guys who are just too nice about getting you a beer.
9. Watch good movies.
10. Keep in touch with old friends.

11. Don't be afraid to cry.
12. Always speak your mind.
13. Always have a mentor.
14. Go to class.
15. Be a child at heart, yet act your age.
16. Take a risk.
17. Smile.
18. Cry.
19. Be happy.

Those seem easy enough for me to live by. As for everyone else...

Rules for those who know me (or want to know me):

1. Always talk to me when you see me (especially if I am alone).
2. Don't criticize me too often.
3. Don't get scared if I cry.
4. Listen to GOOD music.
5. Smile.
6. Just let me listen, I like to know what others think.
7. If you notice something different, ASK! It'll make me feel more special and noticed.

Rules to live by will make everyone a little bit more understandable. And if everyone understood everyone else, we'd all get along. No more wars, fights, arguments...but maybe that's what identifies the world. Wars created the nation we are; fights and arguments established the governments, hierarchies. So maybe we need those things.

With all of the fighting and arguing there is nowadays, it's hard to understand the popularity of athletic competition. Every year, millions of kids ages 3-19 pick up bats, kick soccer balls, pass, punt, etc....all for one purpose, to beat the other teams, the players, and/or prove themselves. Many people use sports for competition, others for something to do, but I always played sports for fun. Sports were always meant to be fun (at least that is what my coaches said). But it's no fun when an uptight coach is screaming in your ear, "Why'd you miss that ball?" or "Why didn't you take that shot!" It's not fun to lose either. Everyone gets pissy and irritable. I don't think I've ever been that way I tend to learn from my mistakes; losses are learning experiences. Winning puts too much pressure on a player and a team. It's like you ALWAYS have to win just to prove it wasn't a fluke. Winning is a fluke. It just so happens you're better than everyone else...so what?

Those teams could just be having a bad night. Everyone puts too much emphasis on being good. What use is being good at soccer, basketball, softball, etc...in high school? Unless you're going to be one of the few, select best to go professional...it's just a status symbol. I was on the State Runner-up Girls' Soccer team my senior year, that means nothing to me now that I'm not in high school or playing soccer. In my opinion, status means you'll be washed up by the 10-year high school reunion.

The real successes at the reunion will be the silent geniuses. The people who just did the work without the grief, but were never smart enough to be the valedictorians or captains of the academic teams. It's those people who will just *be happy* with their lives. Being truly happy means you're the most successful person alive. I'm not sure I've been completely happy. I've been happy with certain aspects of my life, but never all of them at once. I'm not sure I've met anyone who is truly happy with every aspect of their lives. Someone's always having problems with love, car, work, pens, car's hairballs; and these little problems plague the people who want to be happy. I *do* want to be happy.

Dr. _____ clicks his pen, signaling the end of our session. I stare at his bald head with the comb over and wonder if he really is a man. I wanted to ask him, but I stand up and without a word, leave. I think about all I've said today, I jumped from subject to subject but it was purely a stream of consciousness that was taking me today in my session. I really got out how I feel about just everything. I haven't been able to do that in a long time. It feels good. I think, also, about how much progress I've made in the week I have been here. I could go home and be happy. And I really do want to be happy. I've got it all figured out too...I'm not going to worry. One day at a time wasn't just merely the name of a cheesy 70's sitcom...there is a meaning, a purpose. Life is just about figuring it all out. And I think you figure out what the meaning of life is when you take your last breath. And in that last precious moment...you see your life and say...now I know.

Michelle Darcy

Staggering

In my room I awake with a headache and with the realization that I should be remembering something. My roommate came in and asked me who the man with the blue nipple ring was last night, I said I didn't know, maybe Nicodemus, maybe the son of Sam...maybe just the Prince Himself. I looked outside the window of our apartment on stilts and saw nothing but chimes and wind staggering amongst the dusk of the forest. Reaching out for something solid, I reclaimed my breath with an echo. Where is Pele when you need her? Eyes flickering in the pink clouds she walks as if her soles paint impressionist art like little earthquakes each time she blinks. I rest upon the red diary I will never let go and wait for a time when underwater things speak to the girl who presses her palm against the pane just for a scream...

...drifting into smog I listen for the blue girls of the waterhole...this is what they sing...

He enters you like a rebel in a small town, screaming out like an unexpected siren in the night. Passing through the doorway, he stumbles upon your bed, finding you in a restless sleep, he kisses your legs open with a smile. You know it's him because of the taste he leaves; the smell that drifts after he abandons the sanction of lust or love. Parting and departing in the same rhythm, the twist, erotic, you squeeze into drink and he always leaves a drop to stain the glass. Liquid consciousness beneath your navel he swims for days after he runs. An American girl with a heart of a European romanticism. The nature of your will is the enemy you conquer. He parts and departs remaining a stain in the glass. A proposal was made, this is your window...

Draining the fibers of the other me, I light a match and take a drink. Touching the raspberry of my womanhood, I melt to meet you barefoot in Barbados. Many hours have passed since our last confession. Father Time has been a little selfish lately with stealing hours when our eyes

are closed and twitching. I have to keep scratching at my mind to keep the blood warm so I don't fade into some abandoned milky way and escape from whatever it is I feel the need to run from every morning. I have continued to fall into the same sexual habits just to relieve myself of headaches and insomnia. Underwater things need to breathe some time. Men have become my aspirin and my late night snack with as many calories as a doughnut hole. I sometimes find my voice speaking out loud to a full moon mingling with masochists. I shot an arrow through one and found the devil in a crevice of space and sky. I asked Him to remind me of the reasons why the angels left their halos on the airplane just to be sophomoric on the other side. He answered by allowing my hands to have a conversation with myself in remembrance of when I saw beyond the mirror. The thunder calls, I take my leave, and light a match to meet you...

Michelle Darcy

Messengers

If it is not Me
that rides at a speed of 90-
between the curves
of lost highways,
drag racing
nihilists
to the point where animalistic
behavior seems synthetically
human-
then it is surely the other;
who has taught me to
dance
in a culture where intimacy
is considered a public
humility.
Intuitive understanding
is our tongues' unspoken word
when it is speed-
(a forbidden sensuality)
that vines our bodies
around each other's manes-
just to be cruel
to those underwater things
that need to breathe
beyond the windowed shadows
of red moons,
tiger lilies,
and a bizarre strangers' view.

A Test of Rhetoric: In Dialog

To propose a question to no other but you,
would entail yet another to discover The Battle of Who.

-“Do what”-

To wonder about the who, the I, and the what is becoming -
for “I” is the foremost of what who is discovering.

-“But why?”-

What is becoming of the who is determined by what the I has done -
all that the mirrors see are confessions of future deeds for the who that
has yet to come -

-“For you?”-

A discovery to battle against and for the who,
for the who is what proposes the question of I to you.

-“You asked the question of wonder, didn’t you?”-

What was the question of wonder that you confessed I asked?

-To wonder of the who, the I, and the what is Becoming.-

To Something Drastic:

...Come calling to me again...where is the time when I used to talk to
Chatter...

...for you, during the witching hour...I can no longer ignore what they
tell me...

...yesterday I watched as people passed as liquid...the moonbeams
came to strum...

...guitar strings scream made when night has fallen...

...I raise my glass and drink to something drastic...

...Meditations come to rest upon the lap of resistance. There is a fear
to begin because of a history of never ceasing. Within the heart of a
woman there lies a secret unwilling to be told by the fire or in the heat
of candlelight. When the wind comes to comfort she whispers toward
the heath in a breath that will never be voiced out loud. In a silent
echo she confesses the adventure of her body; a virgin who never made
much of time when it came to love, but a whore who knew of nothing
else but to be a symbol of every man’s desire and the knowing of how
to become everything but her...

...A quiet drift to keep finding whenever the sound began to drown
between the glistening lakes of lovers’ reflections; then the hesitation
to leave when there is the moment of love directed strategically by the
moonlight, for it was manipulated perfectly, on just the right angle
when she turned her head to let out a cry you didn’t know to be hers or
borrowed from the wild. For you, she said, this may be a moment of
splendid celebration, but, for her, its just another midnight...

...A witching hour that was a creation of song and human exploration
between language and tongue, touch and sensitivity; intertwining
souls to mix secrets withing the mouth. In an hour when the moon was
hyellow the spirits were free to sing and echoes screamed alive, but
tonight maybe a grand finale full of confetti and champagne for you,
she said, but for her, just another witching where silhouettes are
dancing in a silence that not even the darkest of shadows can dis-
turb...

...Restless in slumber once again, eyes when closed are tight, heavy, waiting for Dream, maybe his sister, maybe the secret that comes between...

...There is a feeling that resides in a woman's stomach that travels throughout the electricity of her youth, to some it may be as soothing as water, a calming way of life, to others it may be a distraction, a fire that is in constant need to be in motion; for the desire to be still is considered the same as being dead. Within the soul of a woman there lies a curiosity, to discover is to fail a thousand times, but to find it, in a moment of majestic splendor, when the girl can become her own, is a moment that has been sketched in the landscape of my memory as a treasure that bares no boundaries...

...To muse in daylight when sound can seem so barren is a walk I sometimes wish would never finish. To muse in the dark when the mirrors reflect the glimmer of a girl's glitter is a trance I will never come out of. A smile came before the beat from within the hour's brew, but when did we become convinced to leave the writing on the wall next to our boots? When did Inhibition exit out the back door in an escape we were unaware of? When did we decide to shake the hand of Insecurity and allow him to join the circle of embracing arms that are not afraid of touch? Confronting the virgin and the whore in the same spell clung to the chaos of the leather on the shelf, but to dust, to never reclaim the journals of red, I chose breath and untied...

...Envisioning a rhythm full of cadences and cluster chords that endlessly toss and turn toward the spirit of recognition, all insides are out and everything has been spoken loud. The moment between death and dream has been stirred by the secret shared between tongue and mouth, touch and scream. Staggering to stand upon the soles never before tread upon to confront an awakening; a revival of the inner construction. A wreckage ball by my own account trampled underfoot while the cauldron was hallow. Waiting patiently for the sound of drowning pianos to crescendo the notes I, myself, could not play. A cooling, a baptism of breathing, the moment has come when the Sands dust themselves off to shake hands with the echoes of time...

...I bang my head hard enough to concentrate on being still...

...During the witching hour...you have come to disturb my silence
with a word...

...entering a palace of dangerous gray...I listen with Beethoven's
ears...

...today I watch as song takes a chance...at the table there is one...

...to pluck a pixie is something the Dream King never intended...

...secrets spoken in the dark...leave messages for the one who
delivers...

...for you, I raise my glass and drink to something drastic...

the glitter girl with a bubble on her tongue,
Darcy

Doleful Glee

Whippoorwills wooing in the meadow.
A rusty bridge with broken beams runs over a gurgling river.
The river runs thick with mud and is to the top of the banks that hold it.

Sitting here.

Not giving a damn about anything except for the presence of the moment and a past that continually runs further downstream.
Feet dangling over the edge watching our beer bottles float around the bend and out of sight.

Longing for the smell of freshly cut grass from an early spring night almost five years old on this a late winter afternoon.

Feeling that all we have is the gurgling of the river, and the smack splat splash of our beer bottles ending their tumble at the surface of the crystal clear murky water.

So what makes us feel so alone at this empty space in empty time?
The products of what we have been through by choice or by chance.
Maybe that is what causes the aching feeling in our bones when we think about the smell of freshly cut grass of an early spring night five years old.

Waiting for the stories we will have when we reach our aged feebleness.

Glowing in the warmth of our twilight while standing on the hollow halls of the card castle of experiences that makes us who we are.
Looking down at the cards that stand out while looking past everything else.

Desperately holding on to the gurgling river and the freshly cut grass of the fragile existence that has made us who we are.

Glowing in the Grandeur of the Golden Carrot

I never needed nothing more than a big black bubbly cup a'coffee. I been to Mobile, Minnesota, Montana, Motor City, Mason County, Manatee Bay and the ol'Mackinac.

I seen drunks, donuts, doves and darkness. I've jived with the beatest beatsters in the U.S.A. and dug with digginess ducks this side of China.

I've wrestled thronging thoughts on crowded corners. The clingidy clang of change in my pocket, the wishetee waash of my super satchel, and the swingedly swang of my swinging suitcase rubbing against my lankedly leg. Clingidy clang, wishetee waash, and swingedly swang.

Everything echoing into my earnest ears. A laid back island in an overwhelming, overbearing, and overcharging ocean. In what always turns out to be a furious fast paced feeding frenzy ... Everybody wants to be the monkey with the biggest coconut.

But I still dig.

Floating above the flim flam in an abstract balloon.

Clipidy clop and clappidy clip.

Picken 'em up and putting 'em down. Coming around a big blue bend on the edge of a two lane lane. Listening listlessly to the gentle gyrations of lawfting leaves.

Smiling.

Basking in the Bohemith beauty of the most heavenly of homes which is a quiet road.

Thinking

I lie awake thinking of you
I close my eyes, I see your face,
Your smile, your eyes,
I see beauty, I see you
I think of what has been
I think of what is
I think of what could be
I think often-I think too much
I think until I know
What I know I am unsure
The future is uncertain
Everyone knows that
I make promises to no one
Not even myself
Time to stop the thinking
And start the doing
But what do I do
Afraid to jump
Afraid of anew
Afraid of failure
Is it worth it
I think I do believe so

All American Eve

She's afraid of the calories in apple juice
lays there - dried out -
feeling shriveled on the inside
So many calories in juice?
Too long to run in the cold
- biting wind -
just to work it off

Criminal tongue in a sand paper mouth
fidgets over teeth worn
into empty pockets
- from turning herself inside out -

Water, Water, Water
to make her belly round
grow closer to the
hip bones - sharp -
as Sunday tongues
(be pretty) stand tall (be pretty)

It is up to you to shatter the glass ceiling
- bursting through -
yet ever radiant in your beauty
To speak out is still too much
- too irritating -

Instead they just tell you to keep watch
dinner - mini van - husband with lipstick on the collar
and the next generation waiting
to suck you dry

(girl) (girl) (girl)
you are still a toy

Don't give her water
not until she drinks the God-damning juice
(not until the taste of apple is on her lips)

roll her out, kick start her into action
There's a world out there waiting
to be changed

hip bones spear the paper thin
- skin -
(blood) (blood) (blood)
all she had left to give
spills into the world
giving the sweet Earth
- atasteofmother -

She was afraid of the calories in apple juice

Who isn't?

Miranda Hunter

Oh Lord My Nappy Hair (Prayer for the Hair Abuser)

It has been deep fried
and blow dried,
Oh Lord my nappy hair.
It has been braided
under-worked
overrated,
loved desperately and hated,
Oh Lord my nappy hair.
It has been greased up
teased out and
puffed up.
It has been permanent and color tint,
Oh Lord my nappy hair.
Forgive me now before I do
douse my hair in dippy-do,
one more night in curlers and pins
wrapped in scarf
whips tucked in,
one more night of sleep insane
to strut on down with flowing mane
to be just like what's her name
Oh Lord bless my nappy hair.

Frankensteinfuckerman

strung out shot of eye drops and hard liquor at late night
makes me see the booths and chairs and shitty band as
they are so cleansed and raw and all have halos raining
sparks of intellect over their heads but nothing connects
and no new ideas of life and health and money is
something they claim is vacuous and unneeded yet they
all kill the air for it and their ringleaderfrankenstein sits
strangled in corduroy and self. he doesn't see with his eyes
he is blind. bolts on the soul of this coffeehousefuckerman
who gets drunk by the atmosphere he drips in his mug and
exists without opinion and is deaf listening to empty
music with repeating rhythms of bad sex and boredom
this super-dominant male receives electric shock shots of
smoke to blackened lungs from the hazy air he lives within
and roams and roams with no destination and much fury this
frankensteinfuckerman fits within the bends of the trends
he helped make and have now trapped him within his own
creation his own monster

I see him sitting confused about the nature of me as I look
like a young girl who doesn't understand sex and fucking
is only a sinful word over the shoulder on a crush so remote
it becomes obsessing and he turns his dead eyes from me
to the music source of screaming and rage so close to his
own nature and continues to think of nothing

Monday afternoon bedwindow

I need to know what my purpose is
 why do I do what I do and to what ends
I would like to believe that there is a plan
I would like to believe that my acts are important
I would like to believe in the future
I would like to think I believed in the past
I would smile at children playing in the mud
 they pour in cokes and make other children drink,
 just for the laugh, for the laugh like funny ha-ha
I would like to think I can keep up with everything
I want to be known and revered
I want to want someone forever
I wouldn't mind that
 not too bad at all
I want to kiss a green-eyed girl on the bus
I want to pace the streets to the rhythm of punk rock music
I want to sleep with a married woman and even have sex too
I demand to be respected for my actions
I want Chicago railroad streets with Seattle sounds
I want my friend to know that when I drink a great big whiskey to him
 I'm drinking away my death
 not the way to it
I want the love of it to reciprocate
I want the love to fill me back up
I want to stop telly watching so damn much
I would rather sit on my furnace and watch the snow
 fall from the sky that is one big cloud
I would rather roll over onto my bed and mouth a tune
I would like to believe I could always go elsewhere
I am still not content here
I am a mouse with a cock that fills a teacup
I am a big cat pacing on a fake rock to the camera flashes of a small
boy

I make myself laugh all the time
but I make no one else laugh
I miss the me I was in high school
I would like to believe it is all so easy
I like the idea of H. S. representing life
everything taken care of
everything broken down to a stroll through the green room
preparation
I miss the pep rallies I used to hate
I wanted to fuck every girl I knew every one
I need to pull myself together
I need to get back on track
I would like a memory that's not pure memory
one I can still make-believe
I would like to believe in predestination but I don't
I have my own control
I lose control a lot
I want to be free to be silly 24 hours a day
I am way too serious for other people
I don't get along well with myself
I am a boring date
but good in the sheets
I never fall asleep right after
I am the woman-friend
I try to play the role of the concerned guy
I play roles
I don't need to try
I talk about me too much

Patrick Kelly

Rabid Transit

She sets her feet up at dusk, wiggles her toes, snatches from the armrest her book, this time *175 Tropical Fish Diseases*, pulls the pink and white Afghan over her knees, splits the book at the dog-eared page, detailing disease 57, head and lateral line erosion, and all nested in, she begins to sleep.

Muriel comes in from the parlor. They like to call it a parlor, even though it is a walk in closet with two entrances (for safety reasons, obviously) that exists within the study, which is actually a cold and nearly empty bedroom on the concourse level.

Grandma, startled by jostled hangers, perks up to get to the nuts and bolts of disease 57, head and lateral line erosion, "hole in the head disease," feigning to look at the hideous accompanying picture, before she is interrupted by the visitor.

"Grandma."

"What?!" she zaps at Muriel, who emerges from the closet.

"I think I have something important to tell you."

"How important could it be, to go scaring an old woman like that."

"Very important, I guess. Dad's dog is dead."

"Oh bullshit. You come around here ever two years or so and tell me that exact line, his dog has died. Then I go and visit your father in his time of 'mourning,' dressed fancy as a fern for the funeral, and there's that puppy, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, wagging and jumping, always obscenely taking liberties with a lady, trying to sniff up my skirt."

"It's never the same dog, Grandma. That's the problem."

"Not the same dog," she said, adjusting her cheaters. "Well, I'm quite sure it is. It always looks the same, acts the same. He treats it the same."

"The dog is a variable, but the formula is the same. Grandma, Dad's out of control. He's had 10 dogs in the last 20 years. Like clockwork, they all die on the same day, same time, same way, everything is the same. Within minutes, it seems, he has a new one

just like it.”

“Now listen here, Muriel. I think someone’s got the boy crazies and sees nothing straight. Do yourself a favor and take a nice long, cold shower and then decide if you want to make your grandma come all that way for nothing.”

“Grandma, you don’t understand.”

“I think I understand the boy crazies, all right.”

“I’m 32. I don’t think it’s the ‘boy crazies.’”

“Don’t think I’ve never been your age.”

“Get off her back, Nessie.”

“Quiet, Frank—”

Muriel’s eyes fall.

“...Nobody wants to hear from an imbecile like you anymore.”

“Grandma, who are you talking to?” said Muriel, dreading the answer.

“Isn’t that obvious?” Grandma raises her voice, and Muriel glances up. “Well I’m not talking to you, that’s for sure.”

“All right, Grandma. Another dog. Another dog, another dog, another dog.”

“You need to start paying attention. You’ll see that it’s the same dog.”

“I’d better go.” Muriel turns toward the parlor.

“Goodbye, dear,” Grandma returns to her book, unable to avoid the glossy fish disease photo. “Oh my, isn’t that terrible, that head and lateral line erosion?”

There is nobody there to answer the question. She is alone.

Michael Place

From “The Alzheimer’s Guide to Confession”

Gwen and Murray are both nurses here at Plum Grove. Gwen worries that I am being evaluated for a move to the Alzheimer’s floor. I tell her what I’m more concerned about is confession. This is the truth. A man in his sixties can’t go around just thinking about baseball all day. I have a piece of the afterlife in mind.

Murray took two years of catechism way back in the Middle Ages, so she takes my confession as a substitute for a priest. She always tries to convince me to attend the Lutheran Service they hold Wednesday nights in the basement lounge. “You might learn about the priesthood of all believers,” Murray says. “Then you could talk to God personally.” Those Lutherans. I think the reason they tell you God wants a personal relationship is so they don’t have to pay any attention to you themselves.

Waiting for Murray the following Saturday, I am too distracted to think very seriously about confession. The cartoons are especially good. And Rainer’s family has come to visit. All of them, apparently, forming a new living curtain around his bed. I’ve had to turn the volume up pretty loud so I can hear. Besides all the commotion, I have to try and figure out if Gwen is right. Does Murray come simply for my confession, or is she evaluating me also?

I am reaching over to pour a glass of water when I notice a small girl suddenly standing beside my bed. My bed is high enough so that I can only see her face above my light blue pajama leg, which is the same blue as my bed sheets, which are the same blue as the wall. The girl seems about seven or eight years old. She has shiny black hair cropped at chin level, a perfect frame for her round, rosy face.

“Your ankles are real thin,” she says.

I hold out my pinkie finger and her round face slowly takes on a confused expression.

“Pull it,” I say, gruffly.

She smiles, giving a good tug on my finger.

“I didn’t *hear* anything,” she says.

“Silent, but deadly.”

My own grandchildren are out in Arizona. My dumb son

Derrick, my only child, the insurance agent, wanted a change. "The Farm will transfer you anywhere," Derrick said, proudly. What a dope. He and I haven't gotten along so well since my first stroke. I moved here to the Plum Grove, and about a year later, they all moved West. He played the good son, wanting me to move with. "There are some nice homes out there. And the weather's nicer, too." Derrick's mother died when he was a small child, and I never remarried. Derrick found a girl name Sue not long after he had plunged his livelihood into insurance. Sue is by far the most boring person I've ever met. Now, I don't mean plain. Plain is fine. Boring means the girl can talk for over an hour about some new cold prevention powder you can mix into your coffee, your milk, your juice, or just about anything. There's a good chance that Sue is in Arizona now, still boring someone on the same subject. I got out of their house quick, before my grandchildren turned into bores also.

"What's this?" asks the rosy-faced girl, pointing at the red "C" on the baseball cap sitting on my nightstand.

"You don't want to touch that," I say. "I had to kill a roach. It's covered with bug guts."

"I like bugs." She adjust the strap and puts it on, matting her bangs across her eyes. I forget all about Murray, thinking that this is the kind of kid Gwen would raise. The girl clears her hair, telling me that her grandfather stays here to keep his pacemaker working. I imagine taking her round face to Wrigley, buying her a bag of peanuts.

"Say, you don't have any candy on you?" I placed a cupped hand above my mouth to explain, "Prohibition."

"I have some Certs," she says. "Fruit flavor," she adds, digging through a pocket. She pulls out a smiley face pencil eraser—"Oh, that's not it"—just as Murray comes in. Murray quickly adds up the situation, removing my cap and ushering the girl over to her apologetic parents. There are dust particles lit up in a familiar stream of light from Rainer's window.

Murray's hair is pulled back in a tight graying bun. She carries a clipboard.

"I tell you, Murray. You should have been in the movies."

"Oh, Bernard."

"I'm tapping my noggin, trying to think of the movie."

"I don't watch movies much."

"I've got the scene in mind. The actress is riding a bicycle, dressed all in black. A long black dress, on a bicycle with a white basket. The odd thing is you're looking at her through a house window. And the house is spinning 'round.'"

"Well. I don't think I've seen that one."

"I'm trying to get the title. All I can get is a wizard and a rainbow."

"Well, Bernard. It's very nice of you to say, anyhow."

"Yes ma'am. Strong resemblance."

Things for pretty well for a bit. I stick to confessing sins like impatience or flattery, so not to reveal anything too questionable. Every so often, I look over at Rainer's family to see the rosy-faced girl glaring hard at Murray. Things go bad when I notice Murray reading from her clipboard. On impulse, I reach over and grab it. The page on top says "Surplus Inventory." For a moment Murray looks at me in pure horror. Then she grabs the clipboard back, huffing. "I was listening, Bernard. A person can do more than one thing at a time."

Rainer's family is beginning to file out at this point. The rosy-faced girl squirms free of her mother's hand and runs up to the foot of the bed "Look Mom," she says. "His sheets are the same as Grandpa's." I didn't catch Murray evaluating this visit, but I'm not going to relax yet. No, sir.

About a week later, with one of the Plums changing my sheets, a half a roll of Certs drops down to the floor. I quickly cover it with a blue slippers foot and shrug my shoulders. "I didn't hear anything fall."

The following Wednesday, I am out and about. I use a walker, but I'm a speed demon compared to most of the Pigeons in this place. I haven't seen Gwen for a few days, so I've decided to go look for her. Just to say "hey." Down the hall, I take a rest in the seat next to the pay phone. With my index finger, I check the coin return. Empty. I used to come out here a lot, to call those 1-800 hot lines. You can get a phone in your room, but it costs extra, so why bother. Anyway, those hot lines are terrific, if you just want someone to talk to. There's tons of them: the Alcohol Abuse, the Suicide, the Health Care Financing, the Surgical Second Opinion. One time, I got the numbers mixed up and told the finance lady that I was drinking my whole check away. "I know what you mean," she said. I tried to call Derrick once, maybe three years ago. Sue wrote one boring letter a year for the first few years after they moved, encouraging me to reconsider Arizona. By the time I called, their number had been changed. I thought of trying to locate them, but not long after, Gwen was assigned to the floor. Now, I don't bother to call Derrick or those hot lines anymore.

An Exercise in Listening

She heard a man come in; she explained what she wanted. Yes, a branding, yes she was sure. She had a friend come in with her, and they gave the man a rough drawing of what she wanted. The branding would have to be rough, she understood. Detail didn't stay with these things.

In the room, she heard him explain the procedure; the paper in his hands made fluttering noises.

"I'm gonna cut and bend some sheet metal into this design, which is mostly dots, so we may have to make multiple strikes. I'll try to avoid that. Anyway, umm, yeah. After I cut the steel, I'll have to heat it with the torch. Where did you want —"

Ring; it was a telephone.

"Oh, could you hold on a bit? Thanks."

A scar. She had avoided them most of her life. Now she was getting them on purpose. This was like the others. No, this one was special. She was wearing shorts, and she felt the smooth skin on her kneecaps; the scars still there from childhood reminded her of running around, playing with the other children.

Her friend started to say something. "Are you —"

"Sorry about that," the brander said, "My wife asked me to pick up some stuff at the store. Where was I? Oh jeez, umm. Yeah, where did ya want it?"

"On my stomach."

"You sure?" asked the man; she turned her head towards the sound only a few inches above her head. "The skin is real sensitive there, and it hurts a lot. Trust me, I know."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Mmm, okay."

She heard him rummaging around, and the chatter of those outside the room; it was almost closing time, but some still remained. They scheduled a branding after the regular customers had gone their way, because of the smell. Soon, the last few were out the door. Teeny-boppers and their belly buttons.

She felt hers; the metal laid there on/in her soft stomach. That first pinch. She hoped the others would catch her addiction. Sometimes she didn't; it felt as if they may take away part of what was special to her. She pulled on the ring. It was healed a long time ago. She had one before most had thought or heard of it, let alone seen it. She had never seen a navel piercing, she just knew she had to have it.

She clicked her tongue-stud against her teeth. Wind from the door cooled her sweat; the bell jangled. The three of them were alone.

Her head was pounding; it wouldn't stop, and she knew it

wouldn't until after they had finished. She'd done things like this before, and the anticipation and fear never changed. She picked up her legs; they were stuck with sweat onto the seat. Anticipation burned.

There were snips, his cutting the metal with something. She didn't look to the noise; it would be pointless.

"Ready?" he asked. She nodded. He hadn't been that long making the brand, but it wasn't a complex design. She lifted her shirt. He put the metal on her stomach. It was cold.

"This right?" she shook her head and moved the metal to where she wanted. "Okay." Snap, he was putting on the, snap, latex gloves. He cleaned off the area with something cold. Hiss, the propane torch started, she heard the fire whoosh.

Minutes later, when she was unable to bear it much longer, he said "You ready?"

Her friend was standing there, trying to be silently supportive. She took her clammy and nervous hand.

"I'm ready."

"I'm gonna count to three."

"No. I hate that, just do it." Heat approached.

The room filled with the smell of cooked flesh. Scalding pain hit her, making her reminisce of when she didn't know the stove was hot, or where it was. She grabbed the arm of the chair and tightened the grip on her friends hand; she cried out in pain despite her promise to herself.

Minutes or seconds later, she sat up, slowly, it hurt, still, but not much. The nerves were fried. The pain came from around the wound, not the thing itself. Sweat ran down her back.

Her friend's voice, small and distant, "Are you okay?"

She had to think about that. "I'm okay," came from 10 seconds of internal debate. Her heart was slowing, her adrenaline dropping. She smelt her burnt flesh and became nauseous, that faded slowly.

A cool ointment was placed on the wound by latex-gloved hands, a large bandage, easily twice the size of the wound covered her new scar. She heard the flutter of a paper being passed from the brander to her friend.

"Read her this when she gets home. It's important that she clean it regularly."

Her friend spoke, "Okay. Jeez, I'm the one shaking. It smells like when my girlfriend curls her hair."

Weeks later, she removed the bandage for the last time, wanting to touch her scar. She ran her hand over the bumps, her scar, her flesh moved to make one word, "love."

She moved her fingers around every dot that made her language. She hoped soon that someone would be here to read her, in the dark. Another hand reading and understanding, if not her language, then herself.

Daydream wagon on grocery day

My wagon
screams to be ridden in,
not used as a grocery cart.
Great concepts linger
in the bottom
where I usually sit;
unfinished ideas
jiggling, shattering
on the long ride
to the store
that recycles cans.

Two boys in the moonlight

Dave's tingling
red cheeks
glow, body
full of bounce
fabric softener
smell, drifting
in October wind,
like red felt
leaves, that curve
in night
air, and remind me
of my cold nose,
and my hot
heart blood.

Michael Bonowicz

Gambit

I guess I blew you away when I
Said I could live without you
Now I swim in the shallow end
Where they laugh at me for wearing a life preserver

(I remember a story
About a doctor who performed surgery
On a patient's soul
But the bandages were torn off
Before the scars had healed)
Isn't it time we said "Hello?"

Over here in this other "reality"
Live all the people bored with evolution
So they sit and watch TV
While I have trouble breathing

I suppose you want to get together sometime
Maybe talk things over
Let me know your version of the story
But you always forget to call

I've seen you stand around
Throwing stones and cursing the banister
For offering no support
I'm still sitting here waiting...

You're a lot like you
The best friend I never had
And all this time history just bores me
Down...
It's Daylight Endings Time
Set you life ahead one hour

Jeff Glombicki

Hush

What does it matter? Slithering through these
sticky rivers. Wind preying 'cross this blue.
So we hold our breath like a pent up sneeze
and we search the sky for some faultless clue.
And when the creek-breeze hisses by our tense
virgin ears, we listen to this spoken
creation imploring "Don't climb the fence."
Then we turn around and bathe in broken
water, diving into our treasure box
of tricks, deaf to the Love in this screeching
jet stream. We fix to soar above these rocks,
weaving through air traffic and still reaching.
We pray, windburned and tangled in our rush
hour, stuck and rutting around for the Hush.

JD Lancaster

Do nothing to eventually do something. Taking a nowhere road
everywhere. Ha.

?

?

Here comes Swifty!!!

From our oneness we shoot out in all directions.

From our differences we find fault in others.

On our patient little paths we slow down and dig.

On our pesky little routes we do our awkward kart-wheels.

Running in a dog race that is as large as everything we know.

Rapidly running not knowing who controls the electric rabbit. Our
Buddahs in the bleachers.

Waiting as we run trying to take in the most beautiful art that is our
nature.

Whiskily whissping around on our own personal tracks with our own
personal rabbits.

Arriving never, always arriving, yet always waiting to arrive. ZIP Zip
zip.

Always accustomed to the agitation of dust in our eyes and fleas on
our side.

Relaxing with a state of mind that is always a heaping dog dish with
plenty of scraps.

Reveling in the revelations of the daily grind. Closing our eyes when it
rains.

Deciding on the things that can have no decisions. Never being
skeptical enough.

Dan Maurer

Only the worthy

A woman visits a grave,
Of a friend who passed on
With a bouquet, to warm the stone,
And her sanity to save.

When she reached the fresh dirt,
A spirit held her back;
Told her that her he hadn't been worthy.

"Why?" She asked, "Why can I not place these upon his grave?"
"Because" it said, "because he was a man who cared about none."
With her flowers in hand, a tear of pain dropped down,
Feeding the Earth, bringing a part of him back to save.

A woman, old and gray
Visits her old husband's grave.
She comes, with bouquet in hand,
And speaking silent words to warm the stone.

When she reached the black dirt,
A spirit held her back,
And told her that of love he was never worthy.

"Why?" She asked, "Why spend his days with me,
Until he became old and gray?"
"Because," it said, "because he was afraid of being alone
Love was never in his life."

Death brings flowers in hand,
Tears on the ground,
And come forth you,
A single blade of grass.

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