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Algora



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To submit work or ask for more details, write to:

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AGORA

"Birthplace of democracy,
the Agora dozes at the foot of the Acropolis.
Athenians thronged here to discuss,
harangue, litigate, philosophize."

*Greece and Rome:
Builders of our World*

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Cover Art: Pedro Pastrana

Everybody Has a Story

It's always the same 1950s motel tricked out with a shopworn kitchen
Where a thousand hungry American mouths
Have downed a thousand baloney sandwiches,
Sand in the mossy shower, seawater pooling and staining
The faded green and white linoleum squares.

Outside, in the sea breeze, picnic tables adjacent shiny Fords and Chevys
Made to carry wife, kids, dreams galore.
Daddy sits on the table's bench blowing smoke and pulling beer
Out of a bottle with practiced lips,
Chortling at Dagwood's sharp retorts to Blondie,
With wind raising tiny hairs let free by his old man's undershirt.

Mommy sorts clothes, pats curlers tight against her head,
Locking thought inside with moat lips pulled in and secured,
While her vacant eyes endlessly sweep the ocean waves.

Bubba plays games that tell us he'll grow up to drink like Daddy,
Die gasping like a fish out of water
While his family stands around waiting for what they always knew
Would come one day, sooner rather than later.

(But Daddy will be many years dead himself by then, of course,
And Mommy's lips no looser, her hair grayer and more skittish,
Her eyes no less satiated by anything at all).

And I?
The story's hole, dark light finding shine amidst despair.
My comic lies vacant in my lap
As its inhabitants, black-shrouded folk,
White faces gleaming under farfetched purdah veils,
Roam the sea on raven skiffs.

Silence broken only by a crow,
As night descends.

William Lindsey

Sam

Sam sits in his well-worn folding chair on Union Street in San Francisco, in front of an Italian restaurant where anxious tourists line up each day to dine. There Sam can be heard; every Saturday and Sunday he blows into that alto sax his own unique story.

He stares with the eyes of an old grandmother, proud of these notes he's given life to, but also sad — sad because too often his most selective sounds, fearful symmetry, seem to bounce off those affluent brick and marble walls, up and down the now-closed commercial buildings. They stop. But this day, like the ground thirsty for rain, Sam's tune drifted into the ears of this tired but curious traveler, who paused at a distance to take his picture.

His eyes stared and his notes were sweet... Yes! His notes *were* sweet but also a bit painful, like the first penetration of two lovers. I stared back at Sam. I watched his fingers in a caressful command run up and down the keys and pads; his lips focused, flesh against wood and metal in such a way as years have given him the road map. Uncomprehendingly, the people sat silent like undergraduates on the first day of class. I was unsure if they heard Sam at all — no one offered even one clapped hand. Sam continued.

Even now he lives in my mind and in my photograph. However, I too am guilty. You see, although I also saw this musician, this storyteller, and was touched by the telling; and although, just as his song flew past my ears, almost missing my brain altogether, and passed through me like a shot lodging itself into my longing heart, *I too turned cold* and passed, without offering even one clapped hand or clanging coin.

Scott Fitzgerald

The asphalt of Louisiana roads
licks its soft paint
into the sand.
Around the Gulf,
summer swimmers hop
and jerk over it, marionettes
screeching at its bite.

When I was three, my mother
gathered my calf body to her chest
and barefooted across the black
that wound between the water
and our cottage. I remember
the salty flat curl
of her hair as she ran
the stinging road.

She doesn't remember doing it,
saving my tears from being spent:
jars brimfull of new pennies
netted at the edges with her fingerprints.

Camille Hopkins

The Secret Life of Catfish

The ripples ringing the surface of the still bayou
Are the only testament we have
To the secret life of catfish.

Creatures marred to every eye save love's,
They practice self-assertion on the sly,
Early mornings when sun casts light on streams
And draws their denizens up to feed, to play:

To dance, with clumsy bemused grace,
Slit mouths akimbo with delight,
Tails aflutter in the water's breeze:

Thus always the netherworld existences
Of those subordinate
To might, to right.

William Lindsey

A Good Idea

It seemed like a good idea at the time. Mom asked me why why why did you do all this? It falls logically into place when I think about it, but she can no more understand the method to my madness than I can understand why she finds me handsome in the brown, tan, and yellow spectrum in which I am now clad.

It all started late one night when I overdosed on Mountain Dew and ranced to a cable melody. *M*A*S*H*, *Cheers*, Nick at Night, "Live a Little, Love a Little" — the Elvis Presley classic. The nuances of these shows led me to utter despair. I was alone alone alone, not only in my basement but in the general scheme of humanity. Imagine my relief when I spotted her.

A smile shot through the Sony to me. I began dialing. Suddenly, I was not alone — Candi was my babe. Her soft, seductive, throaty whisper kept me attentive. I confided in her. She encouraged me. We were soulfully close at the time. In retrospect, she was paid to be my friend, to talk suggestively and prevent me from hanging up; she was quite adept at her job. I did not hang up and soon amassed a phone bill from hell.

Mom was none too excited about my 1-900 marathon calls at two dollars per minute. I had plunged myself into instant debt. Forced to come up with the money, I considered the alternatives: Taco Bell, the grease pit hell; odd jobs as the indentured slave of neighbors and relatives; or gambling, i.e. quick, easy money.

Anybody would have chosen gambling. With 20/20 hindsight, I realize I lacked the necessary understanding of gambling and odds. But it seemed like a good idea at the time. I thought about all the times luck shined upon me for no apparent reason ... Once I won a He-Man action figure in a Bubble Yum sweepstakes. And there was the free medium fries from the McDonald's Monopoly Challenge. However, these were chance winnings, not true gambles. My sole experience with Lady Luck was the lotto, and I had never been successful. I was positive the lotto was a fate thing, just as the He-Man and fries had fallen into my hands by the chance

that I was a random consumer who got lucky. And I believed gambling was a fate thing, too. Now I clearly know there is a distinction. If you lose the Bubble Yum contest, you still have the gum to chew. If you draw "Sorry, try again" in the McDonald's contest, you still have the french fries. All you still have in a gamble is the debt.

My wisdom is apparent now. But wisdom is very costly. Very costly. I already owed my small fortune to the Candi Company, and my plan was to alleviate this debt and then some. I thought of my friend Melvin, the star player for my high school's football team. Melvin is no dumb jock; he is an import.

An import is common in Kentucky football. Small schools and big schools play in the same league. Small towns would not have a chance against big city

schools if they didn't have help. So, at a price paid by the booster club, we import players of stature to help us. It's a good system, as we make it to the state playoffs about every other year at least.

Anyway, Melvin is from St. Louis and the inner city. He has told me of all the action there, the rackets and all. I knew he was itching to do something other than cruise the Wal-mart in his new Supra, yelling at everyone else creating the teenage traffic jam.

I found Melvin in the weight room benching 200 like it was air.

"Melvin, I have a proposition for you."

"Chuh. Chuh. Chuh. Chuh...." Melvin just kept breathing and benching, ignoring my very puny existence.

"It involves an easy, quick money-making opportunity that I am offering exclusively to you, Melvin Jones."

"Chuh. Chuh. Chuh. Chuh...." Melvin kept breathing and benching, but his eyes left the ceiling panels and fixed for one long second on me.

"Let's talk in private, Mel," I suggested. I knew he was eager because he rolled off the bench, toweled off, and walked out. I followed him. I figured he needed to feel like he was in control. If a guy thinks the ball is in his court, he'll usually bounce it off his foot. Anyway, Melvin went straight to the locker room, stripped, and got in the shower, so I stripped and got in as well.

Two other football players were showering and joking around on one side of the steamy room. Melvin stepped under a shower head on the side of the room opposite those guys. I got under a shower head two down from Melvin. I lathered up with the Biostatic soap. Melvin just stood with his face in the direct stream of the shower. Melvin's water splashed on the floor and hit my bare leg. It was ice cold.

"That's freezing, man!" I said, knowing Melvin was waiting for me to break the ice (excuse the pun).

"Whut?"

"Melvin, that water is freezing!"

"Uh-huh." Melvin turned around and iced his back with the water.

I decided to be direct. The other guys had left the shower room and I heard them in the locker room. It was safe to spring the plan on Melvin. "Two hundred dollars."

"Whut?"

"Two hundred dollars cash paid to you if you help me."

"Help you?"

"The game. Just have a bad game. You can have your own wagers and I'll have mine, plus I give you two hundred."

"And mess up my ride for two hundred? You're crazy but I'm not stupid."

"Melvin. You're only a junior. A loss this year won't hurt your

college blue-chip-ability."

"For only two hundred? Not worth it."

"Okay, three hundred, plus I'll split my earnings fifty-fifty with you."

"It'll be obvious and I'll get caught."

"No need for alarm. This game isn't a gimme. We should win, but this game isn't a gimme. It's their homecoming." The game was to be against a newly-consolidated local public school. It's huge now since it engulfed all the small-town schools within 30 miles to amass around 1500 students. Those farm boys had potential, but they hadn't gotten the program we had; still, it was going to be almost a challenge to beat these guys considering the emotion factor.

"Okay. Four hundred and I'll do it."

We shook on it and I got my naked self out of the shower room to hunt for a towel.

Because of the rivalry, I knew there would be a lot of bets on the game. Melvin and I would split the winnings fifty-fifty. I placed \$600 worth of bets at ten different places by five different people (spreading bets helps avoid suspicion); that is, two \$60 bets per person, each at a different place. All at 5-1 or 4-1 odds at least.

Actually I placed two bets myself with two different bookies. Then I disguised myself as a woman and placed two bets under the name "Hillary St. John" with the same two bookies. I got my cousin Jason to place two bets over in Levington and all I had to pay him was a case of Bud. I asked my neighbor Sam to place two bets, one through his bookie at the Pub. And my grandma asked her boyfriend Rudy to make some wagers with his organization contacts. It took major organization to hide my trail, but I pulled it off.

The night of the big day comes, and Melvin is a back of all trades. He quarterbacks, fullbacks, halfbacks. So the coach has him in there and he plays adequately. At the half, we are up 20-14. I worry a bit, but I'm confident that Melvin is the man. He knows how to make it look good. In the third quarter he tries to throw an interception. He spirals the ball beautifully right at the defensive end. It hits the guy in the helmet and falls into our receiver's hands. Touchdown. We're up by 13 after the extra point.

On our next possession, he runs right to the cornerback and practically asks the guy to strip the ball. Literally hands it to 'em. The would-be hero drops the ball and one of our guys recovers. The next few plays must make Melvin look good. A couple completions and yards picked up here and there. Melvin looks poised and throws an interception which puts them within six. Our defense holds them and we're still up by six going into the fourth quarter.

The time is ticking down. Melvin keeps running the ball rather than

passing so the clock will be on our side. He screws around with draw plays for awhile. With six minutes on the clock we're on their 30, third down and three. Melvin keeps it, dances around, looks for the pass but hesitates long enough to get sacked for a loss of five. Our kicker comes in for the field goal attempt. I pray pray pray. No good. Thank you.

Our defense doesn't hold. They score and with three minutes left they are up by one. Melvin is sent in to run a quick passing campaign to win. I know he will get the interception. He looks good at first, moving the ball down the field in short completions. Then fate deals me a blow below the belt. Some farmboy linebacker gets out of hand and crashes Melvin. His hand is smashed. He's out of the game. I am shit out of luck. Our team is fired up and comes back to score on a rough touchdown drive after the coach tells the guys to "win one for Melvin."

I'm \$600 more in debt, plus another \$400 to Melvin for his services. Plus my phone bill. Taco Bell looks more and more like a better idea at this time. So now I am looking handsome in the brown, tan, and yellow-spectrum, *free* uniform and receiving half-off on meals.

Stacie Popp

locust

sin' on blacktop
 a the 55 zone, 'n I'm in the zone
 n' across the U.S.
 n' out the window
 s _____
 h _____

 d _____
 s like light speed 'n
 e a newborn baby locust, all
 e colored 'n' wet 'n' sticky with
 e kinda gunk
 ny wings
 ny eyes
 ny mouth
 gs wet/won't move/can't flap
 flyin' for me man
 th bound with a destiny for
 d the open road.
 I look over at you, your
 erin' like a pro but You been
 erin' and drivin' for at least
 o months yet
 you got a joint
 joint
 autiful paper 'n' plant united for
 ace on earth
 od pills/acid/crack/Jack Daniels
 wards Man...Man...Man...Man...
 the smoke goes
 and 'n' round your head
 oke, like dragon's breath
 d scaly snaggletooth beast
 e a crocodile
 ndbag
 th
 o

bright
 button eyes
 and the smoke rises round your head
 again
 As you "consume a J" and
 water wells in yer eyes
 but
 it's just crocodile tears.
 False sympathy.
 Our eyes meet 'n' I see
 two jewels
 blue 'n' pure 'n' deep
 I feel a bump and
 the window smashes in
 'n' there's a deer in the front seat
 with us
 kicks us
 makes no noise
 car lurches left 'n'
 we hit the ditch.
 Suddenly
 Earth-is-sky.
 Sky-is-earth
 'n' I'm an astronaut in my
 Buck Rogers bellbottom white spandex
 spacesuit 'n'
 Then I come back to earth
 along with the
 car 'n' you 'n' the d-r-a-g-o-n.
 Feels like a mountain
 fell on my crotch and
 the rest of me is, like,
 all mashed
 I feel wet all over my
 body.
 It hurts. Damn.
 It hurts. Damn.
 It hurts. DAMN!
 Then

like a newborn baby locust, but now
my wings're dry
The gunk's gone
'n' I'm the color of polished jade,
translucent,
'n' I fly
straight up 'n'
I'm gone.

Michael Cooper

Green

if evolution results from personal will
then call me a failure
for I can not create my transformation

I, the green inch-worm,
will never be cloaked
in oriental black and gold,
glossy and magnificent,
as much as I desire

such a minute speck
under this grand sky
yet the dark blue bird spots me
on the third pass I am snatched up
within its sharp beak's lock
slowly, carefully, it descends
over its helpless children
within seconds they have devoured my flesh

Michael Lillard
from 16 Mar 92 to 24 Apr 92

Arkansas Fall

Grackles downrush,
Veil the day suddenly in darkness:

The sky is falling,
Piece by piece,
Inner blue turned outer black
In its descent, while high flying and crying
Canada geese scrawl cold mystery across it,
Inscribing it with their bodies, their very being.

As I watch and listen, I know suddenly
Something I've always glimpsed
Only from the corner of my eye:
That grace comes when we least expect,
With small portentous signs
Betraying its complex ways to us
Here, there, everywhere,

In this Arkansas fall, if only we could see....

William Lindsey

Acknowledgments

I open the door of the House Chapel
To acknowledge Him.
The Vigil candle flickers
And waves in its container,
Him acknowledging me.

Br. Leo Fowler, O.S.B.

On John 8:59

They really didn't know:
Throwing stones to start,
Driving nails to finish.

Once He fled from the Temple.
Destroying the old,
He becomes the Temple.

Now, we are the stonethrowers,
Driving the nails,
Destroying the Temple
Built inside.

But, we know.

Br. Leo Fowler, O.S.B.

An Elegy

You, Anne Sexton, lie dead in black
dirt where worms dance just above
your brain, eighteen universes away
from your manual typewriter with the
missing key you spent years searching
for in broken crevices of old wooden bowls.

I imagine you and Sylvia slouched in
a well-lit corner, scribbling notes,
exchanging criticisms, shuffling papers
with your skeletal half-yellowed fingers
holding a cigarette —

Your sunken eyes lively in death that
holds your hand like a best friend.
Your wicked voices laughing from where-
ever you are consorting angels...

Shannon Smith

In the Out

Indecisive
Blatant mystery unfolds
as she struggles to break free
of blind hands.
Unrest and unravels
Tear away at her sheltered soul.
The caretaker locks her doors
only she; in time;
can reopen them.

Jennifer Dowd

A Touch of Color

A moon, great white face
Stares down intently upon
Warm, damp enfolding earth,
Ground parts slowly, unnatural
Bone white pale hand stretches forth
And leathery wings flap into the night.

Young pure heart beats
Thought safe in warm breast
Mind sleeps, beautiful face
Wreathed in glowing auburn
Unaware and innocent
To the dark shade looming.

Dead yet living creature
Floats soundless from concealment
Hovers over corpselike form
Admiring rosy warm cheeks
And remembers a time
When sunlight was a welcome sight.

Bright green eyes snap open
Aware of unseen presence, dark,
Dire, expectant yet calm
Beautiful wan face moves close
Speaks in soft tones and
Holds gaze in velvet grip of hypnosis.

Accursed form now stands by bed
Victim chosen, a *fait accompli*
There is a moment of hesitation
And then he smiles, baring straight,
Perfect fangs that seem to glow in the moonlight
No sound but shallow breathing.

Her body lies still, like frightened deer
Mind screaming, body frozen
He motions his hand and speaks
And she feels suddenly at ease
His hands caress the perfect face
Smile parts her shining, full ruby lips.

Eyes move slowly to throat
Smooth as marble statuary
The sound of breathing stops
He moves effortlessly: there is a sound
Like ripping silk and a hiss
And she sighs, in bliss of unknowing.

The warm red runs down
Trail from alabaster neck winding between
Rounded heaving breasts, a moan
Escapes his lips, caught in a feral
Rape of life, ancient monotonous ritual—
Yet it is different every time.

His heartbeat increases as hers
Wanes and fades, the life-forces
A mirror image of each other
And he pulls himself away gasping from
Now limp form, and thinks how much
More beautiful the skin is with a touch of color.

Single tear falls from his soul
Suddenly mourning for destroying
Such beauty for own savage cause, then
Moon is seen from corner of eye
And he remembers why he became this thing
All for the love off divine nocturne, the night.

Michael Cooper

Grendel

dedicated to Father Lawrence, O.S.B., the only troll I know

From point west came the dull glow of the setting sun, as embers from the hearth. Isabella thought, "The MacMahons have their lamps lit. How strange. They're usually at the Grove on Sundays." Most of the folk around Brechin are Christians, including Isabella. She turned to her thatched-roof field-stone house and, upon entering, closed the sullen oak door. In this one-room hut was a lone bed, fitted with linen sheets grey from use. The floor was packed earth, with a roughly woven woolen rug attending the hearth. In a place of honor on the wall next to her silver crucifix, an heirloom she hoped to give to her granddaughter Margaret one day, lay a great broadsword, gleaming in fire-light. A finely honed instrument, it was double-edged with an enamelled hilt. There was an inscription - GRENDELUM TERMINARE - *To End a Grendel*. Her glance darted away from its five-foot blade, her hand vigorously caressing her pendant crucifix. She looked to the floor, and her mind reached far back into forgotten lore of glorious times past.

With a draft of cold wind entered Malcolm. Isabella, without looking at him, said, "Aye, lad. Grendel is much the same - silent stalk, then death to any near." She turned to gaze upon her dear grandson. He was dressed in the garb of a highland Scot - a kilt in the Mackenzie tartan, a slightly greyed linen shirt, a full length woolen cape, and a pair of muddy leather soles. From the bulk of his form, one could discern a strong build and a determined brow. But there was something amiss, for this great hulk of a man had tears flowing from his bloodshot eyes.

Malcolm could no longer contain himself. He fell to his knees, eyes transfixed on the cruciform on the wall, "*Aye! Why did you have to take them? Why not me instead?? How could You, the Almighty, allow this to happen!*" Isabella knelt in front of Malcolm and grabbed his shoulders firmly, "What happened?? Malcolm, tell me what happened!" She wiped the tears from Malcolm's cheeks with her soft sage hands, and Malcolm began, "I was walking on the moor tonight - I could see my house! The door was open and all the lamps were lit. Out of the corner of my eye I saw *something*...a creature, hairy, eyes glowing red, nearly seven feet tall. We locked gazes...teeth...huge, bloody...he turned and ran. I ran to the house, passed the threshold and what I saw...blood...my wife's hand in a pool of blood...her wedding band gleaming in the moonlight. The children's clothes strewn about...blood *everywhere*...that beast...I'll kill him!!"

about...blood everywhere...that beast...I'll kill him!!"

Tears were streaming from Isabella's eyes. She got up and walked to the sword hung on the wall. She touched the shiny silver blade, and turned, "A Grendel killed...devoured your family." Her tight fists beats against her thighs as she tried to hold back, "They have lived here for many years, since creation! Spawn of Cain, human...deformed by God's curse. They wander in search of happiness, love, holy things...to destroy them." Turning attention to the sword, "Only this can kill them, if held by one of the chosen." Malcolm climbed from his knees, "Give me the sword...NOW!!"

"NO," Isabella shouted, "Do not pursue the Grendel! You will die! Like my father...killed...murdered by that brood! My family, we were terrified - we survived only because let it alone! I am not going to lose another to it!" Now visibly angry, Malcolm shouted, "The death of my family chose me! Give me the blade, NOW! I want revenge!" Isabella growled, "Damn you! You stubborn young fool, you will die! My father died with that sword!" Malcolm walked to the wall, brushing Isabella out of the way, "I'm sorry, Grandam. I must go." With that, Malcolm bolted out the door to find Grendel, toward the swamp. Isabella started after him, "Come back, Malcolm! You will die!"

Isabella skittered back to her field-stone house, got her cloak, and ran toward MacLeod's house on the hill. She flew through the cold, foggy moor and, reaching MacLeod's house, beat on the door with both fists. MacLeod opened the door and let Isabella in. "What is the matter that you come beating on my door at dining time?" Isabella, breathing heavily from the run, gasped, "Grendel killed Malcolm's family...he's gone after it!" MacLeod's face turned to stone, "Oh God, No! He'll be killed, just like your father!" He turned and yelled, "Donald, Michael, John! Get your cloaks on and bring arms!" Isabella quipped, "He was going toward the swamp!"

The five ran through the craggy moor, which was carpeted with thick fog and strange noises on all sides. As they came to the outer edge of the swamp, they heard Malcolm shouting in the distance, "Die, you demon!" The group struggled through the quagmire, water to their waists. They saw Malcolm - and Grendel, on a sliver of dry land ahead of them. Grendel has his one of his hands around Malcolm's neck. Malcolm swung Isabella's sword, but Grendel caught the blade and threw it to the ground. The beast brought his hand back around, grabbed Malcolm's chin, and started to pull his hand apart. Isabella and MacLeod turned their heads. Isabella brought her gaze back around and looked at Grendel. He smiled a snaggle-toothed grin.

He then turned and ran into the fog.

Isabella and MacLeod ran to where Malcolm lay. The body was headless, covered with cuts from Grendel's claws. The head, which lay a few feet away, had an expression of terror on its face. MacLeod turned and vomited. After he recovered, he stepped over the body and picked up the sword. He gave it to Isabella, who looked at him with bloodshot, tear-filled eyes. With a weak voice, she said, "He should have listened to his Grandam." She then fell to her knees and cried.

Marshall Jones

It Ain't Necessarily So

CHARACTERS:

Mr. Sidney Polko...Owner/landlord of the Luxurious VanHeusen Apartment Complexes...budding mystery novelist...self-made man who was quite opportunistic during the stock market crash of '29

Betty Berkins...A busy-body, but generally harmless. She listens in on one-too-many conversations, but attempts to do the right thing. She is a housewife and happily married for 10 years.

Harold Berkins...An unassuming husband who doesn't ask for much besides a good meal and an uninterrupted baseball game. He is an accountant in his late thirties, and comfortable with life.

Rita...Maid for the Luxurious VanHeusen Apartment Complexes. She's rarely seen but always hears what's going on around her. She's in her forties, walks with a slight hunch, and could have been stunningly beautiful at one time, but now only looks worn. She always knocks three times before entering.

Sergeant Patrick O'Malley...Officer with the NYPD—homicide division. He's generally easy-going, quite patient, and holds a slight ethnic prejudice against Italians. He is in his thirties.

CHARACTERS NOT SEEN OR HEARD FROM, BUT MENTIONED:

Mr. Pasquale "Buddy" Vannetti...Partner in the ownership of the Luxurious VanHeusen Apartments...self-made man, opportunist, also a good listener.

Sylvie...Betty Berkins' gossip buddy...She's got the scoop on the action in the West tower of the VanHeusen Apartment Complex

TIME: October 1934

PLACE: New York City, at the Luxurious VanHeusen Apartments— specifically, at the apartments of Sidney Polko and Harold and Betty Berkins.

SCENE ONE: [The curtains open to reveal two apartments, side-by-side, with the suggestion of a wall between them by means of a radiator connected to a heating duct. The area on the right portrays a living room/den complete with a desk, swivel chair, typewriter, stacks of paper and telephone. There is a door on the left which leads to the bathroom. A door on the back wall, on the left, is the main entrance to the apartment. When the door is ajar, a flight of stairs can be seen. The stage on the right is raised above the other area ever so slightly. There is also a door on the left back wall which is an outside entrance to the apartment. The main room pictured is a kitchen, complete with icebox, table, electric range, sink and counter space. There are two doors on the right; the furthest one back leads to the living area, the closest one to a small bathroom.]

(SIDNEY is seated in his swivel chair, his feet on the desk, in his "apartment," talking on the phone. RITA THE MAID is lowering her cleaning cart down the flight of stairs when Sidney begins talking. She is about to knock and enter his room when she gets interested mid-knock and pauses to listen. The door to Sidney's apartment is ajar. The lights are lowered slightly on the Berkins' side, to draw more attention to Sidney.)

SID:...So yeah, Buddy, I'm gonna go ahead and write that murder mystery I've always been jammerin' about. Yeah, I know, I know...runnin' this fancy apartment complex ain't exactly easy...and I don't have a lot of time...Yeah, yeah...naw, I've been thinkin' about this a long time, and I really think I could pull it off. Just think—me, Sidney Polko, kid from the Bronx, the creator of the new Sherlock Holmes of NYC!...(in his excitement, he knocks over a stack of papers on the desk and bends to pick them up)...Alright already! Here goes—the brainstorm of a lifetime! It's set in a ritzy complex, of course... (BETTY BERKINS enters her kitchen to begin getting dinner together. The lights raise slowly on her side. Sidney's voice is coming through loud and clear, even though a Yankees baseball game can be faintly heard from the radio in the other room.)...So, I'm gonna have Mavis, the new cleaning lady, bump off a bunch of tenants, (BETTY moves by the radiator to hear better) you know, a clean job—mixing bleach and ammonia to clean the bathroom—but conveniently forgetting to rinse away the deadly fumes, until after they're

dead, and the rest of the smell disappears out the window. She'll probably frame it like suicide, leave a note or something, but the m.o. won't be traceable right away. No, no...she'll cover her tracks—no unusual odor, no motive, get it? The perfect crime...(SID begins to turn in the swivel chair, which squeaks enough to break Betty's intense concentration. The game coverage in the other room gets louder among the whoops and hollers from HAROLD BERKINS over the bases-loaded homer by Gehrig in the 2nd...BETTY clearly cannot hear any more and is utterly shocked by what she has just heard. She stumbles into the other room.) ...yeah, well...I gotta work out the details, but my rough is pretty much done. (SID pats the stack of papers he recently knocked over.) Yup. Been puttin' in long nights at the ol' Smith-Corona...between tenant complaint, that is. Heh, heh, heh. You got dat right. Geez...deez rich people are pickier than our old lot! Who'd a known ol' VanHeusen would've lost it all on Black Tuesday? More like Green Tuesday to us, eh, partner? Heh, heh. (The MAID is conscious of being seen and disappears down the hall)...Yeah, well, I'll see ya later, Buddy. Gotta grab some lunch and I DON'T wanna stand in line outside of Rubenstein's Deli—I'm dyin' for a corned beef on rye. Yeah, later. (SID hangs up the phone, rearranges the papers, grabs his wallet and leaves. The MAID knocks three times, enters, begins snooping around the desk and reading the papers lying there...she soon heads to his bathroom to begin cleaning. Lights dim.)

SCENE TWO: [The Berkins' apartment. An hour or so has passed. MRS. BERKINS is making noodles for a casserole. Strains of the Yankees game are still heard from the right. The phone rings. MRS. BERKINS waits to see if Harold will get it but ends up having to get it with floury hands anyway.]

BETTY BERKINS: Now just hold your horses, Sylvie...but...I...Sylvie, L...SYLVIE!!! I can't follow you at all! No, no...Harold's got the game on. Oh, Sylvie...wait a minute, let me see something (BETTY runs over to the vent to listen)...Oh, never mind—he's off the phone now...Oh, no...not Harold! Mr. Polko, our landlord...I could've sworn I overheard him planning...oh, well...you'll never guess...Good Lord, Sylvie!...What IS it???...DEAD!...Are you sure???...I mean...but...Jumpin' Jehosephat...Then it's true!...No, no...I wasn't meaning that you're a liar, Sylvie...no, no...just LISTEN...I just overheard Mr. Polko saying he's planning to rub out some tenants, but I didn't think he'd mean his own partner! Poor Mr. Vannetti...Suicide, you say...something fishy's going on here...oh, gotta go, Sylvie. Harold's grumbling for dinner—they're in the 7th inning stretch. We'll talk later. (HAROLD enters stage right.)

HAROLD: Is dinner finished already? (HAROLD surveys the floury mess

that is soon to be noodles.) Silly question. I trust Sylvie has filled you in on Mr. Rubenstein's gout—or was it Joe Thompson's floosie update this time? Honestly Betty, I don't know how you can stand listenin' to that woman's yakkin' all day! Well...no matter, I know you enjoy it as much as she does...I'm starved! What's for dinner?

BETTY: (without looking up from rolling out the noodles) Chicken casserole.

HAROLD: ANOTHER casserole—that's the fourth one this week! At least *this* one's normal-sounding—that salmon one yesterday was pushing it. Honey, when are we gonna have some hearty meals? What ever happened to meat and potatoes? Fixed SEPARATELY?

BETTY: Now Harold—you know I'm doing the best that I can. I can't cook a whole lot with my stove top burners out of commission, but I did bake you a pie for dessert—it's Dutch Apple, your favorite...

HAROLD: (grumbling) Mmm...well, thanks, hon...but did you ever see Mr. Polko about getting this stove top replaced? I'll tell ya, this country's goin' to pot! These new-fangled ranges should at least last more than five years!

BETTY: (taking a break, rolling pin in hand, BETTY turns to face Harold) Now, Honey...the warrantee's already out. I was going to see about it earlier, but with the phone call and all, I just plain forgot. Why don't you go over and ask him to come fix it before you miss much of the game?

HAROLD: Oh, all right. (grumble, grumble) Be back soon. (He exits through the back door. BETTY resumes rolling out the noodles and cutting them. SID and HAROLD enter while BETTY begins cutting the leftover chicken into small bits and placing them in the casserole dish.)

SID: Hello, Mrs. Berkins! Harold tells me you got a problem with your range. If you can hold off dinner for a bit and let me at it, I'll have it fixed in no time flat. (SID puts his tools on the table next to the chicken. BETTY gets disgusted and hastily moves the food to the counter. SID proceeds to pull the stove to the middle of the floor, blocking the way to the dining room.)

HAROLD: (A bit annoyed at Sid's blocking the way) Uh...the game's on again...

SID: The New York/Detroit game? I've got my money riding on the Yanks! Turn it up will you? (HAROLD grumbles and squeezes around the stove to the living room- exits stage right. The volume of the radio is louder; HAROLD re-enters the kitchen to survey Sid's work)

HAROLD: So, um. . .how come you still fix all the tenant problems personally? The builder of this complex had a staff of maintenance men - they seem to have. . .ahem. . .disappeared (BETTY'S eyes get big)

SID: Well, I let 'em go 'cause I can do most repairs myself and I don't mind doing 'em. The other apartments I used to run were built cheaper, so there was more to keep up. Since Buddy and I bought these nice jobs, I haven't had too many major problems. Ol' VanHeusen sure didn't spare any luxury when he built these. . .too bad the crash ruined him. But one's man ruin is another man's fortune. (BETTY exclaims in disgust and cuts the chicken more furiously.)

HAROLD: Yeah, he sure was ruined all right. The richest man on Fifth Avenue and he lost every share of stock he owned. Couldn't take the loss and just jumped out of his office window. . .been five years already. . .Hard to believe.

SID: Yup. Been the best five years of my life, though.

RADIO ANNOUNCER: We interrupt this broadcast for a special news report. Mr. Pasquale "Buddy" Vannetti, co-owner of VanHeusen Luxury Apartments, one of New York City's most expensive modern complexes, was found dead at 3:15 p.m. today. (SID drops his screwdriver.) The 34-year-old millionaire was one of the few men to prosper while most despaired during the great stock market crash of 1929. Although he was considered successful, he apparently committed suicide. The investigation is still underway. . .Now back to the ball game. . .but first, a word from our sponsor. . .(An ad for Austin's bleach chimes in the background as HAROLD and BETTY watch SID intently)

HAROLD: Sorry to hear that, Mr. Polko.

SID: Um. . .I had no idea this happened, (BETTY does not look convinced) I'm sorry. . .I'll be back later to finish the stove. I wanna check on this. (SID exits through the back leaving the stove and tools as they are.)

BETTY: Had no idea!. . .I'll BET! Why, I heard him planning it earlier today!

HAROLD: Oh. . .you and your eavesdropping! Those vents can distort conversation, you know. Being friends with Sylvie has over- excited your

imagination. You probably didn't hear anything of the sort. Why don't you. . .

BETTY: (interrupting and grabbing his shoulders) HAROLD! I'm telling you-I HEARD HIM- even worse-he said he'd make the maid do it so it'd be untraceable. That homer in the top of the second drowned out the rest of the conversation. . .he hung up before I could hear the rest of his plan. (HAROLD shakes his head in exasperation) That's it! I don't care if you believe me or not! I'm calling the police and doing my duty as an American citizen. That killer needs to be stopped! (fade out to black as she crosses and picks up the phone)

SCENE THREE: Sid's apartment, a few days later. He is wearing black and talking on the phone. . .

SID: Yes, well, thanks for calling, Rita. I can't think of anything at the moment, no. But I will let ya know if there's anythin' you can do. . .What? . . .No, I didn't see it coming either. . .he didn't even let me know that somethin' was naggin' him. No, he didn't seem to be that type. I guess I didn't know him like I thought. Yeah, it's always the quiet ones. No, no. . .why don't you just take Monday off? It's hard on all of us. . .(knocking is heard at the door) I gotta go—someone's at the door. You take it easy now—and no, you don't have to clean his apartment right away. Just try to get it off your mind. (louder knocking is heard) Thanks again—bye. (SID hangs up the phone and opens the door. SERGEANT O'MALLEY enters the room)

SID: Good afternoon, Sergeant. What can I do ya for?

O'MALLEY: Mr. Polko? (SID nods) I'm just doing a routine check up on the death of Mr. Vannetti. We've had some new information on the case.

SID: New information? Like what?

O'MALLEY: For starters, instead of just a routine suicide investigation, this case involves a slight possibility of murder.

SID: MURDER?

O'MALLEY: That's right. Murder. And saints be praised, Mr. Polko, you are the prime suspect.

SID: But. . .but he was my best friend and my partner for Crissakes!

O'MALLEY: Precisely. You've got the perfect motive — sole ownership of the Big Apple's fastest growing apartment complexes. You're the bee's knees! The

cat's pajamas — why share the spotlight with anyone, much less a wop?

SID: I'm telling you, he *was* my FRIEND. You got no proof!

O'MALLEY: Ah, but I DO, Mr. Polko. Your neighbor overheard you planning the murder over the phone. She conveniently heard your entire scheme through the heating duct, so ye can't get away that easily!

SID: What?!! *I never* . . .oh wait, I know. . .let's call her up to hear what she has to say. (SID dials the phone and hands it to O'MALLEY)

O'MALLEY: Mrs. Berkins? Sergeant O'Malley here. Can you come over to Mr. Polko's apartment to clear up this matter? Thank you. (O'MALLEY hangs up and turns to SID) She's on her way.

SID: I'll tell you what she overheard. I was tellin' the plot of my mystery novel to Buddy — just this morning in fact.

O'MALLEY: Mystery novel? Since when does a successful businessman take to writin' mysteries?

SID: I always wanted to write one. . .only I was too broke to think about it much. This building deal opened up a whole new life for me. . .and I finally wrapped it up last week. I let Buddy in on it, but he's the only one. It ain't proofed yet, but the basics are there. In it, the maid kills a series of tenants by mixing bleach and ammonia together, leaving a suicide note and other fake plants to fake a suicide — and then she rinses the apartment thoroughly to get rid of the smell of the chlorine gas — she's got a mask on. I'm a writer, Sarge, not a killer! (SID gets his script and hands it to O'MALLEY to look it over. Furious knocking is heard at the door. THE BERKINS enter and stand beside O'MALLEY)

BETTY: Oh, Officer! I am SO glad you called. It's all I think about since I called. Why, I can hardly get dinner on the table anymore for all the updates on the case Sylvie gives. Did the autopsy prove it murder? Has he confessed? (HAROLD rolls his eyes) Do you need to hear my evidence again?

O'MALLEY: Thank you, ma'am, but the documented evidence you have so generously provided is very clear. We won't be needin' any more statements from ye.

BETTY: I just want to catch the killer, Sergeant. . . (She glares at SID; he shrugs it off) and we all KNOW who he is!

HAROLD: Betty. . . (HAROLD grabs her arm and leads her to the side and proceeds to silently chide her. SID and O'MALLEY exchange impatient looks)

O'MALLEY: (Clearing his throat) Mrs. Berkins. . .if I may. . .(BETTY breaks away from HOWARD and stands beside O'MALLEY)

BETTY: Yes, Officer?

O'MALLEY: It's a novel.

BETTY: What's a novel?

O'MALLEY: This. (O'MALLEY hands her the copy of the novel)

BETTY: But — what —

O'MALLEY: Ye overheard the plot of a NOVEL, Mrs. Berkins. Fiction. Our Mr. Polko here is a budding writer. (BETTY looks crestfallen; HAROLD is smug. O'MALLEY turns to SID) I'm pretty sure you're on the up and up, Mr. Polko, but even so, I wouldn't skip town just yet.

SID: Don't worry, Sarge. I gotta get published, eh?

O'MALLEY: (turns to go and then turns back) This may be a silly question, but humor me. The death in your novel and the actual homicide are too similar. What about the maid? Is it possible she had anything to do with Vannetti's death?

BETTY: Do you mean little old Rita? She couldn't possibly be behind this!

SID: RITA??? Now, Sergeant, she's the most loyal employee I got! She was just on the phone, askin' if there was anythin' she could do for me. She's real sweet. I've known her since I took over the VanHeusen apartments - she doesn't talk much and keeps to herself most of the time. She was real ancy for the job five years ago - even took a pay cut to keep it - and hasn't missed a day yet. She always keeps up with Mr. Vannetti and me - if there's a murderer around, it ain't her.

O'MALLEY: OK, OK, just a hunch to follow up on. Just doin' my duty. We'll just call the whole kit'n'kaboodle an awful coincidence for now. . .and unofficially close the case. I just have to wrap up a few loose ends. Thank ye for your cooperation - and good luck on that novel! (He exits through the door)

HAROLD: (nudges BETTY towards SID) Sorry we doubted you, Mr. Polko. We

had no reason to accuse you - especially on something CASUALLY overheard. (casts a darting glance at BETTY) The Mrs. has an overactive imagination at times, I'm afraid. We'll let you be for now...but do come over and finish the range when you can. (whispering) Betty isn't that inventive with casseroles and I'm up to my ears in noodles!! Ooh, what I wouldn't GIVE for a steak right now! ...Well, come along Betty. We've bothered Mr. Polko enough.

BETTY: Sorry, Mr. Polko. It'll never happen again. ...if you need help with typing that story, I'm pretty handy with a typewriter, so just let me know, OK? (BETTY and HAROLD leave)

SCENE FOUR: The Berkins' apartment. Three days later. The stove is fixed and back in its usual place. Betty is fixing steak and mashed potatoes. Harold is reading the paper in the other room. Gershwin is playing in the background.

(Harold enters from right into the kitchen)

HAROLD: Hey, hon. ...

BETTY: What? (pauses) Did you say something dear? The music's a bit loud.

HAROLD: (Enters right, bringing paper) Listen to this. The Times had a feature on the Stock Market crash. Can you believe that was five years ago already? Anyway. ...they're lookin' for info on the millionaires of yesteryear. (RITA THE MAID knocks three times and enters through the back. Carrying cleaning supplies, she goes toward the living room and exits right) They've got pictures of the men and their families - a "Where are they now?" feature.

BETTY: Say, here's VanHeusen himself - and his wife too. Tsk, tsk. Imagine finding out your husband lost every penny and then finding that he jumped out the window of a thirty story building 'cause he couldn't stand being labeled a failure. I wonder what ever happened to her. ...

HAROLD: Apparently, no one knows 'cause they're requesting info on her - see the caption under the picture?

BETTY: Remember those wonderful gowns she used to wear? She used to look just like Zelda Fitzgerald, all dolled up. What I wouldn't give to have been in her shoes. (THE MAID enters right and crosses the kitchen. ...BETTY and HAROLD say goodbye)

HAROLD: Yeah, you say that NOW...see you tomorrow Rita...but who knows how she's living today?

RADIO ANNOUNCER: We interrupt this broadcast to bring you the following news bulletin: Mr. Sid Polko, sole owner of the VanHeusen Apartment complexes was found dead this morning at 10:00 a.m. - five years to the day that he became the apartment mogul of New York. It is believed to be suicide, for he was said to be distraught over the loss of his long-time friend and business partner Buddy Vannetti, who was found dead last week. Investigation has commenced to discover any connection between the bizarre deaths. Now back to the Gershwin hour. . .

BETTY: Did you hear that Harold? I wonder if Sylvie knows about this. .
.(BETTY begins to cross over to the phone)

HAROLD: (still reading the newspaper) Poor man. I always wondered about him. Not always there, if ya know what I mean. . . Say, Betty. . . I know this sounds crazy, but. . . doesn't this picture of Mrs. VanHeusen look like. . . Rita?

(BETTY leans over to look at it - her eyes widen - they look at each other — the lights dim as the radio plays "It Ain't Necessarily So")

The End

Brenda Fisher

Commodity

White male, age 22
slim, weak build
ragged appearance
light industrial,
fieldwork,
... or maybe sales?

what experience do you have?
describe
in detail
a specific time
when you had a chance
to steal from an employer
... and yet you chose not to do so
 Could you explain?

classroom mind
ain't a bit of common sense in this kid
all books and theories
doesn't know what he wants to be
doesn't know what he wants to do

would you be willing to take a drug test?

AN INDIVIDUAL MUST DESTROY THEMSELF
AND RECREATE THEMSELF
 constantly

Sorry, we were looking for someone more permanent

Michael Lillard
from 04 May 92 to 14 May 92

You cannot hide in the wheat.

When the wind whips you to its golden bowels
In your day of torment,
You'll think you've found shelter from the storm forever,
Down in the dark furrows where field mice run,
Where storms tunnel houses of the grainstalks,
And one could live forever hugging sweet cakey earth,
Looking up at sky so blue it penetrates the mind with its
Sharp clearness awash with wind.

But what will you do when the bronze leaf
Tendrils down the clean fall air
To bray its clarion call,
Ablaze with all the sun the summer hoarded for this day alone?

You'll raise your head to sing it home,
And all will be lost.

No, you cannot hide in the wheat.

What will you do when day turns night
And mice no loner scamper, but freeze transfixed
Before the owl's unblinking oleaginous eye,
As doves whimper sadly in their sleep off in the woods
Beside the field, and big blacksnakes slide silently
Down the ordered rows of grain?

You'll run out, out, into the glistening starlight
And find yourself exposed:

You cannot hide in the wheat.

You cannot hide in the wheat where maelstroms
Will surely come, and all the stalks upstanding
Fall to mown rows round you, and then where will you be?

Don't you see? You cannot hide,
Cannot hide in the wheat.

You cannot hide where reapers reap,

Where lifted grain will fall to dusty harvest,
Once for all, its journey done,
Then be ground and pummelled, shaped to find its home at last
As finest bread for hungry mouths.

And what but wheat can bear this destiny?

William Lindsey

That Was Then ...

On October 21, 1989, Megan Federal was involved in a car wreck that left her in a coma for two months. She wrote this essay while in school, about eight months after leaving the hospital.

I don't know why everyone is crying. I know I'll be out of this fog soon. Why is everyone staring at me? I just want to sleep. My leg hurts, and people won't stop touching me. Why won't they leave me alone and let me sleep? Who are these people anyway? I want them to get their hands off me, and let me sleep! Blue flashing lights are everywhere! I wonder why nobody will tell me what's going on, my leg is killing me, and strange people won't stop touching me, even though I told everyone to leave me alone! How did I get into this mess?

It was a crisp, clear October morning. I slept late, ran 4 miles, finished my homework, and started getting ready for my date with Josh. Josh was a new person at school. We had gone out with a group of kids three times, but tonight was our first real date. Josh was kind of shy and quiet, with a great sense of humor. He loved baseball, and was hoping to play in college.

I was thrilled! I could drive the new car tonight! So, I told Josh that I would pick him up. It was a great car! Sporty and fun! It was a white, convertible Cabriolet. In order to drive the car, I had to take my sister to her friend's house first. I know I was speeding because I was religious about time! I always had to be somewhere at a certain, specific time. I couldn't be late for anything or my entire day would be "wasted". My time was split (not evenly) between homework, organizations, exercise, and play practice. It left very little time for Rob, other dates and my

friends, but they understood. In my quest to be on time, I know I was going too fast but I thought I could handle anything! A curve came as a surprise and the car started spinning and I saw a tree...

They said I didn't have a heartbeat. Therefore, someone gave me CPR. They put me in an ambulance, and someone stuck a fat tube down my throat. The trip to the hospital was awful because nobody told me what was going on, my leg was killing me, and strange people wouldn't stop touching me, even though I told everyone to leave me alone!

Finally, the ambulance stopped outside a hospital. I was happy, only because we left some people behind. Luckily for me, we couldn't take all those people! When we got in the hospital, I was still in a fog. Nobody seemed to listen to me! I felt hopeless!

Next thing that happened (which I found out was two months later) a nurse gave me a toy that I've seen whenever I babysat for little children. I didn't know why because I knew I wasn't babysitting! The nurse told me to "put each donut on the ring in their own size order." I felt like a two-year-old could do that! Then, I couldn't handle it anymore — I was just furious that these people were so clueless about the real Megan Marie! But I was tired and wanted to sleep, so I gave in and tried to do that stupid game. But, surprisingly, it was extremely hard for me to do! Then I asked a nurse how I was going to be at play practice that night. She just said, "You've been in a terrible accident. I don't know if we can get you okay enough to be in the play, or go to school at all!" I kept hearing the doctors and nurses talk about me, in front of me like I couldn't hear them or understand what they were saying! But I could. I understood every word they said! They were talking about how I should go for "special care," but all I could think about was going back to my school, Marist.

After eight months, I am finally going home! Everyday I remind myself that no one can change the past. What's happened has already happened. But the one thing I can change is my future!

Megan Federal

At the Emergency Room

If you could see, you'd
be pleased,
horrified,
drawn with an awful intrigue
toward that fragile link,
its tearing binds the string of men and women
like sutures toward,
woven in flesh,
drawn down and across
and inside.

You'd see x-rays hung like laundry,
these black and green plastic films,
tarot of fortune,
revealing that we are not as
in-control
as we once believed.

You would see women and men
fighting,
crises controlling crises.
You would ask who is more (or less)
wounded.

If you could, perhaps, look into
the eyes of one whose days have
passed like years,
many frightened faces,
some simply and gratefully unconscious.
And those who look on are tied up
and cold, but for the moment,
composed.

These are not numbers in a system,
nor dividends,
nor any purchasable thing.
These are light and breath,

dream and vision,
each with a story
(some tragic)
but all heroes,
all of them.

If you could see me
locked up with my own wounds,
my own brand and particular kind of suffering;
unique only to me, but a type of yours,
you'd be pleased,
horrified,
drawn with an awful intrigue,
that is, if you could see.

Scott M. Fitzgerald

Him

a man's reality is his sacred realm
his understanding forms unyielding knowledge
his will is his flaming sword of truth
discipline sharpens the blade for the challenges
when he discovers himself, a trust is born

external law demeans him
internal law directs him

"I'm human
and I'll do
whatever I have to do
to survive"

the unmarked individual
cannot come into enriching knowledge
without experiencing
pain

how far we slaves must come
to rule the land of our birth
and never return to
such a restricted existence
with no potential, no energy
no wheel can be set in motion

I have nothing to offer you
or you to offer me
there is nothing to say
nothing we can do for each other

"Yes, the ice-cold knife will come
to decorate the dead
for there's a war
in my head
and I'm your enemy!"

Woman understands this earth
Man must violently escape it

she digs into her cluttered purse

finds a plastic lighter
the pack of cigarettes is pounded on the dashboard
within the tight grip of her soft, white hand
then the insult begins...
"You still don't know what you're going to do with your
life, do you? That's really sad. At least I have some
direction. All you have are your books and your silly
music!"

digital clock screams "8:30" in blazing red
the morning must be embraced
sitting on the edge of my bed
in a dark, intimate communication with my stereo
a bowl of cereal held under my chin
scattered thoughts scratched into my green notebook
yet they do not sing from the page
spiral notebook tossed across the room
upsets the cat's nap
sends her fleeing

Michael Lillard

from 10 Jan to 15 Nov '92

I Want Your Mouth

I start at your chin,
use it for a springboard,
jump, gracefully doing a swan dive
and then a back tuck.
Land perfectly on your exquisite palate.
Attach my hiking boots,
lace the red strings tight and secure
ready for any terrain.
Walk down your tongue in
search of all those eloquent words.
Step slowly around the betrayal,
stop to dissect your syllables.
Hidden in the back left corner
of your pink palace is lust-
it rests near your back molars.
The vocabulary of your mouth is
strange. It does not look like my dreams.
I throw a rope to your front tooth,
rapell, catching your integrity-
the texture does not feel like language,
even phonics.
More like a snake escaping skin
he finds undesirable, useless.
Trails are not marked in this
antiseptic cave of frustration.
The subject finds me.
Spotted the chipped, bottom front tooth
treasure I thought-
only to discover leather, bruises
and humiliation.

Shannon Smith

The Battleship

My mother took me to see
the battleship, moored
like a meteor to the sidewalk,
still as cement, a radiant heat.
I saw it sharply:
crisp red lining its belly,
towers slicing the sky.
We stood delightfully small
beside turret guns
and the anchor; climbed
a ladder to the lookout;
waved to families below.
Looking out, my mother
stepped up to a round window
which fell at her touch,
her glasses sent scuttling across the floor.
Her fingers brushed
and felt wetness.
Wordless, scurrying down
ladders, past dials and barracks
back to the gift shop,
through offices to first aid
where the girl whitened
at my mother's
blue eye, closing and
darkening, and mine
swollen and spilling
with fear.

The battleship's last attack,
my mother jokingly recalls it;
I have a hard time laughing.

Camille Hopkins





Barb

Death
tragic as it
is
it brings people together
The only time
I've ever seen
my father cry.
The tension of the crowd
almost palpable
the grey mist we
were all breathing.
At the moment
the strain became
too great
An outpouring of
sorrow, sadness, regret
but joy that she has risen.
My father
tears in his eyes
shared my sorrow
and gave me
solace from
grief
At that instant
we stood clutching each other
in common
empathy.
It reminds us of
our own
mortality.
To come together
in public sorrow
and leave carrying
a greater will
to live
The gift of the lost ones.

Marshall Jones

Requiem

In the Hall of Early Industries
the motionless steam contraptions,
all brass and wrought iron, squat
like sphinxes before the flocks
of wandering children, as if at one
hour on one day all the mills in England
had fallen silent and these beasts
crawled here to die. All the gears
and flywheels are mysterious without
motion, forms no longer functional,
no longer pointing to some ultimate
end, which is us, oddly enough,
loose on a Sunday afternoon,
desperate for diversion. Why,
we wonder, would anyone invest
the effort to make a machine
so shapely, with, oh, bright brass
so fine? Did they know that some day
they would stand here, useless as
cave paintings, with only their
beauty to recommend them? Probably
not. In an age of strollers,
who know nothing of Watt, much
less Henry Adams, and history
disappears overnight, the motives
held within these sculpted forms
are silent as the stones of cathedrals.
How could that noisy age which invented
us have suddenly grown so quiet?
How peaceful it is when cultures die
is our only parting conclusion.
Yet before we leave for other parts
let us say a few words for these
dead intentions and for whoever
they presumed we would be.

Russell Fowler

The Journaling Scholar

The dreams we cherish most, they're like stones well-worn by constant rubbing of our hands. But black, pedestrian, not glamorous. And we keep them in tattered old felt bags, afraid to bring them out too often. Who knows when the magic will wear off, as it has with everything else in our lives?

I write this by the yellow deck light,
As I sit under my redbud canopy.
The heart-shaped leaves reach my knees,
One after another on thin, recumbent branches.
A few-not many-cicadas sing.
Through the leaves before me
Someone's yard light glimmers quietly
Like the lamp that lures the children
To the old witch in the wood.

The only breeze is from the air-conditioner motor
That just kicked on noisily, obtrusively.
Otherwise, so still it is, so quiet,
So removed from hustle and bustle.
Dogs in the distance bark dreamily,
Out of sheer obligation,
For no reason at all.

William Lindsey

The Kiss

The Kiss is the most widely recognized painting executed by Gustav Klimt. Oil on canvas, 180 cm x 180 cm, Österreichische Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna.

August 24, 1907

I. *"What is the model to the painter?
A mirror or mystery that must be
resolved?" —Gottfried Friedel*

We wait, sometimes together,
each of us beautiful
in a tiny room
next to his studio.
Out of sight
where the hours seem
as still as the pollen
in the Lucullan country air.
He calls my name. I walk in
timid at first as his anticipation
hovers over me like
an unanswered question,
one I can never answer.
He walks around me,
staring as if my secrets
were his to pursue
and not my own.
I almost tremble.
I untie the strings,
unbutton the buttons,
my clothes fall to the
floor making a jagged mound
where I move them with
my foot's hesitation
into the corner and
out of the way,
as if I would never
need them again.
He sketches, tearing sheets
from his book

throwing them to the side.
I am a still life,
a landscape, no more
important than a
bowl of apples,
or a charcoal mountain
iced in white.
The autumn light creeping
through large paned glass
shines on my pale skin
like warm gold.
He tells me to come back tomorrow.

December 12, 1907

II. *"And woman, what is she to the painter? The painter is her audience. It is wordless clear dialogue...silent agreement."* — *Gotfried Fliedel*

Under winter's cloud
filled with future glaciers,
now liquid as the turpentine
and linseed oil that lingers
on my skin and in my hair
like exotic strangers
from childhood.

We barely notice the crimson
fire dwindle into ashes with
our exhaustion. If he leaves
me here alone, I sneak,
look at the canvas sitting
on the easel waiting
for his return.
I see myself through
his eyes—flowers woven
through my auburn hair,
my green eyes alive as
passion, my face sensual and
disconcerting, a sphinx
living on canvas.

My feet hanging off a cliff
of wildflowers,
two figures
isolated in
kaleidoscopic
composition.

I keep my head turned
a certain way, just
as he tells me.
My half open eyes still
for hours until
my whole body is
cramped beneath his
gaze. All for him
or secretly for me.
We work into the
night as if we
were climbing a blue
marble ladder,
reaching for universal
contrasts, staring from
some distant winged
surface of stars.

My muscles about to
melt from within.
Today, he told me
I would hang more
gracefully than a dancer
in mid leap on
the Stolcet Freize.

His fascination escapes me—
like a garden maze I
wander through, always lost
in my dream underneath
my closed eyes.
I am so myself, so much like
the others that hope in the
small room waiting for their
names to escape Herr Klimt's

lips. But to him, I am
light and transparent
flowing through his
blood like a gracious
host. His hands move
over my body like his
paintbrush filled in
oil with cool bronze,
the metallic texture
reminds me of late
afternoons when I
could swear that
we were lovers on
stretched canvas—
and that it was us
fused in gold.

February 21, 1908

III. *"She is a challenge in her enjoyment and
surrender to the moment of being painted, she
does not hide but reveals herself..." — Gotfried
Fliegel*

I can feel spring arriving
through the mountains,
a slow and quiet breeze.
He covers the canvas.
I close the door
without a whisper.

Shannon Smith

Let's Do Lunch

"If anyone present knows a reason that these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace."

I can't believe I actually have this option. I'm sure if I even cough Andrea will never speak to me again. What would you do if you were in my situation?

My name is Jess. I'm 25 and a writer for a fairly substantial advertising firm. My main goal right now is to make something of myself; however, my best friend seems to have other plans for me, such as involving me in her so-called problems.

Today, instead of eating lunch with my best friend at the local bar and grill, like we do every day, I'm standing here in front of the fountain at City Hall, watching her get married. I always knew that, of the four of us who hung out together in college, she would be the first to get married, but I never expected it to be like this. I think she has totally flipped this time. Perhaps I should illustrate what has happened over the past month, or better yet, the past four years, in order to make the whole mess a little less confusing.

Andrea and I became best friends our junior year in college. We argued like siblings but never lost the ability to make one another laugh until we both cried. We had almost everything in common, well, except for the ability to find and keep a boyfriend. Andrea isn't a beauty queen, but she had a certain cuteness that seemed to attract the guys, a lot.

At the start of her sophomore year she met Joseph. Those two were the perfect couple. She had long, sandy brown hair with a slight wave and big brown eyes to match. He was clean cut, tall with light brown hair, and deep blue eyes that lit up every time he smiled. Andrea fell head over heels for him after meeting him at a party. She had never asked anyone out for a date before, but this guy was different and somehow she found the nerve.

"He is sooo cute, Jess!! I just had to ask him out. Do you think he'll think I'm too forward since I'm the one who initiated the whole thing? Do I look okay? Do these shoes go with this outfit? Oh my gosh — I'm soo nervous!! I hate my hair and I hate first dates! Why can't I have curly hair like you?"

"Andrea, you look great! Relax, he'll love you and he'll love your hair. I thought you said he mentioned something about having a weakness for girls with long hair. You'll have a great time — just be yourself and don't worry. Just go out and have fun. If it doesn't work out another one will come along shortly."

It was love at first sight. They both fell for each other instantly. After going out to dinner on a Friday night and then a movie the next night, they ended up spending every weekend together until she graduated, three years later.

It seemed like everything was perfect for them. Everyone saw them as the ideal couple, but of course, there was a problem. Only two people, besides Andrea knew about this problem — Daniel and myself. Daniel was the problem. Daniel was the other guy, so to speak. He was the one guy who had never been able to forget about Andrea, the one that would never let Andrea forget about him.

Andrea and Daniel had dated in high school for two-and-a-half years. It seems a little unbelievable for high school, but it's true. He was the one guy that wasn't just good-looking but who was definitely going to make something of himself. The only setback was where he had chosen to go to college — 500 mile away from Andrea. He was a year older than Andrea, and from what she told me about him, seemed ahead of all of us on plans to get started with his life.

"Jess, he really thinks he's going to land a job right away when he gets to California. I admire his ambition, but come on, shouldn't he get a little more organized? Shouldn't he make some arrangements for job interviews first, before he gets there?"

"Andrea, you know, some people just have an extremely high level of self-confidence. Maybe he will find a job right away, you don't know. Don't be so pessimistic — you should be supporting his ambitions rather than laughing at them. He's your friend."

"I know. The last thing I want is for him to fail, but I guess — well, I don't know. I just hope it all works out the way he wants. As long as he's happy is all that should matter."

No matter what she said, she always lit up a little when she talked about Daniel. She especially started to become more interested after he graduated and really did go to California and find a great job. Maybe her interest flared because his seemed to. Eventually he was calling her twice a month, then regularly once a week. No matter, Joseph still remained her main interest and her true love.

Often times she would admit to me her special attraction to Daniel, but she didn't have to tell me about it — it was evident from her excitement after she spoke with him on the phone.

"Jess, he called again! I'm so excited for him. He really seems to have his life together. He's actually doing what he said he'd do! He said he plans on coming home for Christmas — and get this — he's looking forward to seeing me!! Oh my gosh — Jess — what am I going to do? I hate myself for saying this, but I can't wait to see him either!"

"Andrea, there's no reason to hate yourself — you're human and you and Daniel had something really special once. Of course you're going to feel excited about seeing him."

Andrea and Joseph never lost the love they had for one another. Even after three intense years of dating exclusively, the honeymoon had not yet ended. Every other week she would tell me about her dreams of marrying Joseph, while quickly slipping in "... unless Daniel asks me first." I knew she was kidding. At least I thought she was; she would always smile when she said it.

The day she told me that Joseph had applied for a job in her hometown and had landed it, I immediately knew the outcome of her life: marriage to Joseph. Andrea and I had decided, during our senior year, to move to her

hometown after graduation² and attend the state university there together. We had big plans — graduate school. After hearing about Joseph's plans to move with us to Birmingham, I wondered if I would end up a third wheel.

"Andrea, I know we planned to go to graduate school together, but are you sure you still want me to come, since Joseph will be living in the same city now? I'm not trying to be ... whatever, I just don't want to get in the way."

"Jess, please don't feel like you would get in the way. Of course I still want us to go to graduate school together — are you kidding? We'll have a great time! Joseph will be busy working all the time and we'll be busy studying and going out, but mostly studying. Come here, I want to show you these estimates on apartments that my brother sent me."

"Oh Andrea, this will be great! I'm so excited about going to a new city and a new school. I know it'll be a little scary, but we're going to get through it together. I can't wait."

I loved Andrea. She was the best friend I had and the only person I could stand to live with. I wanted to go ahead with our plans for graduate school because I knew we'd have the time of our lives, but the last thing I wanted to do was interfere, especially with her future.

After graduation and after we began our careers as graduate students, our lives became somewhat stable again. I was still single and searching, while Andrea was still head over heels in love with Joseph. Daniel quietly waited in the wings for the right moment to make his move; what his move was, only Daniel knew. Of course, Andrea met a few eligible men, and as usual their interest was more intense than she would have liked, even though I knew she loved the attention and was completely flattered by all of their kind and generous gestures of affection. A few times I thought her interest in Joseph would be swayed, but it always ended up being an innocent school-girl crush, and Joseph's illuminating smile would bring her back to reality.

Two years after entering, we both successfully graduated from graduate school. It was unbelievable! We had actually accomplished what we had set out to accomplish and were finally through with school, at least for a while. We both lucked out on jobs. I was offered a great job at a large advertising firm in Birmingham, and Andrea found a promising position with a private counseling center close to my new office.

"Jess, we have to start our own tradition of meeting for lunch every day — unless some great-looking guy asks one of us to meet for lunch."

"You never change, do you? I thought once you graduated and found a good job you would start thinking about settling down with Joseph ... or Daniel ... or whoever."

"Oh never mind, Joseph can wait. I'm not ready to settle down yet — I want to be independent for a while first. Besides, Joseph hasn't even asked me yet. How are we supposed to get settled if he hasn't even proposed yet? As far as I'm concerned, the marriage issue is fair game. For all I know, Daniel will propose before Joseph even begins to think about it."

"You may have a point there — he is coming back home to live! If I were you, I'd watch out."

"Oh Jess, what am I going to do? I love Joseph to death, but he just doesn't seem ready to really commit and — well — I do still have feelings for Daniel, but — oh, I don't know!"

"Why don't you use all that energy on picking a place to eat lunch and worry about all that stuff when the time comes?"

Sure enough the time came. I used to envy Andrea for always having a boyfriend, but now — I was thankful it was her having all these worries and not me. All the times she speculated about what would happen if Daniel proposed first — I never took it seriously, but now — it was reality.

"Jess, we've got to talk! Meet me at Texas Taco in 15 minutes! *He proposed!*"

"Who?!!!"

"I'll tell you — just meet me. Hurry!"

I suppose I expected this would happen eventually, but I never thought it would happen this way. She always wanted someone to propose to her, but by the tone of her voice on the phone, she wasn't happy with this proposal. For the past four years she had been trying to come to a decision on a situation that had not happened and might never have happened, but today — it happened.

"Jess, I'm so glad to see you — you'll never believe what happened to me!"

"Andrea, sit down, take a deep breath, and tell me what happened!"

"He's in town!"

"Who's in town?"

"Daniel. He sent a dozen roses to my office, and when Joseph came to pick me up to take me to dinner he saw them — and he read the card!"

"Oh no! What did he say?"

"It doesn't matter what Joseph said half as much as what the card said."

"What did the card say?"

"I love you. Please marry me. Daniel."

"Oh my gosh, are you serious?"

"No, I'm kidding. Of course I'm serious — do you think I'd be this crazy if I wasn't serious?"

I always thought Andrea over-reacted sometimes, but this time she had every reason. I couldn't exactly sympathize with her since I had never had the pleasure of being sought after by two different men at once. The only thing I could do was be her friend and allow her to spill her guts while I patiently listened.

"Jess, you know how I feel about Joseph. He has been an absolute angel to me. He found a job down here, just to be near me, and you know what a sacrifice that was for him to move so far away from his family. But — he's so undecided about commitment! He wants to get rich before we get married — he doesn't want us to struggle at all. I always thought that the struggle period was what helped to bond the couple. At this rate, if we wait for him to get rich, I'll be forty before he even considers getting engaged. I don't want to be a girlfriend for

the rest of my life."

"So... you're going to say yes to Daniel?"

"No, well... I don't know... he just moved back to town — I know I've had really strong feelings for him ever since high school, but we haven't seriously dated since I was seventeen. How can I say yes when I have no idea if we still even enjoy one another's company?"

"Alright, so you'll say no, and maybe date him for a while or maybe you'll talk all your suppressed feelings out with Joseph about making a commitment soon."

"Oh Jess, I have no idea—I'm still completely confused—what do I do?"

"Andrea, listen to yourself. If both of these guys love you as much as they claim, they'll wait for you. Why must you decide today? Why can't you wait a while until your mind is clear and you have plenty of time to come to a rational decision?"

"Jess—what if they won't wait, what if I never get another proposal again? I'm ready to start my life—to settle down and to eventually start having children."

As usual, our gab session had gotten us nowhere. I think Andrea was as confused at the end of our discussion as she was at the beginning. Maybe I was losing my sensitivity after hearing about her guy problems so much, but I couldn't find it in me this time to really feel sorry for her. Come on, she had to decide between two very nice looking men who were both successful, who both had great personalities, and who both had showed a strong, sincere and enduring affection for her for the past six or more years. I felt bad not feeling compassion for my best friend, but wasn't she acting just a little irrational? How could she think they wouldn't wait for her — she had waited all this time for them. How could she even start to believe she would never get another proposal again? Everywhere she went she would meet some new guy—some other poor soul who hoped to have a chance.

I'm not really sure what happened after I left her at Texas Taco last night, but I can imagine:

"Hi there, you look a little down. Are you alright?"

"Oh yeah, I'll be fine. I just can't figure out what to do with my life."

"Well, don't you worry, you can tell me all about your problems, I have all night. Here, have a piece of gum."

"Oh no thanks, I really don't care for Big Red. The cinnamon makes my mouth numb. I appreciate your generous offer to sit here and listen to my problems, but I think the only person that can help me is myself."

"Why don't you give me a try. You never know — I might be the answer to your problem."

This morning, during one of my five minute coffee breaks, Andrea managed to leave a message with my secretary:

MEET ANDREA AT THE FOUNTAIN

IN FRONT OF CITY HALL AT
12:00 SHARP—SHE HAS MADE A
DECISION. DON'T BE LATE!

I couldn't believe that Andrea had been able to come to a serious decision over night. I was anxious to find out the outcome—whatever it might be.

There she was, in a beautiful white cocktail party dress—the one she had worn for our graduate school farewell party. Next to her stood an extremely handsome, wealthy looking, evenly tanned god who had a forever frozen smile on his face. Andrea looked absolutely stunning next to this man—almost as though she glowed—but wait a minute, she can't be serious!

"Jess, I'm so glad you could make it—I want you to meet Brantly—we met last night at Texas Taco. I hope you're not mad about having to break our lunch tradition today, but you know—we always said we would break it if a guy asked us out—and—well, here we are. Isn't he gorgeous? I'm so excited! He is absolutely divine!"

"What about Daniel. . . and Joseph?"

"What about them? Jess, look at this ring!"

.. "or forever hold your peace." This is absolutely crazy—what is she thinking? Oh the hell with it, I don't care if she never speaks to me again—I can't stand here and watch my best friend totally mess up her life—

"Uh Andrea—we need to talk!"

Aileen Lavelle

The Ships Sail On

It was as if God Himself were crying right along with me. The skies, gray and full, emptied the rain onto the front lawn. Pressing my forehead against my bedroom window, I felt the tears stream down my cheek, and I watched as the street became flooded with rain from above. I stood there with the telephone receiver in my hand, the dial tone humming loudly through my bedroom. And those words: "I don't love you anymore." They hurt so much, cut so deeply. After three years, Elizabeth had decided that I was not right for her. I don't know why, and I was really afraid to figure it out. All I really remember her saying was something about going away to college had changed her, and she yelled something about me being an "insecure son of a bitch." And she hung up on me. That was it. Three years, and it all ends with a lousy phone call.

Not being one to really talk about things like this, I desperately needed some support that rainy Saturday. I wanted to be around people, some friends, some really good friends who could take my mind off it for a while. My friends were always good at cooking up something fun and entertaining, and it was even legal at times. And that's what I was really in need of that night. Some good ol' male bonding that would carry through several counties and across the state in a search for drink, women and fun.

So I called my friend Tim. Most people who think they know Tim would describe him as a quiet guy, a lanky fellow who stood at about 6'1 and weighed this side of 165 pounds and always carried himself as if he were about to nod off to sleep and fall over. In high school people thought he was just another well-mannered Protestant stuck among a throng of Catholics. Beneath that quiet Lutheran exterior lurked a monster.

Okay, so he wasn't that bad. He had many friends, two of whom went by the names of Jim Beam and Jack Daniels, and when they got together, the whole Southeast took cover.

Tim was in town for the weekend from the Citadel and called Clark, a hormone with opposable thumbs always in search of liquor and breasts. He then called Brett, the sane one out of us all. He really was the guy with his head on the straightest, but Clark said it was only because he was so anal-retentive he needed an enema. Knowing that Brett was going, I knew that we would all be okay.

That evening we rendezvoused at Star Castle Arcade, a small video game joint that was the hangout for those of us who weren't 21 and couldn't obtain fake I.D.'s. After a few minutes of debate out in the rain, I was volunteered to drive. "Aw, c'mon, man. I don't want to drive. Not tonight, guys," I pleaded.

"Why the hell not?" Tim asked.

" 'Cos," I replied.

" 'Cos don't mean nothin', brother, you gotta have a better reason than that."

"You know me and Elizabeth broke up today. I ain't in no mood to drive."

"Oh, bullshit," Clark intervened, "No girl in the world make me not want to drive."

"Then why don't you drive?" I asked.

"You kiddin'?! I'm getting drunk tonight."

"Oh, goddammit," Brett said, "I'll drive."

"Brett, no way in hell are we gonna let you drive," Tim declared. "You wrecked your damn car in the K-Mart parking lot at three in the morning without a fucking car in sight."

"Yeah, and you weren't even drunk. You ain't driving," Clark said.

Tim returned his attention to me. "C'mon, Ryan, it'll be fun. I promise. You'll get to watch me and Clark. It'll be a blast."

"I don't know, man. I really wasn't wanting to drive tonight."

"Oh, don't be a pussy, Ryan, just drive tonight. I'll drive tomorrow night," Tim said angrily.

"Guys, I'm getting fucking wet," Brett said.

"Tomorrow night's Sunday, dumb ass."

"So?"

"So you won't even be here."

"Oh yeah," Tim said in a voice that I thought had signaled my victory. "Well, I'll drive next time."

"What if I don't want to drink next time, smart ass?"

"You'll drink if we gotta make ya'," Clark said, opening my door and climbing into the back seat of my '73 Celica. "Now get into the goddamned car. I'm soaked, and I'm ready to drink!" Tim followed him, and Brett climbed into the front. Clark had swiped an obvious victory out of my grips and demoralized me with the subtlety of George Patton storming across Europe in sandpaper underwear. Not only was I depressed because my girlfriend dumped me, now I had to drive.

So I drove, dammit.

We made our way towards Tybee Island, a tiny, innocent barrier island off to the east of Savannah, at the end of U.S. Highway 80. The golden sands of Tybee Island met the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, and thousands of people made it their paradise during the humid summer days that are so prevalent in southeast Georgia. This rainy Saturday night, we were going to make it our own.

We pulled into the parking lot on 16th Street, just underneath a mountain of man-made waterslides which had become dormant with the arrival of night. The caravan emptied out of my car and into the parking lot. Fortunately, during our thirty minute ride down to Tybee, the rain stopped, and so with a bucket of ice in one hand and a liter of Jim Beam in the other, Tim made his way down the stairs leading from the storm wall to the beach. Clark followed gripping a two-liter bottle of Coke. Brett and I slumped on behind them. Although he didn't say anything, Brett was apparently the only one who really cared about my broken heart. I could tell by the way he hung with me as I moped silently along.

Reaching the water's edge we all plopped down on the wet sand, and almost instantaneously Tim broke the seal on the bottle of Jim Beam and took a swallow from the sacred chalice. Almost on cue Clark opened the bottle of Coke and passed it to Tim, who passed the Jim Beam to Clark. Tim gulped down a small bit of Coke and violently swung his head back and forth trying to shake the burn out of his head. "Hot damn!" he screamed just as Clark gulped at the bottle of Jim Beam and then chased it with a swig of Coke. It was entertaining to witness this sacrament of drink between

Tim and Clark. Somehow they were magically attached at the liver, staying one step ahead of the other. It was entertaining, but it was also downright scary.

Brett swallowed a little of the magic poison and gagged. I shook my head when he passed it to me, knowing full well the damaging effect just one small taste would have. "I'll be right back," I said, "I left my lights on." Thankfully I had left my lights on; I really did not want to be a part of this night, at least not sober anyway.

I was planning on staying at my car for a few minutes, to just kind of readjust my thinking. Turning off my lights, I heard a car honk. "Ryan! Ryan!" I heard someone shout. I looked behind me to see Mindy Whalen pull her 280 ZX into the parking spot beside me.

I met Mindy Whalen two years earlier through a mutual friend in high school. She was a New Jersey girl who had been transplanted in Savannah several years ago. Her wavy, jet black hair perfectly framed the contours of her flawless face. Her crystal blue eyes captivated every man who ever looked into them. They were almost hypnotic. Even after all of these years I had not gotten over them. Nor did I ever think I would.

"Ryan, how are you?" Mindy screamed as she got out of her car. She bounced over to me and hugged the breath out of me. Her firm breasts felt very comforting and yet, at the same time, with the memory of Elizabeth still fresh in my mind, somewhat disturbing as they buried into my chest. "It's been so long!"

"Ah, it hasn't been that long," I said. "I just saw you at your sister's graduation last month."

"Well, that's a long time, dummy," she said, playfully slapping my arm. Then I noticed that she wasn't alone. A very attractive blonde girl exited the passenger's side of the car. "Oh, Ryan, this is Cynthia."

"Hi," I said shaking her hand.

"It's good to meet you," she responded, beaming with a smile that seemed to light the entire eastern coastline.

"Same here."

"So what are you doing down here?" Mindy asked.

"Well, me, Tim, Clark and Brett came down. They're down there gettin' loaded."

"And you're —?"

"Driving. As usual."

"What in the hell are you doing up here?" I heard Clark yell. I turned to face my brethren.

"We thought you'd taken off," Brett said.

"Oh, no. I just ran into Mindy. You remember Mindy?"

"Oh yeah," everybody exclaimed. Everyone knew Mindy.

"Cynthia, these are my friends, Tim, Clark and Brett. Guys, this is Cynthia," I said.

"Hi," Cynthia said.

Tim apparently had gotten a little tired of the receiving line and slapped Clark on the back of the head. "C'mon, man, let's go," he ordered.

"Alright. We'll catch up with you later," he told us.

"Hey, man. If you guys take off, we'll never find ya'. Just hang out here," Brett requested.

"Yeah, we'll never see y'all again," I added.

"Yeah you will. Don't worry about it," Tim declared. "We'll be back in an hour."

"Alright," I huffed, "but we ain't spending all night looking for you guys."

"Yeah, yeah," Tim said, waving me off. And then we all watched as he and Clark disappeared into the night along the shore.

"So what do you all want to do?" Mindy asked.

"Shit, I don't know," Brett said. "Ryan what're you up for?"

"I don't know. Cynthia? Any ideas?"

"We could drive down to the north end and hang out by the rocks," Cynthia suggested.

"What the hell. Let's go," I said. We all packed into Mindy's car, me and Cynthia in the back and Brett and Mindy up front and headed off to the north end of Tybee Island.

Pulling into the parking lot at the north end of Tybee Island, the full moon glimmered off the ocean, the bright reflection of the moon framed by the forboding, yet peaceful blackness of the water. We strolled along the beach until we reached a long line of rocks that stretched out into the water for about forty or fifty yards. Carefully we made our way to the end of the tiny mountain and sat down, taking off our shoes so our bare feet could rest on the slick rocks.

The moisture from the rocks seeped through the seat of my pants. I was a little uncomfortable and shifted to readjust my underwear. With women around I felt a little bit this side of uncouth to dig up there and pull around. So I wiggled, and the spray from the breakers crashing on the rocks misted my face.

"Wow, isn't it beautiful out here?" Cynthia asked.

It was so startling to hear someone break the silence that I instinctively turned towards her, and it was then that I noticed the reflection of the white moon shining in Cynthia's hazel eyes. Her blonde hair captured the glow of the moon and was whisked about uncontrollably by the breeze that glanced off the ocean. My insides stirred as I realized what a beautiful young woman she was.

"It sure is," I replied, out of breath.

As Brett and Mindy carried on their own conversation, Cynthia and I exchanged brief life stories. She was originally from St. Augustine, Florida, she told me. She had moved to Savannah about seven years ago when her father took a job at Savannah Foods, a local sugar refinery. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do, but she thought that being a lawyer might be fun. I told her of how I was brought up in Savannah, and how I was living with my parents while I attended Smythe College. I was a psychology major, but I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I didn't want to teach; I knew that. But I had no idea what I wanted to do.

Our conversation paused. The spray from the waves breaking on the rocks misted us, and the wind brushed through my hair. It was an incredibly free feeling, one that I didn't want to end.

"Would you like to go for a walk?" Cynthia interrupted.

"Sure," I grinned, oblivious to Brett and Mindy. They gaped as Cynthia and I strolled past them along the rocks. "We'll be back in a while," I assured Brett.

Our bare feet sank into the mud left by the high tide a few hours earlier. Our jeans were rolled up as far as they could go but were still dampened as the black waves crashed around our ankles. The waves crescendoed into a roar that seemed distant as the full moon. Cynthia and I exchanged tales from our childhood. She told me about the time she was run over by a kid on a bicycle. I told her about how I was St. George in the sixth grade play at St. John's Parochial School. She had a cat

named Oliver once that fell into the washing machine, ended up in the spin cycle and suffered some minor, although psychologically traumatic, wounds. I had a sheep dog named LeRoy that someone stole. We exchanged tales of tragedy and comedy. I told her about how my grandfather died of cancer when I was six, and how I wish I had gotten to know him better. She told me about an uncle of hers that was killed in a plane crash while he was on maneuvers with the Army Reserves one weekend.

We walked through the surf for what seemed like miles and decided to light behind one of the dunes masked by towering sea oats. The moon was now resting almost straight up above, and we sat there, staring at it, enamored by the intensity of light that it radiated. Inside I was shaking. I was attracted to Cynthia so much that I was intimidated by her.

But I found myself also confused. Did I really feel this way about Cynthia, or were these leftover feelings for Elizabeth? Maybe I was intimidated by that. I felt a hand touch my knee and looked down to see Cynthia caressing my leg. I was no longer intimidated.

"Listen," she said, "I have to get this out in the open. I don't know what it is, but I am just so terribly attracted to you right now. I have never — ever — been this forward with anyone, but I just wanted to let you know that I really am enjoying myself with you. I don't think I want it to end here tonight."

What could I say? She had verbalized the very feelings that I had been feeling — or thought I had been feeling — all night long, and suddenly I was expected to respond to it.

Shaking my head, I lifted my head and looked at her. "Cynthia, I feel exactly how you feel. But I've got to be honest with you. My girlfriend just dumped me this morning, and anything we do tonight probably won't be meaningful past tonight," I said. My hormones spoke otherwise.

"Really?" she said, dejected.

"Really." Her face was white with the moonlight, and the wind tossed her hair about. I cupped her face in my hand and caressed her cheek, all along gazing into her eyes. Nervously she glanced at my lips; she knew that I wanted desperately to kiss her. My stomach was upside down. Slowly I pressed my lips against hers, and I felt her shoot through my body. I smelled her perfume as the wind swept it along the shore. The adrenaline rushed through my body as I slowly and methodically quenched myself, cupping one of her firm breasts in my palm.

We made love on that dune as if we had been lovers for years. We made love not as strangers, but as lovers, reaching out to one another in a desperate attempt to find something new for our lives. Slowly and passionately I learned her body, discovered her intimate secrets, and as I lay underneath her, I prayed that I would always remember this moment, that I would never forget this night.

I awoke hours later. Sand had nested in my hair, and the moon had crept from its resting place directly overhead to a more distant position into the western sky. Cynthia lay beside me, sound asleep. And I remembered what had happened. I thought it was a dream at first, but there was no possible way that what I had felt hours before was not real.

Happy and refreshed, I thought about what happened between us. It was incredible. She was incredible. The passion, the tenderness, the romance — I had touched her and she me in ways both physically and emotionally that I honestly thought had never happened before or would ever happen again.

And then I remembered Elizabeth. As quickly as I had reached this emotional and physical high, I felt the hurt and the pain that I held in my heart earlier that day. I saw Elizabeth and I roaming the beach last summer, digging through the mud at low tide with our toes in search of sand dollars. I saw us at our high school prom last year. I saw the first real college dance. I saw us in the front seat of my Toyota, parked at Lake Duffy, hiding from friends and parents in a bundle of repressed teenage lust. I saw me going home frustrated. I wondered what it would have been like to make love with her and how she would compare with Cynthia. I missed her terribly, and I wanted her back, but I also wanted to forever remember this moment with Cynthia.

Then, through the whipping of the wind, I heard a familiar noise. It was Brett. "Ryan!" he yelled. "Where the hell are you?"

Popping up from behind the dune, I zipped my jeans. Cynthia stirred as I stuck my head from behind the sea oats. "What's going on?" I asked.

I must have startled Brett; he was at a loss for words. There were two other people with him, and as I approached him I was able to make out that it was Mindy and Clark. "Hey, man where the hell have you been? We've been looking for you for —" Cynthia came from behind the dune and it felt like the eyes and morals of the entire world had fallen upon me. Brett's mouth gaped. Mindy jerked her head back in disbelief. Clark snickered like a hormonally-imbalanced schoolboy.

"What?" I asked, trying to avoid any escalation of embarrassment.

"We've been looking for you for hours," Brett continued, returning his attention towards me.

"Yeah? So?" I noticed that they were one person shy. "Where's Tim?" I scanned the dark shore behind them. Then I noticed the eyeglasses in Clark's hand. They were Tim's. But Tim's head wasn't behind them, as it usually is. This was not a good sign.

"Oh, shit, Clark," I said, "what'd you do with him?"

"I don't know!"

"What the hell do you mean you don't know?"

"He's been talking that same shit for an hour and a half," Brett informed me.

"I'm not very sure," Clark slurred. "I think I left him somewhere on the beach between 4th and 9th Street."

"Fourth and 9th? Jesus, Clark, that's five goddamn blocks of beach. How the hell are we gonna find him in the dark?"

"At least you got that much out of him," Mindy declared.

"Maybe if we wait until morning the tide will wash him back to shore." Clark's syllables oozed through a cloudy vapor of whiskey.

"Oh, Christ."

We headed for the area between 4th and 9th Streets. Cynthia and I started at 4th and worked our ways towards 9th, which is where Brett and Mindy started. We locked Clark in the car. With him in there, Southeast Georgia would be safe.

Fortunately, I stumbled, literally, over Tim between 5th and 6th. He lay there, sprawled out spread eagle across the front of a large sand dune. Apparently someone had found him before us; they had stretched an unused condom across his right hand. In his other hand was the empty bottle of Jim Beam, the sacred chalice now barren, an emptied symbol of the night. He lay there motionless. I prayed to God he wasn't dead.

"Is he dead?" Cynthia asked.

"I don't know."

"Can't you check?"

"How?"

"See if he's breathing."

"Are you kidding? I'm not getting too close to that. He's liable to barf at any moment."

"Oh for God's sake," Cynthia huffed and leaned her ear down to his mouth. "Yeah, he's alive," she announced.

"Thank God. I guess."

We sat beside him, waiting for him to stir. About a half hour later, Brett and Mindy showed up.

"Guess what we found?" I asked.

"How many guesses?" Brett said, examining the drunken carnage laying in front of him.

"One."

"Jimmy Hoffa?"

"Close. We found Jimmy Beam," I said, holding up the bottle. "Oh yeah, his good friend Tim just happened to be hanging out with him."

"Well I'll be damned," Brett declared.

"Well, guys, I know he's not in too good a condition to move, but don't you think we ought to be making some progress?" Mindy asked.

"She's right," Cynthia agreed. "It's almost three o' clock."

"Yeah, okay," I said. Brett helped me get the drunken mass to its feet. I struggled to lift him from behind, and Brett pulled him from the front.

"Jesus, this bastard's heavy," Brett said.

"God, I know," lifting him to an upright position. He swayed backwards towards me, so I decided to give him a little nudge forward to balance him out. I expected Brett to be there.

He wasn't.

Tim crashed face-first into the beach with a muffled thud.

"Owwwww," he mumbled through the sand.

"Shit. It speaks," Brett giggled.

I bent down and rolled Tim over to discover a river of red pouring quickly from his nose.

"Oh shit. He broke his nose," I said.

"I think you did it for him, junior," Brett quipped.

"Me?! You moved, you idiot."

"Moved?! Hell, I wasn't even there to begin with."

"What the fuck's goin' on?" Tim slurred.

It took us a while to get him to the point where he could walk on his own a little. We slumped through the sand, carrying him part of the way, leaving a trail of blood along the

shore line. We placed him in the back seat of my car along with Clark, who had passed out.

The four of us gathered in the middle of the parking lot to try and figure out a plan of attack.

"I say we take him to a car wash and hose his drunk, lanky, Citadel ass down," Brett suggested.

"Give him the ol' hot wax finish. That doesn't sound like a bad idea." Revenge was high on my list of priorities.

"Be serious. He's practically bleeding to death," Mindy said.

"Yeah. All over my backseat."

"Can't we just take him home?" Cynthia asked.

"Of course we can, if we want to get his ass killed," Brett stipulated. "Have you ever seen his dad get pissed?"

"No."

"It ain't a pretty sight."

"Look we've got to do something," I interrupted.

"No shit, Einstein. What do you suggest we do?"

I started to wonder aloud, toss out ideas, and I was oblivious to the sounds around me. I wasn't really paying attention to the car starting up behind me.

"Uh, Ryan. Do you have your keys?" Brett interrupted.

I grabbed at my pockets to check. I didn't have my keys. They were in the car. In the ignition, to be exact.

I whirled around to see Tim, all 6'1 of him, guiding my tiny Toyota from the back seat. He had wrapped his long limbs around the bucket seats and had started the car and was driving off.

"TIM! GODDAMMIT, STOP!" I yelled, like it was really going to help.

He sped towards the four of us, swerving out of control. The other three scattered. I stood my ground. Call it stupidity, call it exhaustion, but there was no way in hell I was going to put up with this shit any longer. I stood there as the runaway car sped towards me. I crouched down, like a linebacker anticipating the next cut of a runningback, as if I were going to tackle the car. I was ready to hurt the car and all those in it. I crouched there, waiting, blind with anger, ready to pounce. The car got closer and closer. Just as it got to me, it swerved to my left, and I dove, flailing my arms in a humiliating attempt to try and stop it. The car sped past me, and I crashed to the ground, burying my head into the asphalt, instantly opening up a gaping hole across my left temple.

"FUCK!" I yelled. I sat up holding my head with my left hand, pounding the pavement with my other, and through the blood running down my face, I watched as Tim drove the car out of the parking lot and around the next corner. A millisecond later there was a loud crash, the sound of metal being twisted and bent. I looked at Brett, who was rolling over on his side. He looked at me as soon as he heard the crash. We stared at each other in ignorance, wondering what happened. The message wasn't verbalized, but we knew what each was saying: "Oh, shit."

All four of us sprung to our feet and sprinted around the corner. There lay my Celica, the front deeply imbedded into the front left fender of a black BMW. Both cars were twisted beyond recognition. Steam poured out from the wrinkled hood of

my car. Splinters of glass shone in the glow of the streetlight overhead.

The driver's side door of my car creaked open, and Tim and Clark emerged. They shuffled across the broken glass of the headlights and stopped as they began to realize what just happened. You could see the enlightenment fall upon them. Tim examined the wreck behind him, scanning the havoc he had just caused.

"Oops," he muttered from behind a mask of crusty blood.

"What did you say?" I asked. Oh, I had heard him alright. But I just wanted to make sure that he said what I thought he said before I killed him.

"Ryan, easy," Brett said.

"Did you say, 'Oops'?" I whispered furiously, slowly approaching him.

No answer.

"Tell me, Tim, did you say 'Oops'? I just want to clear that up, you know, because from over there I thought I distinctly heard you say 'oops'. N - now I may be wrong, but I need to know, if you said 'oops'." I tried to control my fury, but it oozed out.

He swaggered in place, mute. Not a word for an eternity. He looked around him again, as if he was making sure that he had done what he thought he had just done. He glanced at Clark.

"He said, 'Oops'." Clark informed me.

"*YOU SON OF A BITCH!*" I charged Tim, but Brett wrapped me up before I could get to him.

The next day the phone rang while I was still in bed. I looked at the clock on my night stand: 1:30 p.m. It might as well have been 6:30 am. I picked up the phone.

"Hello?" I said, trying to sound awake.

"I know you're not awake, so don't try and fake it." The voice said. It took me a while to figure out that it was Cynthia.

"Oh, hey, how're you doin'?" I perked right up.

"I'm doing okay, considering."

"Yep. I can relate. Did you get any sleep?"

"I got a few winks. How'd your parents take the news of your car?"

"Oh, they were pissed, especially Dad. But I guess they're okay now. They haven't yelled at me in a few hours."

"What were they pissed about? It's not your fault," she said.

"Yeah, I know, but they're pissed at Tim, I guess, and they can't really go over and yell at him. I wish they would, though."

"I bet. By the way how is he?"

"He, who?"

"Tim, dumb ass."

"Oh. I guess he's okay. I haven't talked to him since last night down at the police station. He'll get a DUI, his insurance will skyrocket, and he'll swear off alcohol forever."

"Sounds like you've been through this with him before."

"The last part, at least" I said. "He'll call up and apologize to me, eventually."

"And your car?"

"Oh, shit. I don't know. I guess the insurance companies'll work all that crap

out. I was pissed last night, but I guess I'm just happy that Tim's okay."

"You guys are pretty tight, huh?" she asked.

"Yeah. We are. He gets to be a real pain in the butt, especially when he gets like he was last night. But he's one of the best people I know."

"That's sweet."

There was a lull in the talk, a very nervous lull.

"Look," Cynthia blurted. "I'm really concerned about your friends, but I didn't really call to talk about that."

"I figured that much."

"I just want to know what to expect from you. I mean, I don't just pounce on top of every man I go out with. I want to know what you feel."

"Cynthia, I told you —"

"I know what you told me, Ryan," she interrupted. She was very nervous, not belligerent, just in search of some answers. It was tearing me apart that I was probably not going to be able to give her the answers she wanted. "I just want to know that last night was - well — I mean — I'm not looking for a commitment. God knows that's the last thing I'm looking for. I just want to feel — that — I — I mean —"

"Cynthia, I've got to be honest with you. Just yesterday morning my girlfriend of three years broke up with me. And I loved her. I still do, very much, in fact. I just can't turn my emotions off that quickly. But, I mean, last night was wonderful. You are one of the most beautiful, intelligent women I know. But I'd be lying to you if I told you that I can be around you without thinking of Elizabeth."

"Is that her name?"

"Yeah," I answered, somewhat startled. It never occurred to me that she didn't know her name.

Another pause.

"Well, I understand."

"Cynthia, I don't want to hurt you."

"You're not."

"I want to get to know you. But I need time. I hope you can understand that."

"Absolutely. Ryan, I just want us to try and be friends, not to act like it was just another one of 'those' nights."

"Of course it won't be. It couldn't have been. No possible way."

"Okay then. Friends?"

"Friends," I agreed.

"I'll talk to you later on then, friend," she said.

"You got it, pal," I grinned and hung up the phone.

Then I sat in my room trying to figure what I did wrong with Elizabeth, and how I was going to get her back in my life.

* * * * *

I spent the next several months after that basically trying to get my head straight. Elizabeth was on my mind constantly; I was truly still in love with her. So I spent a lot of my time maintaining the status quo. Nothing risky — school, work, food; in other words, the basic stuff that makes up the life of a person trying to heal a broken heart.

I went out on a few dates every now and then, anything to try and expel those

memories of Elizabeth. But every date had a certain moment that would trigger my memory, and I would be thrown back in time. "Gosh," I thought, "Elizabeth and I used to do this," or, "Elizabeth would have enjoyed this." The memories hurt and would not die. I raped myself with the images, and it seemed that this destructive cycle would never end. Everything I did reminded me of what I had lost, and that memory was the most painful thing in the world.

And then, sometimes, I would think of that evening on the beach with Cynthia. I thought about her more and more. It's really strange, but she had reached out to me that evening, and despite the furious and passionate exchange of carnal intimacy, I was not ashamed of it. Something more had happened, something besides just sex.

I ran into her every now and then, and whenever I saw her it was very amiable. About two years after the night, we went to lunch at a Japanese steak house on River Street, adjacent to the roaring Savannah River. As the enormous ships passed in and out of the harbor, carrying their cargo from distant shores, fueling the economy of the sea town, we talked like a couple of old high school pals. No mention of that evening. No mention of sex. Just a couple of old friends. And that was very special. We told one another that we'd have to stay in touch. For whatever reasons, we really didn't. A few phone calls every four months, a run-in around town, but nothing ever substantial.

And I was okay with it. The formation of that friendship put me at peace with myself, and with Elizabeth. I was slowly letting her go. And I was feeling okay. I thought I was, anyway.

About a year-and-a-half after my lunch with Cynthia, and about three-and-a-half years after *The Night*, I graduated from college and started grad school at the University of Georgia. I was in the counseling program and had abandoned the sea oats and marsh gas of Savannah for the true college-town life of Athens, Georgia. Athens is about an hour east of Atlanta, just down the Atlanta Highway, and captures the essence of diversity fostered by the University. It is a quaint little town where the frat boys and the townies are separated by socio-economic-political barriers and yet, in a mystical way, are united by the lively, colorful and exciting night life that seems to emerge from out of the confines of the town. REM, the Georgia Theatre, the legend of the Bulldogs and, of course, the spectre of Herschel Walker all loom over the city, and its citizens welcome all of the glory and mystique associated with them.

On a Saturday in November after the Georgia/Georgia Tech football game, my roommate Kenny and I had stopped by Thomason's, a country and western bar on West Broad Street. It was one of the very few country and western bars that I would allow myself to visit.

Near closing time, I had already had a few long island iced teas and was just about ready to go. I told Kenny the tea was getting to me.

"One more drink, dude-man," Kenny said, as he maneuvered the joystick on the video football game located in a dark corner. Kenny always called me "dude-man," and it always got on my nerves after I had had a few.

"Nah, man," I said, leaning my head on the electronic gizmo that had enthralled Kenny so much. "I'm burnt. I want to go sleep, man."

"Man just go to the damn bathroom, take a pee, and then come back. By the time you're done there, I'll be done here."

"Ah, shit. Come on," I said.

"Go pee before I carry your scrawny white ass over there and squeeze it out of you,"

Kenny ordered. I thought he was joking, but wasn't really sure. Kenny was a large black man, standing about 6'3 and weighing just shy of 210 pounds. Quite aware of this, I wasn't going to risk having the patrons of this bar watch a really big black man carry a 140-pound white kid across the bar and rip his genitalia off. So I went and peed, purely out of self-preservation.

I navigated myself through the crowd and towards the bathroom way the hell on the other side of the bar. Unfortunately the crowd collectively leapt towards the dance floor as a popular tune began to blare over the sound system. I didn't know which song it was; I was interested in getting to the bathroom and keeping my groin intact.

As I was delayed, waiting for the crowd to pass by, I heard someone call my name. I turned towards the noise. There I saw Cynthia.

"Ryan! Oh my God! How have you been?" she screeched.

"I'm doin' great," I replied, stammering partly in disbelief that I was seeing Cynthia, partly from the tea. "What in the hell are you doin' up here?"

"Me? What about you?"

"Grad school, babe. I realized that a psychology degree wasn't going to get me far. I gotta make money somehow."

"I can relate," she replied. "Hey, guess what I'm doing?"

"Hell, I don't know. Studying cross-dressing cattle, maybe?"

"No, smart ass. Law school!"

"Oh, God. I knew it. I just knew it," I said, burying my forehead in my palm and shaking my head.

"Shut up," she said as she slapped my arm.

"No, I'm just kidding. Jesus, I can't — I mean — of all the places in the world to see you again, I run into you at some redneck dive in Athens, Georgia. Unreal."

"Hey, watch it, bud," she frowned, "some of my closest relatives are rednecks."

"I know," I joked, and received another smack across my arm.

So we sat there for about fifteen minutes carrying on a lot of small talk, catching up with one another. The music blared through the thick clouds of cigarette smoke. The hardwood dance floor reverberated with the stomping and the shuffling of the energetic dancers as they ritualized the latest line dance. Cynthia and I leaned against a waist-high picket fence that framed the dance floor and separated the dancers from the less restless patrons. Cynthia's voice chimed over all of these distractions, and, once again, I found myself at ease. Being with her again comforted me for reasons I could not explain and was not too sure I wanted to be able to.

About this time, I felt a nudge. It was Kenny, fresh off his video game conquest. "You 'bout ready, dude-man? It's about closing time?"

"You sure you haven't come for my genitals?"

"What —?" I heard Cynthia screech.

"Cynthia, this large specimen of a man you see before me has been following me all night," I said, keeping an eye on Kenny. "Just a few moments ago he told me that he wants to rip my — well, you know — my thing off and mount it in his refrigerator."

"Oh God, that's disgusting."

"Smart-ass," Kenny grinned. "If I wanted to I could keep it in a thimble."

"Oh, big man talking big, huh? No, Cynthia, this is Kenny my roommate. Kenny this is Cynthia, a friend of mine from Savannah."

"Hi, good to meet you," Kenny said extending his hand.

"Same here, I guess," Cynthia said. "But can I keep my genitals?"

"As you wish."

"Oh God, you two are just alike," I realized. "This is gonna suck."

"No, way, man, this is gonna be fun!" Kenny smiled.

Cynthia shook his hand, and they exchanged brief life stories. I wasn't exactly paying too much attention to them, though.

Behind Cynthia, I noticed a man about 30 or 35 years old. He sat alone at a tiny two-person table. The ash tray in front of him was full of cigarette butts, some of them tapered with crimson lipstick, so apparently he had company earlier. I also noticed that there were a few empty beer bottles in front of him, but by the looks of his eyes, he seemed to have had quite a few more than that.

He stared at Kenny. I couldn't place it, but he seemed enthralled with Kenny's presence. He arose from his table and swaggered over. His out of shape, sadly overweight body swayed.

"Hey, man," he said, looking directly at Kenny. Kenny realized that this was a cue. He turned his head, saw the man before him and retorted, "Hey, man," and quickly returned his attention to Cynthia.

"Hey, boy. I'm talkin' to you." Surely, I thought, this man wasn't trying to start anything. Not with Kenny.

"Look, mister. We're not looking for any trouble," Kenny said as he rolled his eyes and turned his head to the man again. "Just leave us alone and everything will be cool, all right?"

"You don't want any trouble, huh?" the drunk continued, scratching his chin, as if he were trying to solve an algebra problem. "Well, maybe you should have thought about that 'fore you came in here with your white trash friends."

Me? White trash? I was kind of offended.

"C'mon, man, just go sit down, and I'll buy ya' another beer. Whatcha drinking?" Kenny said trying to avoid anything.

"No way. No fuckin' way I'm gonna let some porch monkey like your black ass buy me shit!" the man yelled, the alcohol emanating from his mouth with every syllable.

Kenny's head hung down and he shook it. I could tell he was getting angry, but it would take a lot more than some drunk redneck to set him off. But I noticed that something was stirring in me.

"Hey, boy, did you hear me?" the man continued, poking Kenny with his finger.

With that, Kenny nodded his head towards the door. "It's time to split gang," he said, looking at us. The pained half-grin on his face meant that the fun was over and it was time to go before things got really ugly. It was one of those "let's get out of here because I'm fed up with this asshole and I don't want to kill him" grins. I admired Kenny so much for being able to walk away from things like this.

I, on the other hand, was about to hurt someone. I maintained my composure as much as possible, trying to follow Kenny's example. It was tough, though. All my life I was taught how I was different from my black friends. "There's a difference between a black and a nigger," I grew up believing. After I met Kenny I became aware of what stupid and dangerously ignorant thinking that was, and I hated myself for ever ever thinking that way, and I felt guilty and believed that I had to compensate for those feelings I once had as a young, uneducated southern boy.

I also believed that there were assholes of all colors.

As we headed towards the door, the man continued his drunken tirade. "Yeah, get the

hell outa here. Go back and listen to that BOOM-DA-BOOM rap shit. That what you like, boy?

"Yeah, go on get outa here. Go back to your black trash hole friends, ya' fuckin' nigger!"

Something snapped in me.

Like a mongoose I spun and leapt towards the man, and in one quick motion I grabbed his throat with my right hand and kicked his feet out from under him, throwing him to the floor in a violent, flailing whirlwind. I fell on top of him and began burying my fist into his face over and over again. Oblivious to the music, the cigarette smoke and everything else, I furiously became the great white savior of the entire black race. I was fucking Malcolm X. I was fucking Frederick Douglass. I was fucking Bobby Seals. I was blind with fury, unconscious with anger, yet I still felt the man's blood from his shattering nose explode onto my face and fist.

And I felt the cold of the steel handcuffs as I was led into the Clarke County jail.

I was there for several hours as Kenny and Cynthia roamed the town going from bank machine to bank machine trying to scrounge up enough money for my \$500 bail.

Around dawn, I was finally free. In the parking lot outside the jail I thanked Kenny and Cynthia until it got to be disgusting. "Thanks guys. I really appreciate this," I said.

"It's okay," Cynthia replied. "You'd do the same for me."

"Yeah, well, I bet we don't have to worry about you pounding in some redneck's face."

"You never know," she chuckled. "Besides I need the legal practice."

Pausing, I reflected on the incident. "Jesus," I said, shaking my head with embarrassment, "what a stupid thing to do."

"No, no, no," Kenny rebutted, "it was very noble. Besides, it's kind of cool to know that your roommate's a closet schizophrenic. That's very valuable information."

"Ah, screw you."

"Don't worry about it," Cynthia reaffirmed, "if you hadn't a done it, I might have."

"Yeah, dude-man. I appreciate you taking up for me and my people," Kenny joked putting his hand on my shoulder.

"Jesus, you're making me out to be Martin Luther King."

"Nope. Not dark enough." He was relentless. "Thanks again."

"Anytime," I rolled my eyes.

"Look, man, it's almost bedtime. Let's hit the road," Kenny said.

"Almost, bedtime?"

"Yeah. I can't afford to lose any beauty sleep."

"That's the truth."

"Touche, dude-man."

"Hey can you give me a second?"

"No problem," Kenny said and climbed into the driver's seat.

Nervously I turned to Cynthia. "Seriously, thanks for everything tonight. You didn't have to —"

"I know I didn't. So don't mention again," she grinned.

After a brief pause, I stammered again. "Look, I know this is a stupid thing to do at this time, I mean, considering all the crap tonight, but - I was - I mean - y'know - um - I was wonderin' if - maybe - you'd like to go out for dinner sometime."

"I'd love to," Cynthia replied.

"I mean I was going to ask anyway, so I figured why the hell should a little prison time get in the way, huh?"

"You're right. Here's my number." She scribbled it onto an old bank deposit slip tucked deep in her purse. "I was hoping you'd ask," she said, handing me the treasure.

"Call me tomorrow night," she concluded, and kissed me on the cheek.

As she drove away, I tried to process everything that had happened. Not just that night, but over the last few years. I watched her tiny import drive away, and I stood there with the world in front of me, wondering just what in the hell to do next. And I thought about the beach. And I thought about Elizabeth. Finally, I thought, I was starting to exorcise her from my mind. That night on the beach, I was torn between the present with Cynthia and the past with Elizabeth. I couldn't separate the two. Now, years later, I was really trying to.

So I called Cynthia the next night. And we went out.

And three-and-a-half years later we were married.

* * * * *

"So how long was it before your insurance went back down?"

"Hell, it must have been six years before it got back to normal," Tim said in a very weak, gruff voice. "Shit, what a night that was."

"Amen, brother," I replied.

"And after all that you and Cynthia ended up married. Who'd 've thought."

"Yeah, it was the damndest thing. Here I was having a few drinks in Athens, of all places, and I run into her. We go out on a date, and a few years later, we're married."

"And you come back to Savannah."

"And we come back to Savannah."

"Unreal," Tim said, and grinned. Even laid up in a hospital bed Tim was still Tim.

"So, how've you been feeling lately?" I asked.

"Okay, I guess," he replied. The gentle smile vanished from his face. "It's scary as hell. You never know when the next little thing is going to be the last. I mean, I get terrified every time I get the slightest cough."

I tried to respond, but I had no idea what to say. It was probably best that I didn't.

Tim laid there in his bed. His gown covered his frail, 105-pound frame very loosely. A tiny, plastic tube protruded from underneath his gown. It was his catheter, he told me. He said he had to shit like a baby again. The smile returned to his face.

He continued to speak, but I didn't hear him. I looked at him, and for the first time realized what this disease had done to him. Nine years ago this man was taking on the world, conquering the lands of Tybee Island and the lowcountry of Charleston. Now he lay before me in ruins, like an ancient Greek fortress. He had lost over sixty pounds and was grotesquely thin. Blue and brown spots dotted his arms and his calves. His voice was weak and rough. He often struggled to get enough air to finish his syllables. The disease had laid to waste a great man, a great friend.

"Tim, can I ask you something?" I interrupted him, unaware that I had.

"Were you even listening to me?" he cackled.

"No, I'm sorry. I was daydreaming."

"You always were living in a fantasy world. Get a grip, junior."

"Yeah, yeah. Quit giving me a hard time."

"Ah, I'm just giving ya' shit. Might not be able to do it for much longer."

"Ah, Jesus, man. Don't talk like that," I exclaimed, wrinkling my face and shaking my head with disapproval.

"Oh, lighten up," he ordered. "What do you want to know?"

"Look, when - uh - if you don't want to answer, it'll be okay - but - um - when —"

"Just spit it out, you weenie."

"When did you find out?"

"Find out what?"

"That you were - you know..."

He toyed with me. "No, I don't, asshole. Find out what?"

"That you were - that you had -"

"That I was 'positive'?"

"Yeah. All these years I've never known."

"Well, about two years ago, I went to give blood. They sucked it out of me, and a few weeks later, I get a call to come meet somebody at the Red Cross. They said they needed another sample of my blood. A few weeks after that, I'm at the hospital, and they tell me that I'm HIV positive."

"Jesus. You had no idea?"

"Of course not. How the hell could I?"

"Yeah. I know."

"A year after that, they tell me that it's escalated. Full-blown AIDS."

"Christ."

"Hey, can you get me a drink of water, I'm a little parched."

"Sure." I walked over to the sink and filled up a Dixie cup with water.

Images flashed through my mind: Cynthia at home. The beach. Athens. Kenny. Clark. All my life. I didn't know how he contracted it, nor was I too sure I wanted to know. And now I sat and watched one of my closest friends die.

"Have you heard from Clark or Brett?" I asked with my back towards Tim. I choked back the tears in my eyes.

"Yeah. Clark called a few weeks ago," Tim gruffed. "He's in Virginia, stationed in Virginia Beach, I think it was."

"Yeah, that's right," I said, handing him the water. "Good ol' Navy boy."

"Yeah," he laughed. "Goddamn squid bait!"

Both of us chuckled. "How 'bout Brett?" I asked, returning to my chair beside the hospital bed.

"I haven't talked to him in a few months," he said, gulping down the water. "You're really the only one I talk to regularly."

"Yeah, well, don't flatter yourself," I joked. "I only visit ya' to make ya' feel guilty for wrecking my car."

"Oh, man. That car was a piece of shit."

"After you got done with it, it was."

"Hey, now —" he started. "If it wasn't for me, you and Cynthia would have never gotten married."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. If you hadn't have been so screwed up all your life, I wouldn't have been compelled to go into counseling, and wouldn't

have gone to Georgia and would have never run into Cynthia. So I guess you're right."

Tim rolled his weak eyes and pondered my thought. "Well, that's not exactly what I meant," he coughed.

"Yeah, I know."

"Hey, can you get me some more water?" he asked weakly.

"Sure." I turned to retrieve another cup of water for my friend. Even in illness Tim made me smile. I filled the paper cup. Tim was grimacing and his breath had become a little quicker and a little louder.

"Tim. You okay, man?"

"Yeah — I — think —"

Suddenly his breathing became very laborious. He struggled to suck in air. I knew he was not all right. I dropped the cup and ran to the door, jerked it open and sprinted to the nurse's station just a down the hall. I told them to come quick. Something was wrong. They followed me back into Tim's room, where he was now heaving, sucking for life. Even his breaths were raspy; what little air he could suck in scraped the back of his throat, making a deep scratching noise. I waited for the nurses to do something, to help my friend breathe again.

Nothing.

I started to panic. "Aren't you going to do something?"

"Sir, please, wait outside," said the male nurse, escorting me towards the door.

"What? What are you doing? Don't worry about me! Forget me!" I yelled in disbelief.

Tim's breathing quickened. His gasps became shorter and shorter.

"*What the hell are you doing?*" I screamed, as the other nurse helped her partner escort me to the door.

His breathing worsened.

"HELP HIM, FOR GOD'S SAKE!"

Shorter. Quicker.

"I'm sorry, sir you'll have to wait —"

Shorter still. Very rapid.

"HELP HIM, GODDAMN IT!"

"Sir, please —"

"PLEASE! HELP HIM!"

The nurse flung the door open. Tim's breathing stopped, and his body that just seconds ago arched in a stiff, futile attempt to breathe, fell to the mattress. He lay there motionless, his blank eyes staring upward. A pungent smell began to fill the air. It was Tim. His body lost muscular control. He had relieved himself.

The battle was over. My friend had achieved peace. And I watched him as he did.

* * * * *

"It was a beautiful service," Cynthia said quietly, sliding out of her black dress.

"Yes, it was," I agreed.

"And it was very pleasant at his parents' house this afternoon."

"Yeah. They're taking it very well."

A pause.

"Where were Brett and Clark?"

"I don't know. They knew about it."

Silence again. I was stunned. Just three days earlier I witnessed my friend's death; he died of a cold. And I could do nothing. It was only afterwards that Tim's parents told me he had declared himself DNR—do not resuscitate. He did not want it to be prolonged. That's why the nurses just stood there. I guess I respected that. But it was so sudden. And where were Brett and Clark? The anger seethed within me. And I couldn't understand any of it.

"Honey," Cynthia said. "Sweetheart."

"Yeah?" I answered, startled to hear her speak.

She touched my shoulder. Her hand was so tender, so comforting. I felt protected.

"He's okay now."

I broke down and cried violently in my wife's bosom. I remembered the day my mother told me that my grandfather had died. I remembered crying like that. I sobbed uncontrollably, out of breath, but I knew that Cynthia would protect me.

"WHY?" I screamed knowing I would not get an answer.

Cynthia caressed my head and kissed my forehead as she cradled me like a newborn. My eyes began to sting from the tears, and the water ran down the black slip that covered Cynthia's chest.

"I love you," I told her.

"I love you, too, Ryan," she sobbed. My wife felt my pain.

My grief and anger began to manifest themselves in an inexplicable, strange desire for my wife. I began to kiss her breasts, partly exposed by the slip. We made love as if we had never made love before. And my mind flashed back to that night on the beach. That first night with Cynthia. And Tim.

Later that evening I awoke. The digital radio alarm clock beside my bed glowed 1:15 a.m. Unable to sleep I slid from the bed. I scribbled a quick note to let her know where I was going, in case she woke up. Before I left the bedroom, I took one more glance at my wife. The streetlight shined through our bedroom window and rested across her face. She was just twenty-six, and she seemed to be getting more and more beautiful. She truly loved me, and I her. I was a very, very lucky man.

I drove to the cemetery where I watched my closest friend be laid to rest earlier that day. Knowing the cemetery would be closed at this hour, I parked outside the gates enclosing a part of the land that I thought, if I traveled in a straight path, would lead me to my friend's bed.

I grabbed a flashlight from out of the trunk of the car and scaled the eight-foot chain-link fence. On my climb, I ripped the sweatpants I was wearing and cut my calf. There was a little scratch, but it was nothing too nasty.

The cemetery was so peaceful at night. The land lay on the banks of the Wilmington River, perched atop a small cliff some forty feet above the banks traversed by countless fishermen and shrimpers in search of their livelihoods. The grounds and those who rested here were protected by a small brigade of majestic oak trees, some of them centuries old, with layers of Spanish moss dripping from their outstretched branches.

The glow of the moon slithered through the tangled limbs of the oaks, casting strange but graceful shadows across the ground and the tombstones. The wetness from the earlier rains dampened the back of my legs. I got closer to Tim's grave and could see the

embankment just beyond a tiny dirt path. The wind kicked up a little as the trees thinned out.

A crimson tent with SMITH AND WEISS etched in white across the front was pitched over the mound of dirt that now held my friend. The aroma of fresh flowers was on the wind, and the sound of grasshoppers and toads echoed.

I turned on my flashlight and waved the bright beam over the grave, as if I were trying to find meaning to all of this among the arrangement of flowers. I didn't know what I was looking for. I don't why I was there either. I felt compelled; something had drawn me.

I continued to wave the beam around the grave. Suddenly the beam bounced back at me, temporarily blinding me. I regained my sight and tried to see what it was. It was a bottle of Jim Beam.

I picked the bottle up to have a better look at it. As if I had never seen one before. "Who in the hell would leave a bottle of Jim Beam?" I thought. I got the answer right away. Taped to the bottle was a piece of paper, inscribed WE MISS YOU. LOVE, CLARK AND BRETT.

I looked at the bottle, hoping that it would talk to me, give me some answers. But it didn't. My stomach knotted up and suddenly, I felt alone.

Nowhere to go. I looked around me, examining my surroundings. The insects and nocturnal creatures chimed their songs of the night. The wind whipped up from the river and the shadows from the trees stretched across the grass forever. I sought comfort in them, waiting for them to take me into their arms, and to hold me, comfort me. Closing my eyes, I sighed. I knew that I would never, ever be the same.

I walked over to the embankment and stood under the largest and most beautiful oak tree I had ever seen. I stood there with the bottle in one hand and propping myself against the tree with my other. The waters of the Wilmington River rushed forty feet below me. I needed answers, and I knew I would not get them. And that hurt. And it made me angry.

Furiously, I whirled towards the tree and smashed the bottle against its enormous bough. I heard myself grunt as I put every ounce of adrenaline into that swing. The glass shattered against the tree and the poison within sprayed the nearby shrubbery. That wasn't enough. With the broken bottleneck, I began to ferociously stab the massive tree trunk, over and over and over again. I panted and stabbed until I could exude no more, and then, finally, exhausted, I fell to the base of the tree.

I sat and I watched the night happen. I tried to catch my breath. The anger had stolen it away from me. And again I began to sob. The tears rolled down my cheek, and I still wanted answers.

Through the tears I saw and heard so many things. I saw the white moon settling into the trees on the other side of the river. I saw the water ripple underneath the wind. A shrimpboat passed along the river, and I saw the glow of its red and green pilot lights heard the whir of its motor. I heard the river swish through the reeds of marsh below when the boat passed. I heard the noises from the insects. I smelled the sea. I smelled the marsh gas, and the aroma of the flowers. I smelled the sour scent of the whiskey as it trickled down the tree.

And I saw other things as well. I saw Cynthia in her dress on our wedding day. I saw her face in the moonlight as we made love that first night on the beach. I saw my car eluding me as I dove for it and Tim's face encircled with a ring of dry blood. I saw my twisted car. I saw that redneck in Athens and Kenny, paying my bail.

I saw Tim, laying dead on that hospital bed.

And I saw Elizabeth. I had never forgotten her. All these years, and I still had never forgotten her. The pain wasn't as strong as it once was, but the memory was. It wasn't until this moment that I realized that I had been juggling my memory of her and my present life with Cynthia. I knew I was lucky to have Cynthia in my life, and I loved her every bit as I loved Elizabeth. Yet I was still hanging on to the possibilities my past offered me.

Elizabeth. I had never quit loving her; I just learned to bury the memory by loving someone else.

I watched the shrimpboat disappear around a bend in the river.

And I cried some more.

And I let the night serenade me to sleep.

Michael West

Winter Quarters

Late at night, the moon is silver.
The snow on the ground seems to glow
White like hot metal. The sweat
Freezes on my cheek, winter
Wind stings my face.
Felix trots, fur tangled with ice,
Prances through the kitty-door.
Winter warbler screams his song,
Feathers disguised in white branches,
His sound surrounds me.
Ice and snow crunch beneath
My boot. I see my own mist
Ahead of me.
I drop, the earth to my back.
Waving my arms and legs, I make a divinity.
Staring upwards, stars are encompassed by the
Ever-present moon. The glare of Luna's
Lamp on white fluff almost blinds me,
Like looking at the sun on a warm spring day.
Time melts, and I think of good times
Past.

Marshall Jones

All Tore Up

Three months of pure bliss
always sure of self
and purpose,
to be with you
until life's blood runs from veins
onto the blistering Texas pavement
hot enough to cook eggs
or my brain in the time it takes a fly to die.
But a crack appears
in the rocks
and you fall away
you to your place and I to mine
you want to see others but still feel
the true love we shared and don't
want to see me go and
I in my foolish
seemingly perpetual male pride
Never write
Never call
Never scream
Never screech
Never cry.
Keep it in, shielded
from the outside
but inside always
Broke.
Busted.
Unfixed.
Unaligned.
All tore up.
And so the cliff falls from under my feet
And I watch you.
You seem to fly away
up, straight up to cold
emotionless stars embrace
a cheating unfaithful star,
but you'll at least have a handhold
for as long as you can stand the deep bone chill.

Imagining frostbit blue fingers
but knowing deep down
that you're really warm
and happy
and loved.

So I sit in my room and
contemplate the heat that I would welcome
hanging on by my nails with
blisters rising on my hands
and grinning all the way
with giddy laughter and drool running down
my chin,
mixed with blood that stains my shirt
and makes my chest sticky as the
warm red runs down.

Then I hit the rocks.

Broke.

Busted.

Unfixed.

Unaligned.

All tore up.

Bones and organs mixed up inside
and I look up at the sky
and see you.

And I crack a smile
through smashed-in teeth that I can taste
'cuz I see you happy and
holding on to your bright star
and I pray to a
hundred bastardized gods
of a hundred whoremongering religions
that you'll stay that way
even if I gotta lay here on the
rocks for the rest of my life.

Broke.

Busted.

Unfixed.

Unaligned.

All tore up.

Michael Cooper

Yesterday I saw a gun.
It lay beside the roadside,
Discarded casually enough
To have its clip pulled open,
With that settled look in the grass
Castoff forgotten machines acquire
In a day, as they begin their descent
To quiet dark earth—the cthonic journey
Of all things made.

What caught my eye was not the gun
Nor the lazy way it lay athwart the yard
But its being there—*there*
In the front yard of a mill house
Next upended tricycle and pots of begonias
And one carefully tended row of polebeans.

There: enfolded in the heart of
All things red and white and blue—
My heart and yours—
A discarded toy
Waiting, biding time,
Till someone with the will to lift it up,
Can use it wisely, wickedly,
And blow a world to bits.

William Lindsey

backstage

the glowtape weaves a trail around
the architecture of a subtle lie:
behind potemkined walls we navigate
detritus of discarded metaphors,
muttering snatches of immemorable dialogue,
waiting our signal to enter the illusion.
reciting, exiting,
our borrowed personas resting loosely, composed
of dabs of colour and old rags, we reappear
stage left or right, at another point
in false space/time. emotions feigned, we rearrange
the lineaments of need and empathy: who am I now?
ears cocked to the three-walled world, we lead
extrapolated lives.

the wizard of old was right: the world is a bauble.

Diane Hollingsworth

CONTRIBUTORS

- Michael "Rasta" Cooper**, from Whiteville, N.C., says he is *still* a freshman. **Jennifer Dowd** is an English/Recreation Studies major from Brandon, FL, and the best runner we know.
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- Michael West** is the king of Student Activities at the Abbey. He is a cartoonist, an actor, and a thoroughly nice guy.



The sage meditates on the scriptures
again and again,
Suddenly, God is revealed
and he puts them aside as one does with the taper
once the lamp is lit.

-Amritanada Upanishad